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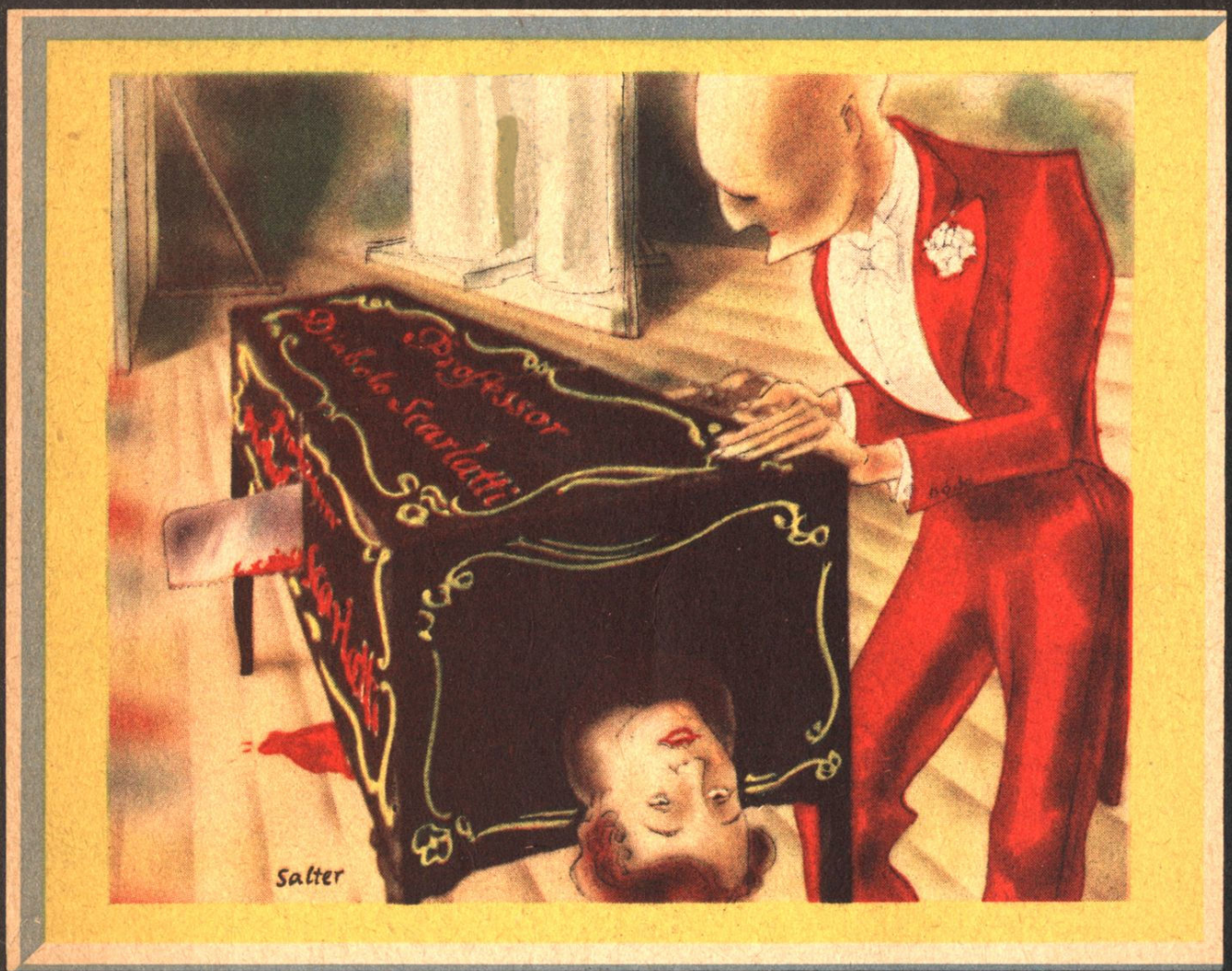

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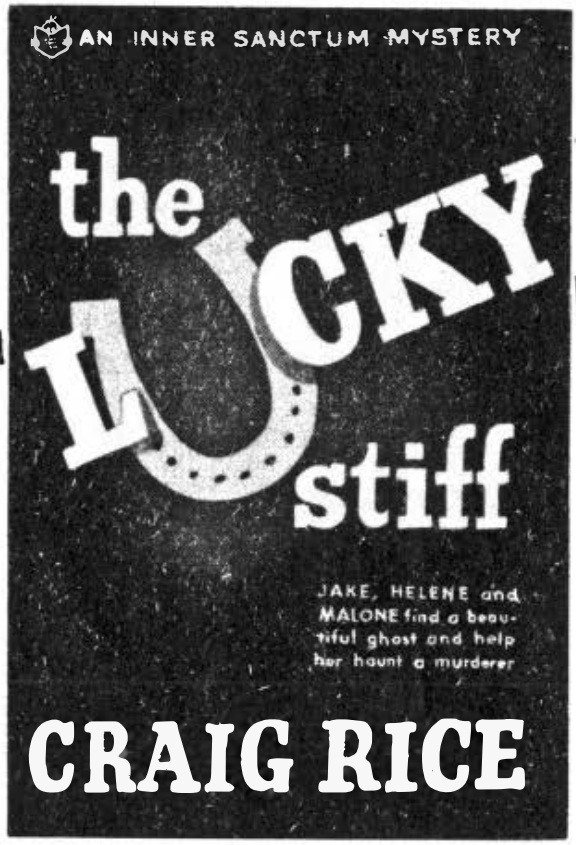

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

VOL. 6 NO. 23 JULY 1945

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

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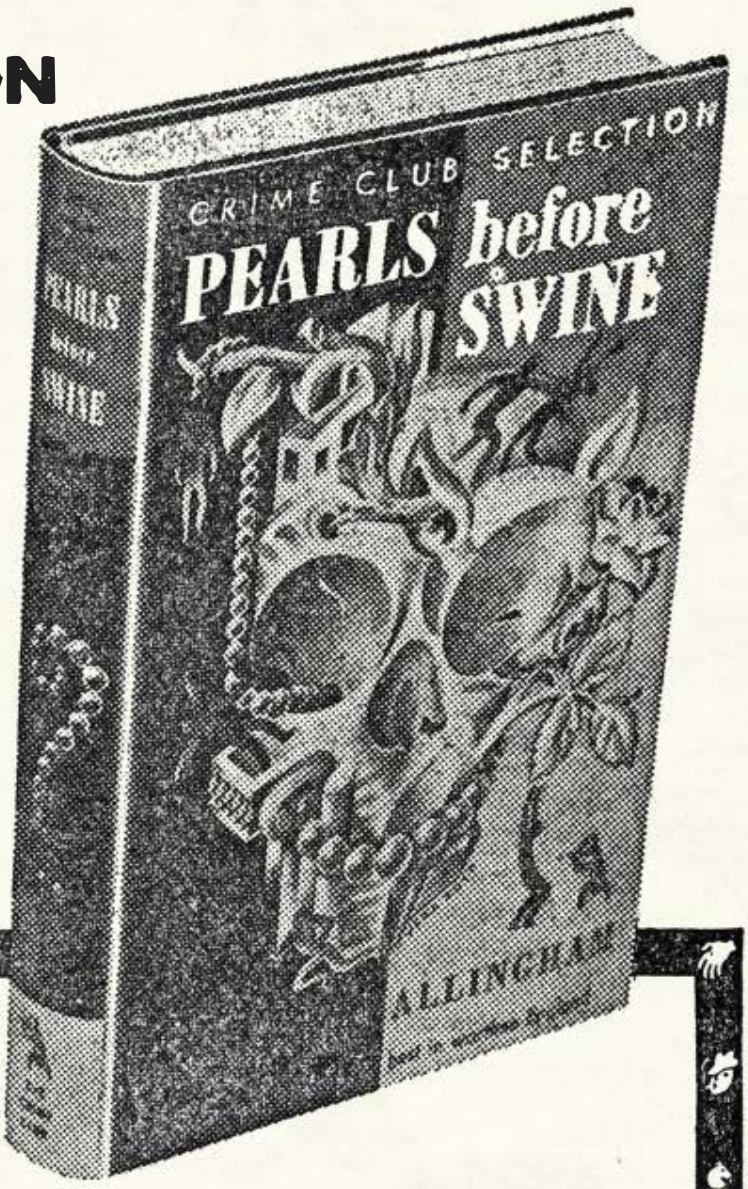
at his best in wartime England!



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THE NEW PROFESSOR POGGIOLI STORY

. . . You see, Mr. T. S. Stribling had promised your Editor an original story about Professor Poggioli. Weeks had passed — no word. Your Editor sent an airmail inquiry to Mr. Stribling, then in Miami Beach, Florida. It seemed that Mr. Stribling had become a sort of sparring partner for a professional chess player, keening up the pro's game for a coming tournament. Between Ruy Lopez openings and Queen's Pawn Counter Gambits, Mr. Stribling dashed off a few words to the effect that the promised story had turned out so well that he had sent the manuscript to "The Saturday Evening Post."

Your Editor waited in fear and trembling. Then one morning a large flat manila envelope arrived in the mail. Sure enough — Mr. Stribling's story! The SEP had declined with more than the usual regrets — but, dear reader, the SEP's loss is your enormous gain. For here is one of Mr. Stribling's most unusual stories — indeed, one of the most unusual detective stories it has ever been your Editor's privilege to read.

Now, one doesn't receive a Stribling manuscript of a brand-new Poggioli story and let it gather dust on a shelf. Not if you are America's Number One Poggioli fan. So it was that same day that your Editor started on page 1 of Mr. Stribling's 27-page manuscript — and read with deepening concentration and growing perplexity.

As we turned page 23 — with only 4 pages to go — your Editor's wife walked in and asked: How is the new Poggioli story? Your Editor raised a groggy head, jerked it from side to side like a fighter trying to throw off the effects of a haymaker, and said: Here I am only 4 pages from the end; I know what I've been reading; I know everything Mr. Stribling has said; I understand everything that's happened — and yet, for the life of me, I don't know what Mr. Stribling is really *driving at! Something is going to happen in the next four pages that will dissolve my confusion, tie up all the seemingly unrelated and incongruous elements —*

And it did!

Our guess is that many of you will have the same experience. Will you be able to dovetail, coalesce, unify the bafflingly diverse elements in the beginning and middle of this story? What connection exists among Tiamara's strange crime situation, Poggioli's strange client, the strange operation of a numbers racket, the strange stand of the Municipal Board, the strange criminological philosophy of Chief of Police Toppertoe?

There's a daring conception of crime in this story — a conception large with philosophical implication. Only when you have come to the end will you understand — with a kind of relieved thoughtfulness — the dramatic and democratic import of Mr. Stribling's last paragraph . . .

THE MYSTERY OF THE CHIEF OF POLICE

by T. S. STRIBLING

IN HIS ROOM on the seventh floor of the St. Regis Hotel, my friend, Dr. Henry Poggioli, Professor of Criminology in Ohio State University, laid out on his bed files of the recent Tiamara newspapers. A number of stories he had circled in red, others in black, and had checked cross references here and there.

The leading headlines in all these papers naturally had to do with the current ouster proceedings brought by the Municipal Board against the Tiamara Chief of Police. The general charge against Chief Toppertoe was inefficiency in office; sub-heads brought out the particular count that his department never arrested or convicted a criminal . . . quite a journalistic scandal for the Spring months when the tourists were all going North and there wasn't much news to print. Dr. Poggioli had brought the file with him from Ohio and had studied them on the train as he came South.

"And this is the amazing fact that I have dug out of these papers," the criminologist pointed to the red-circled articles, "While the Tiamara police seem never to catch a thief, they invariably recover and return to the owner any money he has lost . . . money, mind you, never stocks, bonds, jewels — just money."

Here I drew breath to express surprise, but my friend ran on as if lecturing his class in criminology.

"Take this story, for example, in the Tiamara *Telegram* of May 29: 'Movie Star's Ocean Villa Robbed; Cash, Jewels, Bonds Missing.' " Here Poggioli referred to a cross check, turned to another paper, and continued, "This is from the *Afternoon Sun*, same date, page 2: 'Cash Lost by Elise Eliot, Movie Star, Recovered by Police; Jewels, Bonds Still Missing; Thieves Escape.' What do you think of that? But one instance means nothing. One instance could happen. Take another from the *Sun:* 'Pennsylvania Couple Lose Twelve Thousand Dollars to Confidence Men; Police Recoup Money.' " He waved his hand at the papers, "All the rest are just the same except in one instance, just one, where the police did not get the money back."

I sat looking at Poggioli wondering what solution of this queer one-sided set of recoveries he would reach; for I had never known him to quit cold on any criminological riddle. I asked him what was the one exception he had found.

"Oh, that . . . the thirty thousand dollar race-track robbery and murder. Here it is, *Telegram*, May 9: 'Unidentified man who was known to have won thirty thousand dollars on

the daily double was murdered and robbed on highway between Poinciana Race Track and City. Nothing left on body to identify him.' That's the only instance recorded in the papers in which the Tiamara police failed to return stolen money."

"Had nobody to return it to," I pointed out by way of a joke. "The man's dead and they don't know who his heirs are."

Poggioli doesn't care for jokes. Lecturers before classes of youth-happy young collegians seldom do. He said "Mm-huh." To recoup my momentary fall from grace I asked seriously why he had circled some stories in black.

"They are fatal traffic accidents, suicides, deaths from unknown causes. Tiamara has thirty-one percent more such incidents than is normal for a city of its size. I was just wondering if there were a possible lead here. . . ."

"You're not trying to link up that fact with the police recovering all stolen money?"

"No, I'm not *trying;* I'm simply holding it in mind. I have found many times, and you know this as well as I do, that when there are two abnormalities in the same community they are likely to be cognates and help explain one another."

"Did you come down from Ohio just to see why the Tiamara police return stolen money and to look into the traffic accident rate?"

"No, no. I'm down here on a commission." He looked at his watch as if his commission were close upon him. "When I travel anywhere I always take a file of the local papers and read them on the train — to see if there is anything in my professional field I want to investigate."

"And just how are you going to start in this case?" I asked.

The criminologist glanced at his watch again. "I'd like to run over to the County Court House and see Bundley, if I have time."

"Bundley," I repeated. "You mean the detective the Municipal Board is afraid to call to the witness stand?"

"Now, now, really," protested Poggioli, "when you say 'afraid' that's your own deduction. The Board explained that they declined to put Bundley on the witness stand for the best public welfare."

I was shocked at my friend's naiveté. I said, "Why, Poggioli, don't you know that's just their excuse for not putting Bundley on the stand. Best public welfare — piffle! They keep him off to cover up their own rottenness and graft! What other reason could an American Municipal Board have for hushing up a witness?"

Here Poggioli began a theoretic and rather foolish argument that because the Municipal Board was trying to clean house by ousting an inefficient police head, they were honest themselves. Corrupt municipal gangs never invited the scrutiny of the law by instituting formal legal action in their own department.

"Well, Poggioli," I said, "I don't agree with you at all. A thing may appear unreasonable but when I see it

going on before my eyes, I admit it's there. Now let's go to the Court House and talk to Bundley —you'll see I'm right."

My friend consulted his watch again. "I have an appointment here at the St. Regis at 10:14 A.M. It's 10:03 now."

"That's a queer time . . . ten-*fourteen!*"

"Yes, it's evidently something very vital and intimate to my employer."

"Who is he?"

"A Mr. Claymore from Chicago."

"Why should he pick out a time like 10:14?"

"I'm to meet him here in the lobby. At that hour the lobby will be almost empty and he will be able to get a view of me before I see him. In other words, he wanted to size me up first — obviously because he is going to take a risk with me, if he employs me at all, with something that is very touchy. But you'll see him for yourself, and I want you to notice him carefully and tell me what you think."

"I'm to see him?"

"Naturally, you know very well the important thing about my work is that you get stories out of it." Here Poggioli gave the faint half-smile with which college professors discipline their classes.

"How am I going to see him? Am I going down with you?"

"No, you go down in the lobby now. Get a paper and sit down in some corner where you can see the doors. I want you to note the precise minute when he comes in just as a check on my forecast of the sort of work he wants done. And I don't have to tell you, unless I call you over, you will not recognize me. I hope to get through in an hour and I'll meet you at the County Court House around eleven and we'll see Bundley."

There was something pleasantly exciting about the prospective Mr. Claymore although I really hoped that Poggioli had got him completely wrong so that I too could use a faint academic half-smile. I hoped Claymore would prove a big fat blustery fellow who chose 10:14 because his watch hands hung at 10:15 and he never was sure of the time after that.

In the St. Regis lobby I bought a paper and sat down by a window. But I couldn't read much. I kept wondering about Claymore. His business with Poggioli naturally had something to do with crime, most probably he wanted some mystery unravelled. Then why didn't he go to a regular detective agency?

Poggioli entered the lobby at 10:13. At 10:14 ½ a trim smallish gentleman entered from an interior door, walked across to my friend. "This is Mr. Poggioli?" "And this would be Mr. Claymore, I believe?" The smallish gentleman agreed, then nodded across the lobby at me, "And if I am correct, there sits the gentleman who writes the stories about your criminological work, Dr. Poggioli?"

I was completely taken aback but Poggioli must have been prepared for something of the sort for he replied very easily, "We weren't sure, Mr.

Claymore, whether you could use my associate or not; so I suggested that he sit where he would be handy."

Mr. Claymore beckoned me over to them, gave me a thoughtful look. "That's perfectly all right. I know you two work together." Then he added this rather odd remark, "However, don't give this matter any publicity as long as I'm alive."

We agreed to this. Then I asked Mr. Claymore how he had known instantly I was with Dr. Poggioli. The newcomer gave me a compressed but very friendly smile. "You glanced at your watch as I entered the door. You were not reading because you held your paper to one side so you could watch the entrances. Then I knew that somebody wrote Dr. Poggioli's adventures and you looked like a man who might write something."

This last remark made a sort of joke out of writers at which both Claymore and Poggioli smiled. I said, "I don't see why you want to hire somebody to help you find out anything when you are such an acute observer yourself."

"You think I want to find out something?" inquired the small man, moving us toward chairs.

"Naturally, if you engage Dr. Poggioli, you want to find out something; usually about a crime."

"God forbid!" ejaculated Mr. Claymore earnestly. "But I do want to find out something. I have a brother — rather I had a brother — here in Tiamara during the early part of May. But I've lost trace of him and I wanted Dr. Poggioli to help me find him."

"What was the last certain news you had from your brother?" asked Poggioli.

"This airmail letter." He handed it over to the psychologist. "I received it soon after he reached Tiamara and I haven't heard anything from him since."

Poggioli read it, knit his brows, then asked if he could show it to me.

"Certainly. From now on I consider you two as one man."

The letter which Poggioli handed me simply said, "Dear Cy: Won daily double, will spend week here, another in New Orleans, then expect me home. Luck, James Barocher."

The phrase "daily double" held my eye, then I looked at the date. It was May ninth. A slightly unsure but shocking recollection entered my head. My heart began to beat. Was it possible that the very murder and robbery which Poggioli and I had just been discussing. . . . But my friend, Poggioli, was quite calm and I decided he hadn't observed the amazing coincidence. He was saying, "If your brother's name was James Barocher, Mr. Claymore, then he was your half-brother?" The smallish man assented. Poggioli went on, "And he didn't come home after his week in New Orleans?"

"I telegraphed him here and at all the larger hotels in New Orleans, but have heard nothing more from him."

At this point I could no longer contain myself. I said in a significant tone,

"Poggioli . . . May ninth . . . daily double . . . haven't we heard something about a man winning . . . the daily double . . . on May the ninth?"

The psychologist assented in a tone so casual I was not sure whether or not he recalled the celebrated race-track murder.

"Yes, I believe we have." He pondered a moment, then asked, "Mr. Claymore, was your half-brother a heavy gambler, a plunger?"

"Yes, he lost considerable amounts of money on the horses."

Poggioli beckoned a bell-boy, gave him his room key, and directed him to go to room 719, look on his bed, and bring down the May 9th issue of the Tiamara *Telegram*. Then he said to Mr. Claymore, "You say you telegraphed your brother here at this hotel?"

"Twice. But listen, what is there about Jim that you . . ."

"Just a moment, Mr. Claymore. I want to pick up the telegrams you sent to this hotel."

He crossed the lobby to the mail desk and presently returned with two Western Union envelopes addressed to James Barocher. The first, of May 14, was from Mr. Claymore asking his brother to telegraph his plans; the second, of the 17th, urged his brother to quit drinking and come home. The smallish gentleman hastened to explain the latter.

"Jim didn't drink often, but I knew if he started he would go for a week or two at a time. And when he wrote me he had won a daily double, I knew he must have won a good deal, because, as I say, he was a strong bettor. And if he had won a lot of money he was likely to celebrate. That's why I sent him that second telegram."

All this was said in the anxious hurried tone of a man who realized some unknown evil was impending. I felt achingly sorry for the little man. I was almost sorry to see the bell-boy come out of the elevator with Poggioli's newspaper. All three of us stopped talking at the boy's approach. Poggioli glanced at the headlines, then said to Mr. Claymore in the slightly elevated monotone men use to break shocking news. "Now, Mr. Claymore, this *may* not be your half-brother. There undoubtedly were other men who won the daily double on May 9th."

Poggioli turned the paper so we could both read the headlines.

The small gentleman's shoulders sagged; he seemed to collapse physically. "I . . . I had no idea you would . . . answer my question so . . . quickly."

"But wait, wait, Mr. Claymore. This is by no means a certain answer. As I say, two persons could have won a daily double — it happens every day. Now you write out a description of your half-brother, a physical description, his dress, jewelry, watch — everything about him. I'll take it over to the Police Department and check it."

"But if he hadn't been . . . been murdered, Mr. Poggioli, he would

have . . . come home."

"Mr. Claymore, please . . . write out the description."

The three of us got up together and went to the writing room. As Mr. Claymore pondered and wrote, and pondered and wrote again, Poggioli said comfortingly, "Now it may not be your half-brother, but if it should be, I suppose you will want the body exhumed and sent back to Chicago?" Mr. Claymore said he would.

Poggioli took the description Mr. Claymore had written, together with the two telegrams and we set out for the Tiamara Police Department.

In the taxicab I expressed my astonishment, my amazement, that the very murder and robbery which my friend and I had been discussing had floated out of the blue into our very hands. Poggioli pulled at his nether lip in his reflective fashion. "What I don't understand is why he made his appointment to meet me at 10:14."

I looked at the criminologist. "That's a queer point to bring up."

"Yes, but why should he want to take a look at me before I saw him? Why should he test my precision to an exact minute? How could my personality mean something vital to him if he were simply trying to locate a lost half-brother?"

"But Poggioli," I argued, "Claymore is simply one of these finical little men. He dresses like one, talks like one, is one."

"Mm-mm, you may be right, but an ordinary man would never have set such an odd hour and minute unless he had some extremely cogent reason for doing so."

At the Police Department we inquired for the homicide records and were referred to Chief Toppertoe in person. We went to his office and learned that he was before the Municipal Board defending his ouster suit. We therefore had some time to use and Poggioli asked where we would find detective Bundley. We were directed to the City Court on the 16th floor of the Glades County Court House.

The City Court in Tiamara is not so much a court as it is a procession. In the City Court cases are decided so swiftly and so informally that while one defendant is retiring to freedom or to jail, another talks hurriedly before the court while a third flanked by witnesses and lawyer pushes earnestly forward in the fear that his case will be decided before he ever reaches the bar at all.

As Poggioli and I entered the City Court a little dried-up negro stood before the bench while his fat comfortable lawyer made his argument to the judge. The lawyer contended that detective Bundley had entered the home of his client, Stogie, and illegally searched said premises. The facts were as follows: Bundley executed a search warrant which called for 70 Joob Street, whereas Stogie's domicile was 70½ Joob Street. It seemed that the evidence found against Stogie really came from 70 Joob Street. The fat attorney argued that owing to this

flaw in the writ his client should be released and the confiscated evidence returned to him.

Detective Bundley stood at the end of the bar glowering at the undisturbed little negro and holding the evidence which seemed to be a cigar-box full of bits of paper. Poggioli and I worked our way against the current of litigation and I asked Bundley what sort of evidence he had in his box. He growled out, "Number-racket tickets." I asked him what was the numbers racket. He looked to see what sort of man I was who hadn't heard of the numbers racket, then explained briefly in both words and temper that they were Cuban lottery numbers. I observed that they were not Cuban lottery tickets because I had bought some of them.

"Naw, they print these things theirse'ves," Bundley shook his box, "but they pay off accordin' to the Cuban lottery prizes."

It required a moment for me to comprehend the detective's implication, then I ejaculated, "You mean that little negro will pay off thousands of dollars if one of his tickets happens to call for such an amount?"

"Naw, he's jest a front, but the gang he works for pays off."

At this moment the judge rendered his decision. "Prisoner guilty as charged. I fine him fifty dollars and costs. Next case."

Bundley seemed peeved despite the verdict. I said, "Well, your prisoner was convicted, anyway."

Bundley spat. "Call that a conviction? It's jest an ad. He'll sell fifty dollars' worth of tickets before he leaves Court House Square count o' the publicity he jest got here."

The little black man evidently did a prosperous business, because when he paid his fine he drew out of his trouser's pocket a roll of bills as large as his arm, peeled off a fifty, then stuffed the money back into his bulging pocket.

Poggioli leaned toward the disgusted detective. "This numbers racket — is that what you meant to tell, Mr. Bundley, if the Municipal Board had called you before them as a witness?"

"Sure it is."

"But the Board kept you off the stand in the public welfare?"

"Public welfare or . . . somebody's pocketbook," said Bundley.

This started again the argument between me and Poggioli. Bundley's remark proved to me the complete corruption of the Municipal Board and Poggioli fell back on his former contention if the Board had instituted an ouster suit against Chief Toppertoe, it was a sound patriotic organization.

"Even," I said, "if they take graft from the little negro, Stogie?"

"You have no proof that anybody in the Court House takes graft from Stogie except the word of one disgruntled detective."

Outside on the great granite steps of the skyscraper I caught sight of Stogie. The first thing I noticed was that his trouser's pocket was empty;

it was quite flat. It amused me, my proof coming so quickly. I called Stogie over and asked him if he sold Cuban lottery tickets. He said he did and I bought one. He produced a bit of evilly printed paper as indifferent to the publicity of Court House Square as if he had been selling popcorn. I offered him a ten-dollar bill. He took the bill, hesitated a moment, then said, "Scuse me, Boss, I'll haff to run git this broke. You want to hol' my watch while I'm gone? I ain't got no change rat now."

This was such a complete and final proof of what I had been contending that I broke out laughing, but when the negro had gone for the change, Poggioli stood shaking his head slowly and repeating, "It isn't logical. Simple municipal crooks don't start an investigation of themselves. If the Board stated they quashed Bundley's evidence for the public welfare, I'm still inclined to think they did."

"There are none so blind as they etc., etc." I quoted in excellent spirits because I am sorry to say I am the sort of man who would have the whole municipal structure collapse into anarchy if it would support a point in one of my arguments.

We returned to the Police Department and found Chief Toppertoe in his office. The Chief was a tall thin man who talked with a southern hill twang and with an occasional slip in grammar such as often plague self-educated men. When Poggioli asked for an appointment Mr. Toppertoe said, "If you want to see me while I'm Chief of Police, better see me now."

The criminologist introduced himself and the Chief reached out a warm hand, "I've heard of you-all, Mr. Poggioli. I've read your stories and often wished I could meet you two. Walk in my office, gen'lmen, and set down. What do you drink, rye or bourbon?"

Such a pleasant start placed us on a confidential footing at once. Poggioli spoke of the newspaper fight against the Chief which had resulted in the present ouster suit against him. "Now I am a criminologist, Mr. Toppertoe, and unless we can be frank I will waste not only my time but yours. The general charge the Board brings against you is inefficiency, but the specific count is the small percentage of criminals in Tiamara who are brought to trial and punished."

The Chief sat looking at Poggioli for several moments, then said drily, "Well, a small percent *is* brought to trial . . . purty near none."

The criminologist nodded very faintly at this and I knew that his whole extraordinary analytical power was focussed on every word, every nuance in the Chief of Police's speech.

"Mr. Toppertoe, the fewness of your arrests and trials, is that a mere accident of chance or is it a departmental policy?"

A different expression came into the Chief's face. "You know, Mr. Poggioli, you are the first man who has ever thought to ast me that question."

"So it is a departmental policy?"

"Why, nachelly, Mr. Poggioli, I could have caught some of them men and brought 'em to trial . . . anybody could."

"But you didn't?"

"No, what's the use. . . ." Here he suddenly put down his jigger and burst into a long tirade. "What's the use when legal technicalities are meshes through which the guiltiest criminals escape? And if they don't git out on a technicality they get let off through the sentimentalism of the jury, or the fixin' of the jury. And if I send 'em to prison, what happens? The jails are high schools and our penitentiaries universities of crime. They come out better equipped than when I put 'em in. So why put 'em in?"

"But Mr. Toppertoe," I exclaimed, "you can't by deliberate policy just let all criminals go!"

The Chief paused again. "Now there's another pint to my administration and nobody seems to have noticed that either. . . . Not many of the crooks git away with the money. I figger if I can make the criminal element of my city understand that crime don't pay money dividends, they'll quit. And think of what the City saves in prosecution fees. Why, to send a criminal to the penitentiary is a ridiculously expensive proposition, what with the trials and rehearings and appeals, and changes of venue, and it all costs loads and loads of money, and the people have to pay for it. I'm against that, Mr. Poggioli, I run an economical administration."

Here Poggioli brought up the subject of Bundley whose evidence the Municipal Board excluded on the grounds of public welfare. "From what I gathered in an interview with Bundley, his testimony would have centered about the numbers racket, so I deduce the Board feels that the numbers racket is somehow connected with the public welfare."

The Chief looked at my friend in astonishment. "Well, you really are some guesser, Mr. Poggioli. Yes, the Board knows about the numbers racket and they approve that."

"You mean you deliberately tolerate the numbers racket?" I inquired.

"Oh no, not at all," smiled the Chief drily, "I mean my department runs the numbers racket. We *own* it. When I entered office thirteen years ago the numbers racket was in irresponsible hands. Tickets wasn't paid off. They caused fights and murders. Today a winnin' ticket is the same as a check on the bank. I regularized it. I use the proceeds for departmental purposes jest the same as the state uses the proceeds of the race tracks and dawg tracks and *jai alai* for education. Yes, the Board approves of that much of my policy."

"But your own men arrest the ticket sellers," I pointed out. "Look at Bundley."

"Oh, I have that done for the benefit of the clergy," laughed the Chief.

"Just what do you mean when you say benefit of. . . ."

"Well, the ministers all think a police department ort to be run jest the same as the church. They don't realize that they are tryin' to get sinners into heaven, but we are jest tryin' to keep 'em out of jail. Our ambition ain't as towerin' as theirs."

Somewhat later, almost incidentally, Poggioli mentioned the murder and robbery of Mr. Claymore's half-brother, James Barocher. Toppertoe inquired how much money Barocher had lost in the robbery.

"It happened on May 9th," specified Poggioli. "The papers of that date published the story of an unidentified man who was murdered and robbed of thirty thousand dollars which he had just won at the race track. That man probably was James Barocher."

This recalled the whole affair to the Chief. "Sure, I remember that case. What does your Mr. Claymore want done in the matter?"

"He wants to take his brother's body to Chicago for burial. He gave me this description to give to you." Poggioli handed over the written sheet.

"O.K. I'll look into this case, Mr. Poggioli, and make you a personal report on it . . . if I am still Chief."

That ended our interview. Instead of returning to the St. Regis I took Poggioli home with me for lunch. On the way over I remarked how pleased I was with Chief Toppertoe. Poggioli came out of a deep study to say that Toppertoe was one of the most dangerous men he had ever met. I was amazed and asked how he had reached such a conclusion. He said Toppertoe was a radical, unscrupulous and perfectly *honest* individualist in power and out of such stuff dictators were fashioned and democracies overthrown.

Here I had to protest. I said, "Poggioli, would you rather the Chief be crooked than honest?"

My friend mounted his theoretic Pegasus again. "Certainly not. Today America owes her liberty to the fact that she has been ruled in the main by crooks who have no moral standing and can be tossed out of office like so much trash. But an honest brainy individualist can't be handled like that. He really sees what is best for a country long before the country itself perceives it. And he gathers about him a strong enough minority to force his measures. That creates a self-perpetuating dictatorship. No, I always thank God that America elects to public office numbskulls, clowns and thieves. If we ever should put our finest brains in power, on that day we cease to be a democracy."

Of course that was ridiculous, but I let it go. There's never any arguing with Poggioli. We had hardly arrived at my home and sat down to lunch when my telephone rang. When I answered it the hillman's drawl of Chief Toppertoe asked for Poggioli. I inquired lightly how he knew Dr. Poggioli came home with me. He said he had found it out from our taxi driver when he got back to his stand. I laughed and asked if all detection was as simple as that. He said it was —

if you knew what to do.

Poggioli took the receiver, made a remark or two, listened for several minutes, then broke out in amazement.

"You say your men recovered the thirty thousand dollars!" After another interval, "I see, you seized it immediately after the robbery, but the owner was murdered and you didn't know whom to return it to. . . . No, I'm not acquainted with Mr. Claymore personally. . . . He telephoned me from Chicago to meet him here in Tiamara. First time I had ever heard of him. . . . No, I have no opinion about the correctness of returning the half-brother's money to Mr. Claymore. . . . You say the description Claymore wrote out fits the body, clothes and all? . . . So he seems genuine to you? . . . Yes, yes, Chief, I could do something. . . . I could interview Claymore and telephone you the impression I receive from him. . . . What's that? You will deliver the money to him while I am with him so I can observe his immediate reactions. . . . Won't you be taking a great risk? . . . You are willing to accept the risk. . . . Very well, we will do that. Good-bye."

The criminologist turned blankly from the telephone. "Isn't that the most amazing. . . ."

"You mean he wants you to find out if Mr. Claymore is the proper person to receive the thirty thousand. . . ."

Poggioli made a gesture. "That's no problem, that will be easy to determine. The riddle is where did Chief Toppertoe get that thirty thousand dollars!"

"Why, he just told you his men recovered it."

"Listen, if his men actually had recovered that thirty thousand dollars, wouldn't that fact have been engraved on the Chief's mind? Wouldn't he have mentioned it as soon as we spoke of the race-track robbery? Certainly! That's human nature. But when he spoke of the money just then, he had no pride of accomplishment in his voice, no particular interest in the matter. It was just office routine. He said he had the money and would pay it to its owner if I could ascertain Claymore was the proper owner. Now what does that mean?"

Dr. Poggioli has the trick of turning simple matters into riddles and riddles into very simple matters. I couldn't answer and he continued his monologue. "Let me think. . . . Do you remember that moving picture actress who lost her cash and jewels and the police recovered her cash? Try to get her on the telephone."

I began looking for Elise Eliot's name in the directory, when Poggioli snapped nervously, "She won't be in that. Movie stars use blind numbers. Call up some War Bond sales agency, they'll know her number." I did this and was fortunate enough to find Miss Eliot there. Dr. Poggioli introduced himself, said he was a great admirer of her pictures and finally got around to his point.

"Miss Eliot, when the Tiamara police returned the cash that was stolen from you, did they send back the same currency you lost, or a check, or did they substitute other bills? . . . I see, sent you some filthy bills you couldn't use. . . . You sent your maid with them to the bank and had them exchanged for clean ones. . . . That's all, Miss Eliot, thank you very much. Goodbye." He turned to me and nodded, "That proves my theory."

"What in heaven's name are you talking about, Poggioli?"

"Why, I've solved the mystery of the Chief of Police."

"Will you please explain it to me?"

"Listen and see if you don't get it yourself. Miss Eliot lost new fresh bills. The police department returned dirty bills. What caused that?"

"Mm — mm . . . well . . . the thief got her bills dirty."

Poggioli was disgusted. "Don't you know it takes from six to eight months of ordinary wear to soil a piece of currency! What class of men habitually use dirty bills?"

"The poor class," I answered hoping this would not increase his contempt for my thinking.

"Correct, the poor class. Now where did the Police Department get the dirty bills it sent to Miss Eliot?"

A light broke on me. "From the numbers racket!" I cried.

"Fine! Simplicity itself! The numbers racket. The Police Department evidently doesn't trust any bank with its secret or its money. Chief Toppertoe uses the same bills he collects from his numbers racket to pay off all losses from theft in Tiamara. In brief, *he runs a theft insurance bureau for the public benefit of Tiamara!* That is why he never recovers bonds or jewels that are lost, only cash. The Municipal Board evidently knows of this arrangement and approves it because they declined to allow detective Bundley to air the matter in open court. So you see Bundley's testimony really would have been against the best public welfare."

I was bewildered at such a turn. The Board's thesis, "against the best public welfare," had appeared so impossible to sustain."

"But the point that puzzles me," went on Poggioli, "is why Toppertoe is willing to hand thirty thousand to Claymore before my eyes for me to decide whether Claymore is the correct payee or not. Won't it be too late to decide after Claymore has the money?"

"Don't climb mountains till you get to 'em. Come on, let's go see Claymore."

Frankly, I was delighted. I was charmed. I believe that was the first time in our association together that Poggioli had ever worked out a mystery to anybody's credit and honor. And I had liked Chief Toppertoe from my very first word with him. I twitted Poggioli about being a Northern man by saying, "Uh, huh, you see you had to come South before you ever found an honorable mystery to solve."

At the St. Regis Mr. Claymore received us in his suite on the twenty-first floor with elaborate but melancholy politeness. He said he had contacted the police over the phone (that was his word, "contacted") and had made arrangements to ship his half-brother's body to Chicago. Poggioli approached his own point very carefully by saying that he had learned an important fact about James Barocher's death and robbery. Mr. Claymore asked unhappily what it was.

"Chief Toppertoe's men recovered the thirty thousand dollars your half-brother lost," said the psychologist.

The smallish man did not change his unhappy mien. "I am more interested in my brother himself. Did my description fit?"

"Naturally the description did fit," said Poggioli, "or the Chief wouldn't have gone into the matter of the money. He is sending it to you by messenger at once. He said you could express it to your brother's executor in Chicago, or could receive it here yourself as agent of the executor."

"I happen to be Jim's executor," said Mr. Claymore in his grieved voice.

"Then you might as well sign for it and receive it here."

"Whatever you think best, Dr. Poggioli. It's as broad as it's long."

"It would simplify matters for you to receive it here. I sympathize with you in your loss, Mr. Claymore. Race-track followers win no particular honor from their hobby but they are usually the frankest, most generous, big hearted men in the world."

"That was true of Jim, Dr. Poggioli."

"I suppose he was like other racing devotees, bet according to systems, believed in luck, wore striking clothes, and so on?"

"Oh, yes, Jim had worked out ways of betting and he was a great dresser. Well . . . he's gone now."

The messenger arrived with the package of bills. Mr. Claymore signed for them and Poggioli and I left.

At the curb in front of the hotel we chose a taxicab but the driver, a little dried-up negro, touched his cap and excused himself. He said his taxi was on call. We took another and drove a short distance to a corner drugstore where Poggioli got out to telephone his report to the Chief.

Enormously curious I went into the booth with him. By good luck the telephone was one of those squeaky contraptions which spoke loud enough for a third person to overhear what was said.

The Chief asked Poggioli how Mr. Claymore had taken the announcement of the money being recovered. The psychologist replied that Claymore had shown more interest in his identification of the dead man than in the money. "His first question was 'Did my description fit?' "

"And what do you make of that, Dr. Poggioli?" inquired the Chief's squeak.

"That's simple, Chief; he was not surprised to learn of the money. In some way he had already found out that the police refunded all monies

lost by theft in Tiamara. His interest therefore lay in identifying the dead man and obtaining the money. If you have his description beside you, look at it and you will see he made the great mistake of correctly identifying the dead man's clothes."

Came a pause as the Chief evidently consulted the paper, then he asked, "Why was that a mistake, Dr. Poggioli?"

"Because just a moment ago in our interview, Claymore told me his brother was a great dresser, the usual sporting type. Now if Claymore had really been in Chicago when Barocher was murdered, it would never have occurred to him to try to identify the victim *by describing his clothes.* He could not possibly have guessed *what suit Barocher had worn on the day of his death.* But his description says . . . a checked suit. I was with him when he wrote it. He thought and thought, but finally wrote down, a checked suit. He was obsessed by Barocher's checked suit, couldn't get it out of his mind. There can be only one explanation for that, Chief."

"And what is that, Dr. Poggioli?"

"He was *with* Barocher on the day and hour his pretended brother was murdered."

Came another pause, then, "I see, I see. Claymore is the murderer. He robbed the dead man of thirty thousand dollars, then tried to come back and swindle my department out of another thirty thousand dollars."

"Exactly. Claymore is one of the most daring criminals I have ever known. And before closing my opinion I have a tag of corroborative evidence."

"And that is . . . ?"

"A phrase Claymore used in our interview. When I offered him his choice between receiving the money here or having it expressed to Chicago he said it made no difference to him, it was as broad as it was long. Now the phrase 'as broad as it is long' is the positive index of a complacent and gratified mind. If he had felt any grief for the dead man, he would have said it made no difference to him but he never would have added, 'as broad as it is long'. That stamped him as completely heartless toward his victim, as naturally a murderer would be."

Under such unexpected revelations the telephone booth in which I stood seemed to sway. I don't know how the Chief at the other end of the line was affected, but his squeak came in very normally. "Thank you for your analysis, Dr. Poggioli, and for delivering the money. You may be interested to know that Mr. Claymore wrote to this department several weeks ago in his pretended search for his brother, and I gave him your name as a man who might assist him. That was one, out of many reasons, I was so delighted to see you when you called at my office." The Chief gave his brief nasal hillman's laugh. "I thank you again, most sincerely. Good-bye."

Poggioli stepped out of the booth with the most dazed expression. He looked at me and breathed, "Merciful

Lord, what have I done?"

"You mean because the Chief recommended you?" I asked.

"No, no, that's nothing, a mere detail. . . . But the Chief's laugh — his perfectly careless laugh when I tell him he has delivered thirty thousand dollars to a murderer!" Suddenly he rushed out of the drugstore to the waiting taxicab. I followed. We leaped in. Poggioli snapped out, "Driver, back to the St. Regis, fast as you can make it! Then take the nearest route to the T.W.A. airfield!"

As we shot away I said, "Poggioli, are you following Claymore to get the money back?"

"No, no, I'm trying to save the little devil's life for a lawful trial!"

I was bewildered. "Save his life . . . why do you imagine his life is in . . ."

"Heavens, man, can't you interpret anything! Didn't you hear the Chief *laugh?* Laugh in complete indifference when I told him Claymore had got away with a fortune! Don'tyou realize he is sure he will get the money back?"

"But how will he get it back? It's gone now."

Poggioli explained rapidly and tensely, staring ahead as we sped from the hotel to the air depot. "How? By assassinating him! Chief Toppertoe sidesteps legal processes. *That explains why there are three times as many traffic accidents in Tiamara as any other city of its size in America!* You heard him rave against juries releasing guilty men. Well, they don't here in Tiamara. Juries never get a chance at guilty men in Tiamara. . . ." Poggioli's half-frantic explanation was brought to an abrupt halt by the sight of a taxicab wrecked on the slope of an embankment. "Stop here!" yelled the criminologist.

Our cab drew up but we were too late. The tragedy was over. Mr. Claymore lay amidst the wreck looking even smaller than when alive. The little dried-up negro chauffeur was working apparently trying to get the body out. The package of currency had vanished.

Poggioli and I stood looking at the wreck. I mentioned the money. I asked if he supposed the Chief would ever get his money back.

"Of course," said the criminologist. "That chauffeur is Stogie, the little negro who delivers the racket money to the Chief's department. Now he is delivering it again. Evidently the Chief hires Stogie to create these accidents. They are relatively inexpensive and don't depend upon the sentimentality of a jury."

"Yes, but you know, Poggioli," I said with a kind of sick thoughtfulness, "if Stogie hadn't murdered him like this, Claymore would have gone free. No jury in the world would have accepted your findings as legal evidence. . . ."

Here I was interrupted by a newsboy shouting, "Extry! Extry! Trial's Ended! Municipal Board Ousts Police Chief Toppertoe for Inefficiency!"

Evan Keith became a detective out of sheer necessity — to clear his name. The trail shuttled back and forth between San Francisco and Honolulu, with a ten-year stopover at San Quentin.

In Honolulu the case would have delighted the soul of Charlie Chan; in San Francisco the checking-back-into-the-past would have been just what the doctor ordered for Sam Spade. But it must be admitted that even with the great Charlie and the great Sam at his amateur elbows, even with such illustrious professional assistance, Evan Keith could not have performed a neater and more workmanlike job of solving a ten-year-old murder.

DELAYED VERDICT

by ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

THE tall, pale man hurried ashore by the crew's plank. His cheap, new suit was a trifle too blue and didn't fit very well. The man's eyes were blue too, but steeled with bitterness. He made them look straight ahead as though determined to ignore all such distractions as beach girls and coco palms and liquid sunshine.

In the dock warehouse a telephone directory furnished him with an address. Then he went out and asked a taxi man the fare there. "Two dollar," the Hawaiian taxi man said.

"One dollar," countered the man who had just worked his passage from San Francisco as an engine-room wiper. He could hardly afford more. For there was nothing in the pockets of the shapeless blue suit except some small change and a secondhand .38 revolver.

The gun was in a side coat pocket. The tall, pale man had a hand in that pocket when, twenty minutes later, he knocked at a door in Honolulu's most exclusive suburb.

The door was opened by a brown-skinned butler.

"Wallace K. Wharton lives here, doesn't he? I'd like to see him."

"Name, please?" the servant demanded.

"Evan Keith. I'm just in on the *Matsonia*."

"You wait, please?" The servant disappeared. In a little while he returned to say, "You come, please?"

Evan Keith followed him into a garden where spray from a fountain made a musical patter. A cloying, tropic fragrance filled the air. Evan had a sense of mellow yellows and flaming magentas, and he saw stately royal palms in a quadrangle around a pool.

A man in trunks on the rim of the pool was drying himself. He slipped on a lounging robe and advanced to meet Evan. His smile was doubtful and his look seemed to say, "Who are you, a gadget salesman?" But it might be

only put on, Evan thought. This man had had a few minutes to compose himself after hearing the visitor's name.

Audibly Wallace K. Wharton said, "What may I do for you, Mr. Keith?" He motioned toward deeply cushioned garden chairs. Then he sat down and picked up a box of cigars. "No, thanks," Evan said. He saw that Wharton was a big, rubicund man with a small, tight mouth in a broad face. Not much over forty, Evan judged him.

"I've never met you before, have I?" Wharton murmured.

"Right," Evan said. "And I've never met *you*, either."

"You've a letter of introduction?" Wharton asked.

"Hardly. For the last ten years I've been in —" Evan Keith caught himself. He had almost said "in stir." It was so easy to lapse into the lingo of his late cellmates. And so hard to remember that back of San Quentin, in the life of Evan Keith, there'd been a Stanford and a Menlo Park. Bitterness deepened in Evan's eyes as he amended, "For the last ten years I've been in prison."

Wharton seemed to put a cautious checkrein on response. He was like a man who counts ten, Evan thought, before venturing.

"In prison?" Wharton said at last. "For what?"

"For a murder I didn't commit," Evan said. "They gave me fifteen years and let me out after ten, just a week ago."

Again Wharton waited, as though weighing whether he should listen tolerantly or call servants to eject this prison bird. Then he lighted a cigar and puffed vigorously. It made smoke which partially screened his wide, wine-red face. Out of the smoke came a cautious, "Yes?"

"During my third year of time," Evan said, "I received a gift. It was ten cartons of cigarettes mailed anonymously, in care of the warden. I guessed that some old college classmate felt sorry for me. I supposed he didn't want to get entangled by calling or writing, so he just sent me some cigarettes.

"But during my sixth year in prison, it happened again. An anonymous gift. This time it came in the form of a one-hundred-dollar bill mailed to my mother, who, deprived of my support was ill and on relief.

"It happened a third time during my ninth year there. This time a five-hundred-dollar bill was mailed to my mother. It came too late, because she had died a few weeks earlier. A year after that third anonymous gift, I was released from prison."

Wharton, after seconds of silence, said, "Interesting, Keith. But why are you telling *me*?"

"By the time I got out," Evan explained, "I'd concluded that the idea of a sympathetic classmate didn't fit. Anyone who liked me well enough to do that would have called to see me. At least he would have written. So it was somebody else. Somebody who didn't dare see me, and yet who

couldn't forget me. Only one character seemed to fit a role like that, Wharton."

Wallace Wharton took a silk handkerchief from his robe and daubed his face with it. Then he puffed again, but the cigar had gone out. This time he waited longer before giving a response.

"I'm afraid I don't quite follow you." His voice was edgy.

"My conclusion is," Evan said, "that the gifts were sent by the man who really committed the murder. Does that strike you as logical?"

Again the ten-second pause. Then: "It does not." Wharton answered slowly and precisely. "The real murderer would be the last man in the world to do anything like that."

"The real murderer," Evan maintained, "assuming he has a normal conscience would be the first and only man in the world to do it. And he *did* do it. I've proved it."

Wharton had relighted the cigar. Out of the screen of his smoke came a startled challenge: "Proved it?"

"During my last year I figured it all out. The gift sender is a wealthy man, judging by the five-hundred-dollar bill. The three gifts were all postmarked San Francisco, where my mother lived, but I concluded that the gift sender himself doesn't live there. If so he would most likely have heard about my mother's death and wouldn't have sent the third gift to her. So I decided he's a man who only goes to San Francisco occasionally. By three postmarks, I know the dates of three occasions. And I assume that a rich man would go to one of the better hotels.

"So on the day of my release I made the rounds of San Francisco's ten leading hotels. I asked for lists of registrations on three back dates. At the first seven hotels they turned me down. But at the eighth I got a break. The manager there was cordial — just why I don't know. He dug deep into his files. When I failed to find what I wanted, he asked if there was anything else he could do for me. I explained that I was just out of prison and trying to clear my name. Then he offered to phone the managers of other leading hotels; he suggested that if I went back to them, maybe I'd get a more sympathetic reception.

"In the end I got three lists of names from each of ten hotels. What I wanted was a registration common to all three dates: A date seven years ago, a date four years ago, a date one year ago. And on the lists of the St. Francis Hotel, I found it: The same guest had registered there on the first date, again on the second date, and again on the third date. His name is Wallace K. Wharton and he lives in Honolulu."

Wharton seemed to relax. This time he said without a pause, "It's true I make a business trip to Frisco about once every three years, and I always stop at the St. Francis. But it's absurd to say I sent gifts to a convict. You're using numbers, Keith, but they don't add up."

"I haven't finished adding yet," Evan said. "My next column of fig-

ures reads like this: The murdered man's name was Ronald Bruce; so I went back to Bruce's neighborhood and asked questions. Had anyone there ever heard of a Wallace K. Wharton? Yes, a Wallace K. Wharton used to live next door to the Bruces. Wharton and Bruce had belonged to the same golf club. I asked what became of Wharton. And learned that he had left the country about ten years ago. I kept at it till I got the exact date. It was the day after the Bruce murder."

This time Wharton waited a long ten count. "I came to Honolulu," he offered cautiously, "meaning to stay only a month. But I liked it so well I settled here permanently. If you're charging me with murder, why don't you go to the police?"

"I'm short one link — your motive," Evan admitted frankly.

All this while he had kept a hand in his right coat pocket. Wharton became aware of a bulge there and it made streaks of redness fade from his face. His protest came hoarsely: "You're building it all on a guess. What's that in your pocket?"

"A gun," Evan said.

"You wouldn't dare shoot me! You'd hang for it! It'd make two convictions —"

"Yes, it'd be my second conviction," Evan broke in harshly. "But you and I know the first one was for your own crime. You let me rot in prison ten long years; and you tried to buy off your conscience. Ten cartons of cigarettes; then a hundred dollars; then five hundred. Did it make you feel any better, Wharton?"

Wharton kept staring with a fearful fascination at that pocket bulge. Evan withdrew his hand from the pocket.

"I brought the gun along," he explained, "only to keep you from killing *me*. You *did* kill once, so you might try it again. In the meantime, I'd like to begin life over with a decent job. As an ex-con, I can't get a job except a cheap one like I've got now, wiping engines on a ship. My only chance is to prove in court that you, and not I, killed Ronald Bruce."

Abruptly Evan Keith turned his back and left the garden. A gate admitted him to a side street and he walked briskly down a lane of magnolias toward the business section.

He must report back to his ship, which shortly would be returning to San Francisco. What then? Well, on his day ashore at San Francisco he could dig for a closer tie-up between Bruce and Wharton. And at each successive call of his ship here at Honolulu, he could work on Wharton in person. The man might crack up, if he kept at him.

Evan swung with long strides down a hill and came to a park with public buildings on one side and with a giant banyan tree in the center. The banyan branches dipped down to take root again. A bench was there and Evan paused to rest. He looked curiously at this hundred-legged banyan; and then at a Portuguese boy making love to a Japanese girl on the next bench; and then Evan Keith wrenched his

thoughts back to Wallace Wharton — and to Ronald Bruce.

In diamond-sharp detail he remembered the only time he had ever seen Bruce. Ten years ago in San Francisco. Evan, fresh out of college, was driving a shiny new flivver down a residential avenue. Bruce, in a heavy sedan, had come banging out of his driveway to a collision. No one was hurt, but the flivver was scuttled.

The usual heated argument, each driver claiming the other to be at fault. Harsh words drew a crowd which heard Evan demand that Bruce pay the damage; and which heard Bruce refuse; and which heard Evan erupt bitterly, "If you don't pay it, I'll take it out of your hide."

Then Evan had called a wrecker to tow his wreck to a shop. An estimate for repair had come to a hundred and seventy dollars. With this estimate in hand, just after dusk, Evan had returned to the Bruce residence. He would insist on Bruce footing the bill. But crossing Bruce's lawn he had stumbled over murder. Bruce's body lay on the grass there; by it lay the club which had struck him down. Evan, shocked, had picked it up because it looked like a spoke from the front wheel of his wreck. He was standing with it in hand, by the body, when two of the Bruce servants found him there.

"Guilty," the jury said.

Evan remembered somebody clicking a camera as they led him from the courtroom. And now he heard one again. He whirled nervously, then saw it was only a tourist lady. She was pointing a camera at the hundred-legged banyan.

He got up and hurried on past the post office and to the waterfront. A shrill whining of winches echoed through the dock warehouse as Evan strode across it to the moored *Matsonia.*

Then, as he was about to go aboard via the crew's plank, an elderly Chinese touched his arm. "You Mister Keith, please, maybe?"

"I am."

"This for you, please." The Chinese grinned amiably, then extended a sealed note.

The envelope bore Evan's name, nothing else. He opened it and saw a single line of writing. The writing had a feminine roundness:

"Please stay away from W. K. W. until you've seen me. A Friend."

Evan read the line twice, then stared suspiciously at the messenger. The Chinese was gray, wrinkled, neatly dressed. He might be the head servant of some well-ordered household.

"Who sent you?" Evan demanded.

"Come, please. I take you there." The messenger bowed, then turned and walked with dignity from the warehouse. He seemed to take for granted that Evan would follow.

It might be a trap. Wallace Wharton could have dispatched this Oriental for the purpose of luring Evan to some secluded spot where, at Wharton's order, Evan could be safely murdered.

What other answer could there be? Who else but Wharton could possibly know Evan's errand here?

Then Evan put a hand in his pocket and fingered the gun. He squared his shoulders and followed the Chinese messenger to the street. The man led him to a parked coupé. Evan, a hand in his gun pocket, got in. His guide took the wheel and drove away.

They took a street which followed the shore line. Soon Evan saw that they were passing handsome estates and hotels which fronted one way toward this street and the other way toward the sea.

The Chinese turned in at the drive of a hotel and drove the coupé up a lane between brilliant flame trees. He came to a stop at the hotel entrance and announced, "Writer of message waits in garden by sundial, please."

Evan got out and went into the hotel lobby. It still might be a trap, though the chance seemed less likely now. This was clearly a respectable place, not a deadfall for murder. The other side of the main foyer fronted on Waikiki Beach.

Evan went out to the flagged garden and saw a sundial there. By the sundial was an awninged divan swing. Its back was toward him; but the swing was swaying and so Evan knew someone was in it.

He crossed the garden to its seaward side; then he saw a young woman seated alone in the swing. Almost at once Evan had a feeling he had seen her before. He couldn't think where.

His uncertain stare drew a smile. A faint flush came with the smile and he knew it was she who had sent the note. She wore a traveling suit and a ginger lei, and didn't seem tanned enough to have been here long.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Keith?"

Evan caught a nervous note in her voice. He sat down in a rocker facing the swing. "Why did you send for me?"

"To stop you," she said. "You're mistaken about Wallace Wharton."

So that was it! Evan was disappointed. So Wharton was using a pretty woman to plead his innocence!

"Your message found me too late," Evan said coldly. "Because I've already seen Wharton."

Her look of alarm seemed real. "You went to his house? Did you —?"

"Did I manhandle him? No, I just told him what I know."

"But you don't really know anything," she protested. "You're just guessing."

"Guessing what?"

"Guessing that he sent three gifts."

"Didn't he?" Evan's stare probed at her. Unless she was in touch with Wharton, how could she know these things?

"No, he didn't," the girl said. Her eyes met Evan's with a disarming candor. Then he saw that she wasn't just a girl, but a mature woman of about his own age, which was thirty-one. "Why would he?" she argued. "Conscience wouldn't make him do it. Because Wallace Wharton hasn't any conscience. Not the tiniest speck."

"Who are you?" Evan demanded.

The question seemed to surprise her. "Don't you know? I'm Pamela Bruce."

Then he remembered. He had seen her at the trial, ten years ago. She was the widow of Ronald Bruce.

"Did you think I did it?" he asked.

Her "No" came quickly, almost eagerly. "I didn't think you were guilty. Then, after you'd been three years in prison, something happened to make me doubt it all the more."

"What?"

"An old neighbor called to see me. I'd almost forgotten him. He took me out to dinner, talked to me about his life in Hawaii."

"Wallace Wharton?"

She nodded. "And before the evening was over, he asked me to marry him. When I said I wouldn't, he went away. That was seven years ago."

"And that started you to thinking?"

"It made me remember that when he lived next door I'd often played golf and tennis with him. And that in an unobtrusive way he'd been attentive. He'd made no advances — but a girl can tell when a man likes her. Then I remembered something else: Wallace Wharton went abroad the next day after Ronald's murder. And he never announced where he was, Mr. Keith, until after your conviction."

"You decided he was guilty, just on that?"

"No. I simply realized he might be, because it suggested a motive. But I wasn't sure enough to accuse him. You, I felt sure, were innocent. So I sent you the cigarettes."

Evan saw instantly that there was no coincidence. The cigarettes had arrived on the first of three dates, but only because Wharton's presence in San Francisco that day had made Pamela think of Evan. "You later sent money to my mother?" he prompted.

She nodded. "I didn't see Wharton again for three years. Then he called again, took me out to dinner and again asked me to marry him. So again it pointed my suspicion of him and made me think in pity of you. By that time I'd learned about your mother. It was the same again three years later. Don't you see?"

Evan saw it clearly. Three times, at three-year intervals, Wharton had gone to the mainland. Each time he had proposed marriage and been refused. And his approach in each case had brought the same consistent reaction to Pamela.

"That explains the gifts," Evan said. "But it doesn't explain why you're here in Honolulu."

"When you were released a week ago," she said, "I wondered if employers would give you a cold shoulder. If so, maybe I could help. I'm a director in Bruce Industries, you know. So I consulted Sam Wang."

"Who's Sam Wang?"

"An old Chinese servant who practically raised me. I talked it over with Wang. He agreed that a young widow can't properly wait at the prison gates to greet the man who was convicted of murdering her husband. So Wang said

he would find out your plans, and that we would help you some way while keeping under cover."

Evan looked at her and the bitterness melted from his eyes. He said, "Thanks, Mrs. Bruce," and it sounded flat and stupidly inadequate.

"But Wang," she said, "phoned me that you were trying to get a job at a hotel. He said you had called at seven hotels and had been turned down, and now you were cooling your heels at the Presidio. I knew the manager of the Presidio quite well. So I rang him and asked him to give you a job."

Evan stared. "So that's why I got a break there!"

"An hour later he called me back," Pamela said, "and told me you hadn't asked for a job. He said all you wanted was to see his registrations for three old dates. They were the dates I had sent those gifts —"

"So you knew exactly what I was after!" Evan exclaimed. "And that I'd find the name Wallace K. Wharton registered on all three dates."

"So I sent Wang to find out what you'd do about it. He reported that you'd bought a second-hand pistol. And that you had then booked as a wiper to Honolulu. I guessed what for."

"You thought I'd walk in on Wharton, and start shooting? Why didn't you cable the Honolulu police?"

"And say what? That a man who has just served a prison term for the murder of my husband is on the warpath after a third man who, during the prison term, has been trying to marry me? And that the police must stop him, and take away the gun?"

Evan laughed uneasily. "You're right. It couldn't be handled that way."

"So Wang and I clippered over to handle it ourselves."

"And now that you've handled it, what else do you want?"

"Justice," Pamela said, "for both you and Wharton."

"That's exactly my ticket," Evan said. "A cleared name for me and conviction for Wharton."

"You're sure he's guilty?"

"I'd bet my right arm on it."

"So would I," Pamela said.

"So let's nail him," Evan said.

"How?"

A polite voice intruded: "For you, Mrs. Bruce." An attendant was standing there with a telephone. Its long extension cord reached halfway across the garden.

Pamela took it and answered the call: "Hello. This is Mrs. Bruce."

Then Evan saw her expression change. And uneasy tension was in her voice as he heard her respond, successively:

"How did you know I was in town? . . . The evening paper? Oh, of course; they publish the names of all clipper arrivals. How are you, Mr. Wharton? . . . Dinner tonight? Please, I've hardly unpacked yet. . . . Well, tomorrow, then. Goodby." She hung up and turned troubled eyes to Evan.

"You're right," Evan said grimly. "He hasn't any conscience."

"I detest seeing him," she said. "But

we'll have a better chance, don't you think, if he doesn't guess I suspect him?"

Evan approved with decision: "Keep him on the string. Call him Wally. Have him all softened up by the time I get back from San Francisco."

Pamela agreed. She knew, of course, that the *Matsonia* made a round trip between Hawaii and the mainland once each fortnight.

Exactly two weeks later Wallace Wharton answered the telephone at his Honolulu residence. He brightened at the sound of Pamela's voice.

"Can you drop by this afternoon, Wally? There's something I want to talk about."

Wharton exulted. She was calling him Wally again, just as when they'd been tennis partners ten years ago. And three times during these last two weeks she'd dined with him.

Everything comes, Wharton thought, to him who counts ten. Even if you have to count ten long years while you wait for a woman.

He drove to Pamela's hotel and parked his car in the drive there. At the desk he announced himself and the clerk rang Pamela's suite: "Mr. Wharton calling, Mrs. Bruce."

Pamela's voice said, "Send him right up."

Her second-floor suite consisted of a sitting room, a balcony, a bedroom and a bath.

Sam Wang answered Wharton's knock. Wang bowed, took the caller's hat and cane. Then he ushered Wharton through the sitting room and out upon the balcony.

Pamela stood up to greet him and her face seemed serious. Troubled, rather. "I'm afraid we're in for something unpleasant, Wally," she said. "I'm all upset about it myself."

Her manner confused him. "What's up, Pamela?" Then he decided she was embarrassed rather than troubled.

"You'll promise not to be offended, Wally?" she asked anxiously.

When she spoke to him like that he was willing to promise anything. Wharton sat down on a rattan settee. He brought out a cigar, trimmed it, and a smile creased his broad, pink face. "I like a good mystery, Pamela."

She sat down, facing him, and asked suddenly, "Do you remember a man named Evan Keith?"

He stiffened. One could almost hear the watch in his pocket tick ten times before he answered, "Keith? He was the man who killed Ronnie, wasn't he?"

"He's the man they convicted for it," she said, "and now he's been released from San Quentin. He seems to have a job on the *Matsonia*."

"He hasn't annoyed you, I hope?"

"He came here," she admitted, "just after his boat docked today. And he has an obsession, Wally."

"A what?"

"He thinks you murdered Ronald."

Again the ten-second wait. Wharton was deciding whether to say, "I know it; he called two weeks agoand accused me to my face," or "That's too ridiculous!" He compromised by saying,

"What makes him think I did it?"

"He claims you had a motive, for one thing. He thinks I'm the motive."

"He's what they call stir-crazy," Wharton said.

"Still, I think we should be kind to him, reason with him. You can listen to the case he thinks he's built up, then show him that it's all illogical and impossible. Don't you see?"

Wharton moistened those thin, tight lips of his. "I see," he murmured.

"So I asked him to call again at five," Pamela said. "You don't mind talking to him, do you?"

When the house phone rang, Wang brought it to Pamela. The desk clerk's voice announced, "A Mr. Keith calling on you, Mrs. Bruce."

"Send him up, please," Pamela said.

Wharton braced himself. His best line, he decided, would be to patronize Keith. Treat him politely, but like a child.

They heard a knock and Wang went to respond. Then Wang returned to the balcony ushering Evan Keith. Evan bowed stiffly to Pamela, then stared at Wharton like a man with a chip on his shoulder.

Pamela was gracious: "Won't you sit down, Mr. Keith?" Wharton liked the way she met this difficult situation. She was humoring this fellow, smoothing down ruffled feathers. Wharton tried to adopt the same attitude.

"Suppose we talk this thing out, Keith," he suggested throatily. "I mean about this obsession of yours that it was I who killed Ronnie Bruce." Evan took a seat near Pamela.

"I'll reconstruct the crime for you," he proposed bluntly.

"Go right ahead." Wharton's tone was expansive.

"On that day in 1931," Evan said, "there was a collision out in your street. Two drivers quarreled about who was to blame. Bystanders gathered, yourself among them. You heard me say to Bruce, 'If you don't pay the damage, I'll take it out of your hide.'

"You hoped I would. You wanted Bruce out of the way for a motive we'll not mention now. After dark that evening you saw Bruce walking among the shrubs of his front lawn. You went to the street and picked up a wheel spoke — debris from the wreckage of my car. You used it to kill Bruce. That's the bare outline."

Wharton waited ten beats of his heart. Then, with a tolerant unction, faintly satirical, he answered, "And of course I knew you were on the way there from a garage with a repair bill in your hand, and that —"

"I can't prove you knew I was coming," Evan broke in. "What I *can* prove is that you found out, too late, that your crime had been witnessed."

Wharton felt hot stings spreading on his face. He brought out a silk handkerchief not so much to mop at them as to hide them from Pamela. Somehow he managed to respond, not too angrily, "The crime was witnessed, you say? By whom? Please don't keep me in suspense."

Then Wharton turned to see how Pamela was taking it. Her look reassured him. It seemed to say, "Be patient with him, Wally. The poor fellow."

"If there wasn't a witness," Evan countered, "why did you leave town in such a hurry? With me booked for the murder you had nothing to worry about — unless you were afraid of some witness."

The man was bluffing on some rank guess, Wharton decided. He assured himself that bluffers never win at a showdown. All you need do is sit tight and call them.

So Wharton put a tongue in his cheek. He asked Evan, "But who was this witness, if it's no secret?"

Evan chose to ignore him and explain directly to Pamela: "While my ship was in San Francisco this last trip I had a day or two ashore. So I went to the police with a list of three dates. June 19, 1934; June 6, 1937; August 2, 1940."

Wharton knew that those were the three dates that he had registered at the St. Francis Hotel.

Pamela asked Evan, "But why would the police be interested?"

"They weren't," Evan said. "Then I asked them if any unsolved crime was committed on any one of those three dates. They looked up the first date and said no. They looked up the second date and said no. Then they looked up the third date and said yes, on August 2, 1940, a little ambulance chaser named Max Gorman was found murdered in his office. The homicide was still unsolved."

Wharton sat perfectly rigid, like a pillar of ice. It was more than ten pulse beats before he could challenge, brassily, "All right. I was in San Francisco that day. And so were a million other people."

Evan continued speaking directly to Pamela: "The name meant nothing. But the man's profession jolted me. Ambulance chasers follow car collisions. The Bruce homicide followed a car collision. The connection was still thin, but it jostled my memory. It made me go back to the garage which repaired my wreck ten years ago. The same man still runs the place. I rehashed the old incident with him and we supplemented each other's vague recollections of it.

"We recalled that while I waited for the estimate, a shifty little lawyer came in. He saw the wreck and asked me if I was hurt. I said no. That disqualified me as a possible client. So he asked who was the other party in the collision and I told him. He left and I forgot all about him. Soon I left myself and went to Bruce's house. I didn't know that Max Gorman, preceding me by ten minutes to inquire if Bruce had been hurt in the collision, and if so would he care to file suit, had arrived on the lawn just in time to witness Bruce's murder by Wharton."

Wharton stood up and his knees almost buckled. "I think this has gone far enough, Pamela. Don't you?"

The fact that she didn't answer him, or even look at him, frightened him more than anything Evan had

said.

Evan went on: "So I looked up Gorman's family and got the name of his bank. At the bank I said I was checking up on the Gorman murder. I handed them a list of three dates."

"The same three dates?" Pamela asked.

"Only two were the same. The first two. For the date of Gorman's murder in 1940 I substituted the date of Bruce's in 1931. I asked the banker to see if any unusually large deposits were made by Max Gorman on those three dates. It wasn't easy. At first the banker wouldn't show me a thing. So I went to the judge who had sentenced me to prison ten years ago. He's retired now — I found him at his club. I told him what I'd uncovered so far. And did I get action! That old judge drove me back to the bank and had a heart-to-heart talk with the banker.

"Then the banker looked up the old Gorman account. He found that on the day following the Bruce murder, Gorman had deposited three thousand dollars in cash. And on the 1934 date, Gorman banked five thousand in cash. And on the 1937 date he again banked five thousand in cash."

Evan turned to Wharton and continued: "You got tired of those payoffs, Wharton. So on your 1940 trip to the mainland you put a stop to it. Yes, there were a million other people in town. But of all that million, only one left town on the first of four dates and returned on each of three others."

"A coincidence," Wharton pleaded desperately.

"A triple coincidence," Evan derided, "like having three wild-goose feathers fall in the same chimney on the same day every third year."

Even then Wharton didn't see just how tightly it wove a noose for him. He heard Pamela say, "Tell him where you next took your list of dates, Evan." Pamela's look was different now. Wharton realized that she'd been conniving with Evan Keith all the while.

"With that square-shooting old judge still batting for me," Evan said, "I went to the Trans-Pacific telephone people. What calls from Frisco to Honolulu on or near those three dates? I found that just before the murder of Gorman, Gorman called Wharton at Honolulu. Wharton immediately clippered to San Francisco."

Wharton said hoarsely, "What are you going to do about it?"

"It's already been done," Evan told him. "The warrant's been issued. Police are waiting at your car now."

Wharton stepped to the balcony railing. He looked down and saw his car parked in the hotel drive. Four policemen stood by it. Three were of the local force; the other wore the uniform of a San Francisco inspector.

Evan Keith moved over to stand by Pamela. Wharton looked at them and counted ten — not ten pulse beats of discretion, but one for every year he'd stolen from Evan's life; and one for each year he'd waited for Pamela.

Then Wharton turned to see Sam Wang holding out his hat and stick. "You go, please," Wang said.

Did you read Donald Henderson's MR. BOWLING BUYS A NEWSPAPER, *published early in 1944 by Random House? "The Saturday Review of Literature" called it a "very queer dish, excellently written . . . but not for the squeamish." Drexel Drake described it as "an amazingly nonchalant chronicle of an unbelievably monstrous career." And "The New Republic" reviewed it as "a decidedly out-of-the-way item which is recommended to readers who are more interested in people than in how the murderer got out of the sealed room."*

All three quotations apply to the story you are about to read. It is the first short story by Donald Henderson to be published in the United States, and it appears in EQMM for the simple reason that EQMM, as you must know by now, has a passion for and makes a specialty of bringing you the most distinguished "firsts" in the detective-crime field.

"The Alarm Bell" concerns an alarm clock and a nameless man with huge hands and hairy wrists, and the shocking events that result from the sound of the former awakening the subconscious mind of the latter. This is a very queer dish, excellently written, but not for the squeamish; it is an amazingly nonchalant chronicle of an unbelievably monstrous career; it is a decidedly out-of-the-way item for readers who are more interested in people than in how the murderer got out of the sealed room.

It is also a frightening commentary on the impact of war-madness — "the ugliness and evil in this world" — on the weak and susceptible minds that sometimes know not what they do . . .

THE ALARM BELL

by DONALD HENDERSON

HE PUT on his old mackintosh because it was early and a bit chill, though not chill enough for an overcoat. In any case, he hadn't got much of an overcoat; also, in any case, it looked as if it might turn to rain presently — it usually did nowadays. He put his huge hands into the oddly small pockets of his rather shapeless mackintosh and went out as usual into dingy Shepherds Bush. There were no signs of any shepherds, or of any bushes, but there were a few trees knocking around and he'd often thought it would make a fairly nice walk if he made a detour and cut through the green to work round by that way. But as a matter of fact he never had made such a detour before, because he had never been early before. He liked to read with his breakfast (well, he liked to read all the time, really — a spot of Shakespeare or something) and he felt it was quite bad enough having to go to work at all, without leaving too early and going in for detours. Prolonging the agony, so to speak!

He gave a sort of chuckling grunt at the thought of all the tedious work which was involved in living, a sort of cynical *brmph!* and feeling good

humored all the same, decided to make the detour for once, and so he went slowly and silently past the Shepherds Bush Palace, the barrack-like pub at the far corner there, with no name on it, and across the green. The green was more brown then green from people sitting on it last summer, but there were plenty of autumn leaves and bare-looking trees, and dogs were up to their larks and trying to kid themselves they were in the heart of the country.

He moved lightly and silently for such a huge man, and his enormous hands were out of sight deep in his little mackintosh pockets right up to the thick, hairy wrists. He went on towards his work and on the way came to the dreary little street of red houses — "family houses," he always thought of such dwellings — which the milkman hadn't reached yet, and where one or two collarless figures were leaving once again for collarless destinations. There was the tumbling, waking noise of London, and there was the smell of distant trains (the District line) and the rattle of them, and then very suddenly the bell went off.

Trrrrrr.

It came from the small house with the dirty green blinds. He'd been deep, deep in thought (as anyone was entitled to be — there was such a vast amount to think about in life), but without knowing what it was he was thinking about so deeply (as anyone was entitled to do), and what with the insistent suddenness of the bell, he got deeper and deeper yet, in thought; people often did that, in the street, or anywhere else — actors or composers, for instance, though he was neither — that was how people got run over by a bus. All the same, what with the bell, and the unusual morning detour, who can say but that the Randall family might not still be alive today? But the bell of their family alarm clock had gone off, and clearly at the psychological moment, and the next thing he saw of his hands was when they were softly sliding up the unlatched window — people really ought to go in for latches and locks more than they did.

He was a huge, quiet man in a mackintosh, and he stood there at the strange window in the strange, empty street. He softly pushed aside the faded green blind and stared in. It was practically pitch-dark in there.

He didn't, of course, know who was in, if anyone, or who lived here, or anything, any more than he knew when a policeman or somebody might not come along the street. He didn't *know* there was a family living here, but he supposed there must be someone, since an alarm clock had gone off to wake someone up and send that someone off to work once more. Alarm clocks did go off freakishly, to be sure; they were temperamental things, and if you wound them up carefully and set them for seven o'clock tomorrow, quite likely, if they felt like it, they mightn't go off until next Palm Sunday in the middle

of the afternoon. That was why his eyes were trying to pierce the depth of gloom in the room, to see if there *was* someone who ought to be getting up to go to work.

Well, if there was, they wouldn't have to go to work today — they wouldn't have to go to work at all anymore! How lovely for them! It was to be hoped they said their prayers properly last night, after setting the alarm bell.

He slipped silently into the dark room and quietly dropped the blind back to the window behind him so that he was shielded from the street again. The room smelt fuggy and cheap and suddenly he heard someone breathing. It was all at once intensely exciting. His huge hands started to grope, gently. They had been hanging down, waiting. But they started to grope towards the breathing. He ran his hands along, it was a long, thin mound and it felt like a man, fairly young, the throat was.

It was soon over. It was tame. It wasn't a bit exciting. The young man, if that was what it was, slumped back in the bed and certainly wasn't breathing now. But then, suddenly, it was exciting again. Very. Hang it, there was another person in the bed! She suddenly shot up and let out a shrill:

"*Who's there? Is someone there?*" in tones of terror and alarm. Then she started to shriek: "*Bob . . .* ?" but fortunately she was near, and he soon put a stop to that. All the same, she had plenty of kick in her, and before he had finished with her he heard a distinct and expressive thud on the floor above his head, like a person just hopping quickly out of bed.

He didn't know it, of course, but it was Mr. Randall, head of the house.

Mr. Randall sat on the edge of his untidy bed staring at his pale, flabby feet. He slept in his day shirt and his white hair stood up on end. He looked tasty! Old and muscular, tattooed, and with white bristles all over his chin, and fag ends all over the bedtable. He stared at his feet, but he was really trying to see through them, and through the floor, down to Vera and Bob. He thought she'd let out a yell of alarm, but on second thought she and Bob had only been married a week, it was probably just that. And she was always yelling at Bob anyway, apart from that; why the silly boy ever went and married such a creature, goodness only knew. But there you were; he was a Randall, and they never did know how to pick a woman! Widower-hood was by far the best; the last two years had been sheer Heaven — he could smoke in bed again!

"You all right down there?" he called down vaguely, and vaguely wondered about burglars. But nobody called out again, and she never said anything more, so he supposed it was marriage larks. And then he did hear some sort of movement down there somewhere — it sounded as if it was coming from Uncle George's room. Scuffling about or something. Let's hope somebody would have the

energy to bring up a spot of tea.

Mr. Randall lit another fag and went on sitting on the edge of his bed, waiting to hear a step on the stairs which ought to mean tea.

He thought about Uncle George down there and wondered if that lazy man was thinking about him in connection with a cup of tea.

Uncle George wasn't! He was thinking about something much more pressing!

When the alarm clock by his bed had gone off, he first started thinking it was an alarm bell of some kind and meant some awful sort of danger. This was because he wasn't properly awake and had been horribly drunk last night again. First of all he thought the bell meant fire, and then his befuddled and drowsy brain decided it meant approaching murder. He tossed and turned in his semi-sleep, flinging his scraggy arms about, his blue-striped pyjamas buttonless about the chest, hating bells, and, of course, murder; and his brain started up that conversation he'd had with a drunken crony about how it was that strangely queer tragedies sometimes happened to people *for no apparent reason.*

Why *did* certain things happen, things which one could never explain? For instance, in the blitzes, you heard about whole families who were wiped out overnight — and never a hint that they'd deserved it, or anything like that. And then the film, "The Bridge of San Luis Rey" — those people, just happening to be on it when it bust like that? What was the reason for that?

Uncle George then suddenly woke up. There had been a cry of some sort a moment or two ago, and he thought with rising resentment that it was Vera expecting him to get the tea again.

He got up, on an impulse, intending, not to get the tea today — well, not at first (he had to remember he never paid any rent) — but to bawl at Vera through her door. Why shouldn't she get it? Or Bob? Or Sid, the lodger in the basement? — he was one of the family now, even if he was a sardine salesman and told interminable stories which everyone had heard before.

He thought angrily about Vera, and buttonless pyjamas, and sardines, and went to his door. He opened it, and then he stood there transfixed.

He saw the most incredibly horrible sight he had ever seen in his life. There were two eyes looking at him out of a huge mackintosh. But that wasn't all. While the eyes were looking at him (thin, trembling *him*), two enormous hands belonging to, and coming out of, the mackintosh, via two hairy wrists, *had got Sid*. They were dropping Sid, as if just about bored with him now, and Sid was grey and had newly arranged white eyeballs, instead of eyes, and his tongue (which had talked so much) was bleeding, on the wrong side of his teeth. It was like a huge, terrifying cat dropping one little mouse because it has suddenly seen a nice, long,

trembling, thin one that has lost even the power to squeak.

And, indeed, that was exactly how it was. When Uncle George *was* ready to squeak, he found it impossible, on account of the intensely unpleasant pressure at his Adam's Apple. And as the pressure increased still more, Uncle George saw Sid, dead, and then, through the open door there, Vera and Bob, dead. That was three. "I'm the fourth, then," Uncle George thought, aghast, and also thought of the *News of the World*, Sunday — imagine missing it! His head began to swim, and his thoughts started to send a frantic, telepathic warning upstairs to the old man. But his head started to burst and something awful was happening to the strength in his knees.

Old Mr. Randall finished his latest fag and began to feel extremely irritated. What was the use of alarm clocks if folks just kept on wallowing in bed? He sat on the edge of the bed and looked like an angry old bull, for he had worked down at the docks all his life and was tough even if he was old. He decided that if he didn't hear a creak on the stairs before very long he'd start bringing the house down. He could hear the milkman getting nearer and nearer with his bottles, so they couldn't pretend there wasn't any milk — that was an old one, that was.

Mr. Randall was just going to start roaring when he did hear a slight creak on the stairs. He felt a bit better tempered. Then there was a gentle knock on the door, which was unusual, and he growled, "Oh, come in," and turned away for his old dressing gown at the foot of the bed, in case Vera (who was a first class prude, considering the way she'd lived before she was married) made out she was shocked. Then, after hearing the door open softly, he was astounded to feel Vera's hands getting at his throat from the back. Then, suddenly, they were too strong for Vera's hands, there was a mass of hair at the wrists, and there was an unaccustomed smell of a mackintosh.

He plunged violently up off the edge of the bed and heaved his assailant across to the opposite wall. But it didn't do any good, there was iron here at his throat, and so he heaved and plunged back again and the table and lamp and fag ends fell to the floor with a crash. The brown room began to spin. The man in the mackintosh had worked his iron hands round to a frontal position, and the two gasping figures heaved desperately to and fro and fell out of the bedroom doorway and struggled frantically on the little landing there to the tune of approaching milk bottles. Then they started to tumble together down the narrow stairs, snapping the bannister rail. At the foot of the stairs, Mr. Randall, who had had his day, was almost exhausted and breathless and had started to go a bit green.

The man in the mackintosh finally dumped him by the back door and then hurriedly went through the little house to the front door. He let him-

self out and went into the street. Except for the milkman's horse and cart, it was empty. There was no sign of the milkman, so he leaned up against the fence to get his breath back. It had been pretty terrific. He stood taking in great gusts of air.

The milkman had opened the back door in the way the Randall family always asked him to, and started to shove the milk bottles in. Then he saw Mr. Randall.

Then he saw Sid, the lodger.

Then he saw Uncle George Randall.

Then he saw Vera and Bob Randall.

He went green as green and his mouth fell open and looked as if it would never shut again, any more than his eyes would.

He raced round into the street. The only person he saw in the distance was a man in a mackintosh going off to work. He tore up to him and gasped out that five people had been strangled at Number 22, the house with green blinds, and to fetch a policeman at once while he went back and watched the house. Then he ran back.

The man in the mackintosh, startled, started to look for a policeman at once. He found one suddenly and agitatedly told him what the milkman had said. He gave the address of the house with green blinds and the policeman said cautiously, as if he never believed things straight off:

"Murder?" and moved away fairly quickly.

The man in the mackintosh watched him go. He felt upset, disliking melodrama, except in fiction. He had started, curiously, to think about bells. Why bells? But there, why did you think about anything, at any given moment? Bells.

Good Heavens, that reminded him, look at the time! What on earth was he doing this morning? He had made quite a detour. It was silly — he never would again. Quite apart from being late for work, imagine starting an already sordid day by being told by a milkman that a whole family had been wiped out overnight by a murderer! Why *did* such incredible things happen, he asked himself as he mingled with the crowd. Why, surely, only because madness was responsible for the ugliness and evil in this world. It was said the police had a positive theory that it was possible for a man to commit murder and not even know he'd done it. But surely that was going a bit far, even for madness!

Reaching his work, he dismissed the whole incident from his mind. It was nothing to do with him and there had been quite enough murder in recent years.

He heard the bell ring where he worked, and he was a sad man and it made something stir very vaguely in his head. But he smiled to himself and thought a bit whimsically about Shakespeare, whom he loved. He smiled and thought: "The bell invites me!" And he thought, dramatically:

"Hear it not, Duncan! For, it is a knell that summons thee to Heaven! Or — to Hell!"

Henry Wade is the pseudonym of Major Sir Henry Aubrey-Fletcher, Bart. Dorothy L. Sayers has called him "one of our best and soundest detective writers." His well-known detective character is the quietly efficient Inspector Poole. His unknown detective character, to most American readers, is Constable John Bragg.

Bragg started his career as a country policeman, with the Downshire Constabulary. A humble, stalwart man in blue — so familiarly known as the "copper" — Constable Bragg made a name for himself in the British hinterland by following his simple rule-of-thumb method: Notice and Remember. The local-boy-makes-good finally achieved his detectival ambition — a chance with Scotland Yard in the big city. "Smash and Grab" relates Bragg's first case as a member of the C.I.D. — the investigation of an epidemic of smash-and-grab raids in London's fashionable shopping district.

Here is a typical example of modern English realism in the detective story — sedate English realism as distinct from the violent realism of certain American contemporaries. Here is the leisurely manner of the classical English crimeteers, as compared with the fast (and sometimes furious) pace of the hardboiled American detectivos. Here is the patient, plodding plain-clothesman, the dogged, persevering copper, who won't raise your blood pressure but who, like Crofts' Inspector French and the Coles' Superintendent Wilson, talks, thinks, and acts like a real-life policeman.

SMASH AND GRAB

by HENRY WADE

CRASH! and the tinkle of falling glass.

In a few seconds a group of staring people had collected outside the broken window of a jeweller's shop in Old Bond Street. A police constable who had just previously turned into Burlington Gardens came hurrying across the road; a young man who had been passing in a coupé car pulled up at the curb, jumped out, and pushed his way through the crowd in rear of the policeman.

"Now then; what's this?" demanded the latter, with no great originality.

Two hatless gentlemen in morning coats, who had hurriedly emerged from the doorway of Marto's, broke into eager speech, declaring that an attempt had been made to rob their shop. The voice of a small boy penetrated through the hubbub.

" 'E done it. I see 'im."

The urchin was pointing at a little man in a shabby black coat, who instantly blushed and stammered unintelligible denials.

"Anyone know anything about this?" demanded the policeman fiercely. "Anyone see anything?"

No one, it appeared, had seen any-

thing, except the errand-boy, who had seen the little man in black passing Marto's when the crash occurred. After one glance at the suspect the policeman commanded silence.

"No car seen?" he asked. "No one jumping out or running away?"

"I was passing in my car," said the well-dressed man who had followed the policeman through the crowd. "I didn't notice anything. I don't think any car stopped or drove away."

The lack of witnesses would have been mysterious at any other time of day, but Bond Street in the luncheon hour is deserted.

Another policeman had by now appeared and, at the request of the first, was taking names and addresses — the errand-boy, Jack Smirke, employed by Toole Brothers, fruiterers, Piccadilly; the suspect, Robert Wallop, clerk to James and James, solicitors of Lincoln's Inn; the young man in the coupé, Lord Feathergill, the "Albany."

"I want to cover this, constable," whispered the young peer. "I'm a gossip-writer, you know, for the *Sunday Post*, but if I can get a scoop on this it'll do me good with my paper. If you've done with these chaps . . ."

In the meantime the first constable had entered Marto's shop and put a call through to Vine Street police station.

"Another smash-and-grab, sir, in Old Bond Street, Marto's," said the station-sergeant to Divisional Detective-Inspector Halliday. "Nothing stolen, Porter thinks, and no clear evidence as to what happened."

"Hell!" said Inspector Halliday. "I'll go round at once. You'll have to pass this on to Chief-Inspector Holby at the Yard. Quick as you can."

Grabbing his bowler hat, Inspector Halliday was gone.

Normally an incident like this would be dealt with by the divisional detective without any reference to Scotland Yard, but it happened that there had been a recent epidemic of smash-and-grab raids and the Commissioner of Metropolitan Police, irritated by pinpricks from the Press, had put the whole subject in the hands of Chief-Inspector Holby, at Headquarters, to "correlate, co-ordinate, explore all avenues," and generally take the blame.

Like Halliday, Chief-Inspector Holby also cursed when he got Vine Street's message. These raids were maddening; they were extraordinarily difficult to anticipate — you could not have a constable outside every jeweller's shop — and they usually ended in the discovery of a stolen car abandoned in a side street; there was a lot of hard work and no kudos at all.

But like Halliday, also, Chief-Inspector Holby wasted no time.

"Car!" he snapped at his clerk. "Sergeant Bevan and two detective-constables. Jump to it."

So it was that John Bragg entered upon his first case as a member of the C.I.D. Chief Constable Thurston had been as good as his word; the country

policeman had said good-bye to his Downshire comrades, had passed through a vigorous process of training, education, and general smartening-up, had rediscovered his London, renewed his old friendships, refurbished his powers of observation and deduction . . . and was ready. A telephone call, a sharp order, and Detective-Constable Bragg stepped into the police car behind Chief-Inspector Holby and in an indecently short time was stepping out in Old Bond Street.

The crowd had by now dispersed, a constable standing outside Marto's door to keep onlookers on the move and to guard the broken window. Inside, Divisional Detective-Inspector Halliday was amplifying the inquiries already begun by the first police-officer on the spot. There were no customers in the shop, but Jack Smirke, Robert Wallop, Lord Feathergill and two other passers-by had been asked to await the arrival of Chief-Inspector Holby.

The young gossip-writer had made two unsuccessful applications for the use of the telephone — to tell his story to his editor; he was now looking fidgety and annoyed. Chief-Inspector Holby, who knew him by name and reputation, heard what little he had to say and let him go. A closer questioning of the lad Smirke soon broke through the tissue of imagination which had cloaked his story, and Robert Wallop's ordeal was at an end. Of the two other witnesses, one had been attracted by the passing of Lord Feathergill's car, and one by the complete absence of any "grab" in connection with the smash. Chief Inspector Holby dismissed them all and gave his orders.

Detective-Sergeant Bevan was to question shopkeepers, commissionaires, etc., on the opposite side of Bond Street, from which a view of the incident might have been obtained. Bragg was to do the same on the near side of the street. The other detective, Patterson, would stay with Chief-Inspector Holby.

Having set his subordinates to work, Holby turned his attention to the staff of the shop. The manager reported that, so far as he could tell, nothing had been stolen; indeed it would not have been possible to "grab" anything from the outside because a fine steel grille protected the contents of that part of the window. When the smash occurred there had been a rush to the door of the shop but there had only been two customers in at the time and the manager had instantly placed himself close to the window in a position from which he could see to it that nothing was taken from the inside, while carefully watching the rest of the shop. He produced a large lump of shapeless lead which had fallen between the glass and the steel grille. He had himself extracted it, using a handkerchief so as not to mark it with his own fingerprints.

"Good man," said Chief-Inspector Holby.

"What I can't understand," said the gratified manager, "is why anyone

should smash the window at all. It seems obvious that that thing couldn't smash the grille."

"Yes," said Holby, "but it seems fairly clear that no attempt was made to grab; there's some other explanation of this game, I fancy."

In the meantime Bragg, inwardly boiling with excitement, was settling down to his first C.I.D. job. The premises next to Marto's on the north side were occupied by a firm of furriers. There was no commissionaire and the only man in the place was a packer and general handyman; he had been in his own cubby-hole at the back of the shop and, though he had heard the commotion, he had seen nothing. The manageress reported that her establishment had been empty at the time; when the crash was heard she and her assistants had, naturally, hurried to the door to see what was happening — these raids were rather getting on everyone's nerves, the manageress explained, and furs could be grabbed almost as easily as jewels — but they had seen nothing beyond the gathering of the crowd.

Next door to the furrier was a hairdresser; here a commissionaire was commonly employed but he had been "off" for his lunch at the time and had only returned after the event. There had been just enough business doing to keep the lunch-hour staff employed; nobody could tell Bragg anything.

So it continued up that side of the street for another fifty yards and then Bragg retraced his steps and started on the other side of Marto's — the Piccadilly side. Here was an art gallery; in the window was one oil painting which appeared to the detective quite remarkably dull and unattractive; velvet curtains partly screened the interior of the gallery. Here again there was no commissionaire, and Bragg, not looking like a wealthy collector of art treasures, was received by the manager with chilly dignity. The manager admitted hearing the crash of glass; there had been three visitors in the gallery at the time, besides the two assistants and himself; everyone, he thought, had gone straight to the door to see what had happened but, so far as he knew, no one had seen anything significant; certainly he had not himself. The two assistants confirmed this.

It occurred to Bragg that he ought, perhaps, to question the customers who had been present in the neighboring shops; it was not likely that they had seen any more than the staff, but "no stone must be left unturned."

"Can you tell me the names of your customers who were here at the time, sir?" asked Bragg.

The manager, who had thawed somewhat on learning the detective's identity and business, gave a wintry smile.

"I don't know that I can exactly describe them all as customers," he said. "In a gallery like this we have a number of visitors who have no intention whatever of buying anything. Some of them come because they love to see beautiful things, some because

they like to be able to say they have seen them — we have many *objets d'art* which are world famous, details of which appear in the Press and are talked about at dinner-tables.

"This morning, for instance," continued the manager, "we had old Lord Bicester. He comes two or three times a week, generally during the luncheon hour when he can examine at his leisure; to the best of my belief he has never bought anything, but he has once or twice brought friends who have bought, and in any case he has 'an air' — we welcome him."

Then there had been, this morning, a young lady who had been two or three times recently; she had evidently been fascinated by the collection of *chinoiserie* which he was showing this month — the manager pointed to a series of shelves at the end of the room; on one occasion she had brought a young gentleman and it would appear that she had been tempting him to buy something for her — but the young man had not fallen; nevertheless. . . .

"Who was this young lady?" asked Bragg, his patience wearing thin.

The manager shrugged.

"We have had no occasion to ask either her name or her address."

"Oh, well, it probably doesn't matter. And the other one? I think you said there were three customers . . . visitors here at the time."

"Ah, the other one," said the manager, brightening visibly; "the other one was Mr. Hiram Potter, collector for Mr. Drew Pierman of San Francisco. Now Mr. Potter, when he comes, comes on business. This morning he wished to see . . ."

Bragg learned — in time — that Mr. Potter might be found at Grey's Hotel in Albemarle Street.

So the budding detective continued his walk down the west side of Bond Street, learning nothing but gathering a list of customers to be questioned — a list which became rather overpowering in its length.

Bragg returned to the Yard and reported his failure to discover anyone who could throw any light on the incident.

"Shall I go and see all these customers whose addresses I got, sir?" he asked.

"Not worth it," said his chief. "It's fairly clear that there was no real attempt to grab; quite likely that the whole thing was a practical joke."

Bragg hesitated, uncertain of his own status in this new sphere; he did not want to court a snub, but he felt an urge never to leave a case alone till it was cleared up.

"Might I have a look through your report when it's ready, sir?" he asked.

Chief-Inspector Holby raised his eyebrows; a snub was imminent, but he had heard something about Bragg's record in Downshire.

"Got an idea?" he asked.

"Not at the moment, sir. I don't know enough."

"All right. Write out your own report first and then you can see mine and Sergeant Bevan's."

An hour later he was back in the

chief-inspector's room.

"Well, what about that idea?" the latter asked.

"I just wondered, sir, whether this window-smashing was just a bit of camouflage to distract attention from something else."

"You mean the grab might have been done from the inside? I thought of that, but nothing's missing. Besides, I made inquiries about both the customers who were in Marto's at the time; one was young Bellowby in the Blues, choosing an engagement ring; the other was Mrs. Hilton-Carstairs bringing her tiara to be re-set. Both full of money and hardly partners in a smash-and-grab raid. One of the assistants might have been in it, of course, but they've all got cast-iron reputations and in any case, how could they get away with the stuff? If anything had been stolen they'd all have been watched and probably searched."

Bragg's large chin, symbol of obstinacy, led him on when no doubt it would have been wiser to retreat.

"There's other shops, sir; maybe there was a theft in one of them."

Chief-Inspector Holby stared at him. Gradually a smile spread over his face.

"Well, you've got the right spirit, my lad," he said. "Go and find out . . . if you can."

So Bragg returned to Old Bond Street and, choosing first the most promising objective, re-entered the Art Gallery on the Piccadilly side of Marto's. As it was now very near to closing-time he was not received with open arms, but his first question startled the manager, Mr. Dolphin, into acute attention.

"You've not missed anything yourself, I suppose, sir?"

"Missed anything? What do you mean?"

"It's just an idea that occurred to me, sir. There was nothing stolen from Marto's, but it's just possible that someone may be taking advantage of this smash-and-grab scare to cover a different game. Do you mind telling me, sir, what happened in here when that crash was heard? I think you said you all went to the door, customers and staff, to see what was happening."

"Yes, we did; certainly we did. It was only natural to do so, because there have been so many of these raids lately that we jumped to the conclusion that this was another — there being a jeweller's next door."

"Exactly, sir. And is it possible that in the confusion something got stolen? I've no reason for saying that that happened here any more than in any other shop, but you told me that you'd got a lot of very valuable articles — some of them not too big to slip into a pocket, perhaps."

"Good heavens, what a horrible idea," said Mr. Dolphin. "But no, certainly I should have missed anything at once if it had been taken. I know exactly what is displayed —"

"Yes, sir," interrupted Bragg, "but would you mind making sure?"

The manager looked quickly round, his assistants followed suit. One of them bent over a table in the centre

of the Gallery, where half a dozen small green figures — bronzes — were displayed on a table.

"Mr. Dolphin, would you look here, sir, please."

The manager hurried to the table and after a whispered colloquy, thrust a pair of glasses on to his nose and picked up one of the bronzes with trembling fingers. He gave a gasp of horror.

"My God! This . . . this is not . . . this is a fake! Someone has substituted this! . . ."

Bragg suppressed a chuckle of satisfaction.

"A valuable article, sir?" he asked.

"Valuable? These are the Pallas bronzes! I bought them myself at the Ruppell sale last month. I paid . . . that is, in the proper quarter they are worth four figures apiece."

"And they have all been . . . exchanged, sir?"

By this time Mr. Dolphin had completed his examination of the six figures. He put down the last with a sigh of relief.

"No, thank goodness," he said. "Only two — these two."

"Just go nicely into the tail pockets of a gentleman's coat, sir . . . or perhaps into a lady's vanity bag if it was a good-sized one." Mr. Dolphin gasped. "Could it have happened some other day, sir, and you did not notice it till now?"

"Certainly not! These are good imitations but they would have been noticed directly they were handled. I put them away myself every night . . . I should have put them away in a few minutes now . . . I should have noticed at once . . ."

"I wonder," thought Bragg to himself. "You had to have a good squint at them through your glasses before you made sure, even when you were looking for trouble." Aloud he said: "How could those figures have been copied, sir? They have not been out of your hands?"

"Not for a moment."

"Could anyone have drawn them . . . or photographed them?"

"No . . . but yes! They were photographed, with other items from the Ruppell collection, at the time of the sale."

One of the assistants, who had been rummaging in a desk at the back of the Gallery, appeared with a page taken from the previous month's *Collector*. On the page were some excellent photographs of two bronze figures, taken from different angles: the two figures which had been "exchanged."

With patient thoroughness, Bragg questioned Mr. Dolphin and his staff as to the exact movements of every person in the Gallery when the crash was heard. At first, it seemed, only Mr. Potter and the unknown young lady, with one of the assistants, had gone to the door; then, as the excitement outside increased, all had followed suit, even Lord Bicester so far forgetting his dignity as to jostle for a view. And for part of that time neither Mr. Dolphin nor his assistants could swear as to the exact whereabouts of the unknown young lady; she had

been the first to dash to the door but after that, it appeared, had given way to the slower but no less anxious males — given way . . . and slipped back into the room? just for the few seconds required in which to exchange two slim bronze figures with two others taken from her bag? It was not impossible.

But who was she? No one in the Gallery knew. Her description was vague, as derived from the observation of three men whose eye for beauty was accustomed to judge inanimate objects. "A pretty girl"; "fair hair"; "no, brown"; "about normal height"; "about twenty-five"; "no, younger"; "older"; "a dark coat and skirt" — this latter appeared the only object of common consent; pretty hopeless. Bragg asked them all to think it over at their leisure and returned to tell his tale to Chief-Inspector Holby.

With the Downshire Constabulary, Bragg had been inclined to keep things to himself until his case was practically complete, but here in the C.I.D. he was only a very small cog in a highly specialized machine. He had to make his report, and then do just what he was told. Chief-Inspector Holby was interested but doubtful; Bragg's theory postulated team-work of a very high order.

If the unknown young lady had taken the opportunity caused by the commotion to make that exchange she must have known that the commotion was about to occur. The throwing of the lump of lead had not been seen by anybody; that implied that someone had very carefully watched his time and opportunity. Who? An errand-boy strolling along with a basket? — no one would notice him if he dawdled; a young gentleman in a motor car, cruising the streets? a little black-coated clerk admiring the pretty things in the windows? — what, by the way, had Mr. Wallop of Lincoln's Inn been doing in Bond Street in the luncheon hour?

All those points required further investigation, and investigated they would be by the machinery of the Yard. But the most immediate question appeared to be the identity of the young lady interested in *chinoiserie*, and to that task Chief-Inspector Holby generously detailed his new recruit. Bragg spent two days on the job, questioning Lord Bicester and Mr. Potter, questioning the commissionaires and staffs of neighboring shops, questioning taxi-drivers and policemen and scavengers, re-questioning Mr. Dolphin and his staff . . . and learning nothing.

Then a new line of inquiry occurred to him and, rashly, he followed it on his own initiative without reference to his chief. The photographs of those figures in the *Collector* and other papers; millions of people had seen them and anyone might have worked on those copies from the mere photographs in the papers. But could anyone have had better opportunity to study them, to measure, to handle? Consulting Mr. Dolphin's observant young assistant, Bragg learned that

photographs of the bronze figures had appeared in the *Collector*, the *World of Art*, the *Sentinel*, the *Sunday Post*, and the *Weekly Critic*. He also learned the name of the auctioneers who had conducted the Ruppell sale.

Messrs. Bosby are world-famous auctioneers and do not welcome inquiries from the police. Still, Bragg learned that the photographs appearing in the papers had been taken by Messrs. Bosby's own photographer, who had been in their employ for thirty years and was a man of unfathomable respectability; the photographs had been supplied to a representative of the Press on request. On this point of interest Messrs. Bosby assured Bragg that only one request for photographs had come from the Press, and that was made by a representative of the Waterfield Group — yes, that would include the *Collector*, the *World of Art*, the *Weekly Critic*, the *Sentinel* and the *Sunday Post*.

Disappointed but vaguely conscious of some chord of familiarity, Bragg returned to the Yard and re-read the *dossier* of the case. Twenty minutes later he was back at Bosby's. Yes, wearily, Waterfield's representative, besides asking for photographs, had asked for information about various items of the Ruppell collection on which to base an article; he had been allowed to examine what he wished and might possibly have been able to measure and even weigh in his hand such items as the Pallas bronzes — naturally, under observation.

Hot on his new scent, Bragg repaired to the huge edifice which houses the Waterfield group of papers and asked for the Editor of the *Sunday Post;* the latter in due course informed Bragg that an article on the Ruppell collection, with photographs, had been put in by Lord Feathergill, who not only was responsible for the *Post's* gossip page but from time to time contributed articles on artistic subjects.

After that things ran smoothly enough for the police — up to a point. On further inquiry little facts about Lord Feathergill emerged in support of Bragg's theory. Lord Feathergill was left-handed and so could have thrown a lump of lead through the near-side window of his coupé as he cruised down Bond Street; Lord Feathergill had been a cricketer and so could have thrown the said lump with accuracy and despatch; Lord Feathergill had been wearing gloves —a point well remembered by the first constable on the scene — and so could have avoided leaving his fingerprints upon the missile, which had in fact been free of any such evidence.

Doubts were raised as to why, if he had thrown the missile, Lord Feathergill had been so foolish as to thrust himself before the attention of the police, but here Chief-Inspector Holby's wide experience suggested that the young peer had been wise; if he had merely driven on someone might very easily have noticed it as a suspicious action and taken the number of the car; by stopping and thrusting himself under the official nose he

might well have hoped to disarm suspicion. Besides, what was there to suspect? . . . until connection was made with the "exchange" in the Art Gallery; and it was very possible that if Bragg had not gone there with his inquisitive nose that connection might not ever have been made.

Why, asked the doubters, had the gossip-writer written that article on the Ruppell Collection and submitted photographs for publication — drawing attention to the very objects that must subsequently prove to have been stolen? Because, to obtain information for the making of the copies, he had to go to Bosby's as a representative of the Press, and, having gone, it would, if inquiries were subsequently made, have looked very suspicious if he had *not* written his article and put in his photographs. Too clever, perhaps, but clever rogues must take risks.

And the other rogue? Now that Lord Feathergill's connection with the theft was reasonably well established, it was a simple matter to follow him to Chelsea and discover that one of his most intimate friends was a sculptress — Miss Nina Beavis. This discovery seemed to Bragg nearly the last stage of the case, and it was in fact the point at which he came up against a brick wall. Although he knew Miss Beavis was the woman in the case he could not prove it. Chief-Inspector Holby refused to apply for a warrant either for Feathergill or Beavis; until, he said, the girl was identified and/or the stolen figures found, there was not enough evidence to justify arrest.

Bragg's first view of Nina Beavis certainly did not tally with the descriptions given him by the staff and customers at the Art Gallery; Miss Beavis had straight black hair parted in the middle and plastered against the side of her head; her face was dead white and her lips colorless. Still, either this or the other might be a deliberately altered appearance. He proposed to take Mr. Dolphin down to have a look at her, in the hope of recognition.

"If you do, my lad, you'll not be able to use that identification in court; no judge would admit it. Didn't they teach you the rules in Downshire?"

Bragg flushed, but in the end his chief had to consent to something of the kind being done. Bragg had learned that it was Miss Beavis' custom to lunch every day at a small restaurant in Chelsea where many others of her profession also lunched; on three consecutive days he sat in a police car or a taxi outside the restaurant with Mr. Dolphin or one of his assistants, not pointing out Miss Beavis but asking them to look carefully at all the young women who came in and out of the restaurant. The result was a blank and Bragg was not surprised; apart from her own appearance, the girl's dress was completely different from the neat coat and skirt in which she had visited the Gallery. He dared not take the manager and his staff inside the restaurant because, of course, they were well known to Miss Beavis by sight and it was essential that

neither she nor Lord Feathergill should at this stage be alarmed.

Doggedly, persevering, Bragg tried to get hold of Mr. Potter, one of the other customers at the Gallery, but Mr. Potter, he found, had just sailed for America. There remained only Lord Bicester and Bragg felt very diffident about approaching him.

But the old peer fell in with the suggestion quite readily.

"We'll lunch there, too," he said. "She'll spot you if you keep on hanging about outside in a car. What time does she lunch? All right; we'll get there first and sit next to the door."

Bragg hesitated. Lord Bicester was a man of striking appearance, a tall, erect figure, grey mustache brushed up, sleek grey air, smartly cut clothes, and eyeglass. The girl would almost inevitably recognize him.

The old man chuckled.

"I know what you're thinking," he said; "you wait."

He disappeared and ten minutes later there came into the room an untidy-looking old fellow in a tweed suit, baggy at knees and elbows; a grey mustache straggled over his mouth, grey hair rumpled on his head, a pair of steel-rimmed glasses on his nose; the erect figure was stooping and the whole appearance completely altered.

"Do a thing thoroughly if you do it at all," said Lord Bicester, "and come to that, you can't go to a Chelsea restaurant looking like a detective. Watts! Put out a pair of Mr. George's flannel trousers and a tweed coat; he's about the same build."

In due course the quaint couple squeezed themselves on to two stools in the little restaurant.

"My God, I hope no one from Boodle's sees me here," muttered Lord Bicester.

Presently Nina Beavis appeared, dressed in a green skirt and orange jumper. Lord Bicester took no notice of her, though she sat down at a table next to them — as Bragg had known she probably would.

Solemnly they ate their simple meal. At last it was over; Lord Bicester signalled for the bill, paid it, and led the way out into the street, Bragg following with a feeling something like despair? What was he to do next? How . . . ?

"Well, that was her all right."

The detective could hardly believe his ears.

"You recognized her, sir?"

"Oh, yes, I recognized her, but not by her face nor by her clothes."

"Then how, sir?"

"Her hands, man. I remember, now that I've seen them again, that I noticed them when she was looking at those Chinese things; they're unmistakable — lovely long hands, the hands of an artist, but . . . she's got spatulate fingers. I think you said she was a sculptress — that explains it."

"Yes, I think that identification will do," said Chief-Inspector Holby, "but I'd like just to find those figures to make sure."

"If you arrest them, sir, we might

get a search warrant at the same time. Probably they're hidden in her studio."

"In a plaster cast, eh? Like your Franks corpse. Well, maybe they are, but I've got another idea. Give me that copy of *The Times*."

Holby ran his eye down the shipping columns.

"I may be able to tell you something about noon tomorrow," he said. "You're not the only man who's been busy on this case, Bragg."

And a little before one next morning, the young detective was summoned to the chief-inspector's room.

"We've clicked all right," said the big man. "Your Mr. Hiram Potter was searched as he left the *Berengaria* at New York this morning and the bronze figures found in his trouser pockets."

Bragg stared.

"Potter, sir? That American millionaire's buyer?"

"Yes, Mr. Drew Pierman's buyer, no less."

"But surely, sir, Mr. Pierman wouldn't . . . those figures aren't worth all that to him . . . theft, I mean."

"Not to Mr. Pierman, no, but to Mr. Potter, oh yes. Mr. Potter's a salaried servant and a hundred or two extra won't come amiss to him. No doubt he paid that young couple anything up to four hundred for those two figures; in course of time he'll sell them to Mr. Pierman, saying he's bought them legitimately, for something nearer a thousand — and produce a properly receipted bill for them, forged. A pretty game the unscrupulous Mr. Potters can play with their employers — but once too often sometimes."

Bragg made no attempt to conceal his admiration.

"I never for a moment thought of suspecting him, sir," he said.

Chief-Inspector Holby laughed. He was not proof against admiration, even from a subordinate.

"No, but you led me to him, Bragg," he said. "You've done well; you've got imagination and perseverance. But let me give you a word of advice; don't let your imagination skip you over the obvious. Here's a case in point. One of the first questions I ask myself is: how does the thief get his price? Here's a theft of some works of art, not easily negotiable through an ordinary fence. But that's just the stuff that is bought by an unscrupulous collector. Collector? Where did I hear of a collector? Why, in that very Gallery — an American professional buying for his chief. Right on the spot, all handy to help distract attention from the little lady. So I just had a little talk on the telephone with New York and there's someone to meet our Mr. Hiram P. on the gangway."

Bragg looked crestfallen.

"I've been a fool, sir," he said.

Chief-Inspector Holby patted him on the arm.

"I wouldn't go so far as that," he said, "but you've still got something to learn. And now we'll pull in this bright young couple."

Your Editor first met S. J. Perelman when, some years ago, we found ourselves co-performers on a radio show called "Author! Author!" Mr. Perelman officiated as master of ceremonies, and both halves of Ellery Queen acted as anchor men. Why "Author! Author!" did not become one of the highlight headliners of the ether is, so far as your Editor is concerned, still one of the deeper mysteries of radio. Perhaps the show was too original for its time: originality and daring do not always pay off.

Here's how the program operated: the "board" consisted of Mr. Perelman as emcee-interlocutor, Mr. Ellery and Mr. Queen as white-faced end men, and two well-known literary figures as weekly guest stars. The show started with a two- or three-minute dramatization of a story — not a complete story, only the ending; *and the ending was always O. Henryish — as startling and unexpected as could be devised. For example: a stranger walks into the ultra-fashionable jewelry store of Spiffin's. He asks to see a watch and finally selects one to his taste. The clerk consults the price tag and informs the customer that the watch costs $500. The customer cogitates a moment, then says: "I'll give you $1 for it." The clerk protests that Spiffin's do not conduct business that way. An altercation ensues which brings Mr. Spiffin himself to the scene. After being told exactly what happened, Mr. Spiffin says to the clerk: "Sell the watch to this gentleman for $1." Curtain.*

At this point, Mr. Perelman takes over. First, he lays down certain "musts": the watch is honest merchandise, worth every cent of the $500 asking price; Mr. Spiffin has never seen the customer before and bears no hidden relationship to him. Further, Mr. Perelman rules out such obvious solutions as the use of a secret code between the stranger and the owner of the store. Then Mr. Perelman throws the problem into the laps of the guests and anchor men — all writers, remember — and each in turn is called upon, then and there, off the cuff and ad lib, *to concoct a set of circumstances that would make the unexpected ending both reasonable and credible. After each author's extemporaneous explanation, a pro-and-con, fur-flying round-table discussion takes place, generously interlarded with pearls of Perelmania.*

Reader, that was real story-telling! The guest stars were famous writers — such stellar combinations as Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman, Heywood Broun and Rupert Hughes, Carl and Mark Van Doren, Robert Nathan and Ruth McKenney, Dawn Powell and Erskine Caldwell, Vicki Baum and Bayard Veiller, MacKinlay Kantor and Gelett Burgess, Alice Duer Miller and Ludwig Bemelmans, Quentin Reynolds and Alfred Kreymborg, Frank Sullivan and Phil Stong, Donald Ogden Stewart and Dorothy Parker. How could such a program miss! And yet,

after six months of brilliant performances coast to coast, not a single commercial sponsor saw the possibilities of "Author! Author!" selling anything — from soup to nuts!

With this irrelevant (and nostalgic) introduction, we now welcome Mr. Perelman to the pages of EQMM. One of America's most popular humorists, Mr. Perelman gives us a super-satire on super-sleuthery — one of the finest pieces of its kind written since the detective story came of age.

"Farewell, My Lovely Appetizer" is a double-barreled spoof on the modern hardboiled detective yarn, with special emphasis on the work of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett. But like all truly excellent satires, "Farewell, My Lovely Appetizer" is not the skin-and-bones of mere exaggeration: there's meat in this merriment — the solid meat of integrated plot, shrewd story-telling, and that "exquisite sense of cliché and mimicry" which "Time" so rightfully attributes to "crazy like a fox" Perelman.

FAREWELL, MY LOVELY APPETIZER[1]

by S. J. PERELMAN

> Add Smorgasbits to your ought-to-know department, the newest of the three Betty Lee products. What in the world! Just small mouth-size pieces of herring and of pinkish tones. We crossed our heart and promised not to tell the secret of their tinting.
>
> — *Clementine Paddleford's food column in the Herald Tribune.*

> The "Hush-Hush" Blouse. We're very hush-hush about his name, but the celebrated shirtmaker who did it for us is famous on two continents for blouses with details like those deep yoke folds, the wonderful shoulder pads, the shirtband bow!
>
> — *Russeks adv. in the Times.*

I CAME down the sixth-floor corridor of the Arbogast Building, past the World Wide Noodle Corporation, Zwinger & Rumsey, Accountants, and the Ace Secretarial Service, Mimeographing Our Specialty. The legend on the ground-glass panel next door said, "Atlas Detective Agency, Noonan & Driscoll," but Snapper Driscoll had retired two years before with a .38 slug between the shoulders, donated by a snowbird in Tacoma, and I owned what good will the firm had. I let myself into the crummy anteroom we kept to impress clients, growled good morning at Birdie Claflin.

"Well, you certainly look like something the cat dragged in," she said.

[1] *Permission The New Yorker, Copyright 1944 The F-R Publishing Corporation.*

She had a quick tongue. She also had eyes like dusty lapis lazuli, taffy hair, and a figure that did things to me. I kicked open the bottom drawer of her desk, let two inches of rye trickle down my craw, kissed Birdie square on her lush, red mouth, and set fire to a cigarette.

"I could go for you, sugar," I said slowly. Her face was veiled, watchful. I stared at her ears, liking the way they were joined to her head. There was something complete about them; you knew they were there for keeps. When you're a private eye, you want things to stay put.

"Any customers?"

"A woman by the name of Sigrid Bjornsterne said she'd be back. A looker."

"Swede?"

"She'd like you to think so."

I nodded toward the inner office to indicate that I was going in there, and went in there. I lay down on the davenport, took off my shoes, and bought myself a shot from the bottle I kept underneath. Four minutes later, an ash blonde with eyes the color of unset opals, in a Nettie Rosenstein basic black dress and a baum-marten stole, burst in. Her bosom was heaving and it looked even better that way. With a gasp she circled the desk, hunting for some place to hide, and then, spotting the wardrobe where I keep a change of bourbon, ran into it. I got up and wandered out into the anteroom. Birdie was deep in a crossword puzzle.

"See anyone come in here?"

"Nope." There was a thoughtful line between her brows. "Say, what's a five-letter word meaning 'trouble'?"

"Swede," I told her, and went back inside. I waited the length of time it would take a small, not very bright boy to recite "Ozymandias," and, inching carefully along the wall, took a quick gander out the window. A thin galoot with stooping shoulders was being very busy reading a paper outside the Gristede store two blocks away. He hadn't been there an hour ago, but then, of course, neither had I. He wore a size-seven dove-colored hat from Browning King, a tan Wilson Brothers shirt with pale-blue stripes, a J. Press foulard with a mixed-red-and-white figure, dark blue Interwoven socks, and an unshined pair of ox-blood London Character shoes. I let a cigarette burn down between my fingers until it made a small red mark, and then I opened the wardrobe.

"Hi," the blonde said lazily. "You Mike Noonan?" I made a noise that could have been "Yes," and waited. She yawned. I thought things over, decided to play it safe. I yawned. She yawned back, then, settling into a corner of the wardrobe, went to sleep. I let another cigarette burn down until it made a second red mark beside the first one, and then I woke her up. She sank into a chair, crossing a pair of gams that tightened my throat as I peered under the desk at them.

"Mr. Noonan," she said, "you — you've got to help me."

"My few friends call me Mike," I

said pleasantly.

"Mike." She rolled the syllable on her tongue. "I don't believe I've ever heard that name before. Irish?"

"Enough to know the difference between a gossoon and a bassoon."

"What *is* the difference?" she asked. I dummied up; I figured I wasn't giving anything away for free. Her eyes narrowed. I shifted my two hundred pounds slightly, lazily set fire to a finger, and watched it burn down. I could see she was admiring the interplay of muscles in my shoulders. There wasn't any extra fat on Mike Noonan, but I wasn't telling *her* that. I was playing it safe until I knew where we stood.

When she spoke again, it came with a rush. "Mr. Noonan, he thinks I'm trying to poison him. But I swear the herring was pink — I took it out of the jar myself. If I could only find out how they tinted it. I offered them money, but they wouldn't tell."

"Suppose you take it from the beginning," I suggested.

She drew a deep breath. "You've heard of the golden spintria of Hadrian?" I shook my head. "It's a tremendously valuable coin believed to have been given by the Emperor Hadrian to one of his proconsuls, Caius Vitellius. It disappeared about 150 A.D., and eventually passed into the possession of Hucbald the Fat. After the sack of Adrianople by the Turks, it was loaned by a man named Shapiro to the court physician, or hakim, of Abdul Mahmoud. Then it dropped out of sight for nearly five hundred years, until last August, when a dealer in second-hand books named Lloyd Thursday sold it to my husband."

"And now it's gone again," I finished.

"No," she said. "At least, it was lying on the dresser when I left, an hour ago." I leaned back, pretending to fumble a carbon out of the desk, and studied her legs again. This was going to be a lot more intricate than I had thought. Her voice got huskier. "Last night I brought home a jar of Smorgasbits for Walter's dinner. You know them?"

"Small mouth-size pieces of herring and of pinkish tones, aren't they?"

Her eyes darkened, lightened, got darker again. "How did you know?"

"I haven't been a private op nine years for nothing, sister. Go on."

"I — I knew right away something was wrong when Walter screamed and upset his plate. I tried to tell him the herring was supposed to be pink, but he carried on like a madman. He's been suspicious of me since — well, ever since I made him take out that life insurance."

"What was the face amount of the policy?"

"A hundred thousand. But it carried a triple-indemnity clause in case he died by sea food. Mr. Noonan — Mike" — her tone caressed me — "I've got to win back his confidence. You could find out how they tinted that herring."

"What's in it for me?"

"Anything you want." The words

were a whisper. I leaned over, poked open her handbag, counted off five grand.

"This'll hold me for a while," I said. "If I need any more, I'll beat my spoon on the high chair." She got up. "Oh, while I think of it, how does this golden spintria of yours tie in with the herring?"

"It doesn't," she said calmly. "I just threw it in for glamour." She trailed past me in a cloud of scent that retailed at ninety rugs the ounce. I caught her wrist, pulled her up to me.

"I go for girls named Sigrid with opal eyes," I said.

"Where'd you learn my name?"

"I haven't been a private snoop twelve years for nothing, sister."

"It was nine last time."

"It seemed like twelve till *you* came along." I held the clinch until a faint wisp of smoke curled out of her ears, pushed her through the door. Then I slipped a pint of rye into my stomach and a heater into my kick and went looking for a bookdealer named Lloyd Thursday. I knew he had no connection with the herring caper, but in my business you don't overlook anything.

The thin galoot outside Gristede's had taken a powder when I got there; that meant we were no longer playing girls' rules. I hired a hack to Wanamaker's, cut over to Third, walked up toward Fourteenth. At Twelfth a mink-faced jasper made up as a street cleaner tailed me for a block, drifted into a dairy restaurant. At Thirteenth somebody dropped a sour tomato out of a third-story window, missing me by inches. I doubled back to Wanamaker's, hopped a bus up Fifth to Madison Square, and switched to a cab down Fourth, where the second-hand bookshops elbow each other like dirty urchins.

A flabby hombre in a Joe Carbondale rope-knit sweater, whose jowl could have used a shave, quit giggling over the Heptameron long enough to tell me he was Lloyd Thursday. His shoe-button eyes became opaque when I asked to see any first editions or incunabula relative to the *Clupea harengus*, or common herring.

"You got the wrong pitch, copper," he snarled. "That stuff is hotter than Pee Wee Russell's clarinet."

"Maybe a sawbuck'll smarten you up," I said. I folded one to the size of a postage stamp, scratched my chin with it. "There's five yards around for anyone who knows why those Smorgasbits of Sigrid Bjornsterne's happened to be pink." His eyes got crafty.

"I might talk for a grand."

"Start dealing." He motioned toward the back. I took a step forward. A second later a Roman candle exploded inside my head and I went away from there. When I came to, I was on the floor with a lump on my sconce the size of a lapwing's egg and big Terry Tremaine of Homicide was bending over me.

"Someone sapped me," I said thickly. "His name was—"

"Webster," grunted Terry. He held up a dog-eared copy of Merriam's Unabridged. "You tripped on a loose

board and this fell off a shelf on your think tank."

"Yeah?" I said skeptically. "Then where's Thursday?" He pointed to the fat man lying across a pile of erotica. "He passed out cold when he saw you cave." I covered up, let Terry figure it any way he wanted. I wasn't telling him what cards I held. I was playing it safe until I knew all the angles.

In a seedy pharmacy off Astor Place, a stale Armenian, whose name might have been Vulgarian but wasn't, dressed my head and started asking questions. I put my knee in his groin and he lost interest. Jerking my head toward the coffee urn, I spent a nickel and the next forty minutes doing some heavy thinking. Then I holed up in a phone booth and dialled a clerk I knew called Little Farvel, in a delicatessen store on Amsterdam Avenue. It took a while to get the dope I wanted because the connection was bad and Little Farvel had been dead two years, but we Noonans don't let go easily.

By the time I worked back to the Arbogast Building, via the Weehawken ferry and the George Washington Bridge to cover my tracks, all the pieces were in place. Or so I thought up to the point she came out of the wardrobe holding me between the sights of her ice-blue automatic.

"Reach for the stratosphere, gumshoe." Sigrid Bjornsterne's voice was colder than Horace Greeley and Little Farvel put together, but her clothes were plenty calorific. She wore a forest-green suit of Hockanum woollens, a Knox Wayfarer, and baby crocodile pumps. It was her blouse, though, that made tiny red hairs stand upon my knuckles. Its deep yoke folds, shoulder pads, and shirtband bow could only have been designed by some master craftsman, some Cézanne of the shears.

"Well, Nosy Parker," she sneered, "so you found out how they tinted the herring."

"Sure — grenadine," I said easily. "You knew it all along. And you planned to add a few grains of oxylbutane-cheriphosphate, which turns the same shade of pink in solution, to your husband's portion, knowing it wouldn't show in the post-mortem. Then you'd collect the three hundred g's and join Harry Pestalozzi in Nogales till the heat died down. But you didn't count on me."

"You?" Mockery nicked her full-throated laugh. "What are you going to do about it?"

"This." I snaked the rug out from under her and she went down in a swirl of silken ankles. The bullet whined by me into the ceiling as I vaulted over the desk, pinioned her against the wardrobe.

"Mike." Suddenly all the hatred had drained away and her body yielded to mine. "Don't turn me in. You cared for me — once."

"It's no good, Sigrid. You'd only double-time me again."

"Try me."

"O.K. The shirtmaker who designed your blouse — what's his

name?" A shudder of fear went over her; she averted her head. "He's famous on two continents. Come on, Sigrid, they're your dice."

"I won't tell you. I can't. It's a secret between this — this department store and me."

"They wouldn't be loyal to *you*. They'd sell you out fast enough."

"Oh, Mike, you mustn't. You don't know what you're asking."

"For the last time."

"Oh, sweetheart, don't you see?" Her eyes were tragic pools, a cenotaph to lost illusions. "I've got so little. Don't take that away from me. I — I'd never be able to hold up my head in Russeks again."

"Well, if that's the way you want to play it . . ." There was silence in the room, broken only by Sigrid's choked sob. Then, with a strangely empty feeling, I uncradled the phone and dialled Spring 7-3100.

For an hour after they took her away, I sat alone in the taupe-colored dusk, watching lights come on and a woman in the hotel opposite adjusting a garter. Then I treated my tonsils to five fingers of firewater, jammed on my hat, and made for the anteroom. Birdie was still scowling over her crossword puzzle. She looked up crookedly at me.

"Need me any more tonight?"

"No." I dropped a grand or two in her lap. "Here, buy yourself some stardust."

"Thanks, I've got my quota." For the first time I caught a shadow of pain behind her eyes. "Mike, would — would you tell me something?"

"As long as it isn't clean," I flipped to conceal my bitterness.

"What's an eight-letter word meaning 'sentimental'?"

"Flatfoot, darling," I said, and went out into the rain.

Editor's Note: *You have just read a brilliant satire on the modern hard-boiled detective story. In our next issue we bring you an equally brilliant satire on another type of modern detective story — the romantic mystery, the "Had-I-But-Known" (in Ogden Nash's perfect phrase), harassed-heroine, homicide-history so popular as a women's-magazine serial.*

Watch for Ben Hecht's "The Whistling Corpse" — in our September, 1945 issue, on sale late in July, 1945.

The world has always believed that Anthony Berkeley's famous detective, Roger Sheringham, has existed in only two short stories. One is "The Avenging Chance" (later expanded with great ingenuity into a full-length novel titled THE POISONED CHOCOLATES CASE*). This story is an acknowledged masterpiece — indeed, one of the finest detective short stories ever written. Concerning the second short story Mr. Berkeley once wrote: "[It is] of a dismal futility that puts it out of court for further use."*

For a long time your Editor has had the consuming desire to publish an "unknown" short story about Roger Sheringham. To this end we have searched through multitudinous library records, hoping against hope that Mr. Berkeley had forgotten an early Sheringham opus and that we could, as we have done so often in the past, bring you an important discovery. But all our efforts came to zero. We dared not reprint "The Avenging Chance" — it is now so well-known that, to use a standard Britishism, it wouldn't have been cricket. We were loath to print the second story — Mr. Berkeley scared us off by his own brutal judgment of it.

The situation appeared hopeless. No contents page of EQMM, it seemed, would ever bear the exciting name of Roger Sheringham, detective. But nothing in this world is really hopeless. One morning, out of a clear sky, we opened our mail and lo! — there in front of our popping eyes was the manuscript of a brand-new Roger Sheringham short story!

It is because your Editor is admittedly a gourmand of gore that we are now urging Mr. Berkeley to make "Mr. Bearstowe Says" the first of a series of Roger Sheringham shorts to be written especially for EQMM . . .

MR. BEARSTOWE SAYS

by ANTHONY BERKELEY

FOR the first few months of the war Bloomsbury was able to carry on much as usual. Besides, to give a beer-and-sausage party, or even to attend a beer-and-sausage party, seemed a subtle defiance of Hitler and all his wars. That, at any rate, was the impression that Roger Sheringham was receiving at a party which he found himself unaccountably attending in the month of November, 1939.

Roger did not care much for parties, even beer-parties; nor did he care much for Bloomsbury. For that matter Bloomsbury cared even less for Roger Sheringham. Either it knew him not or, if it did know, despised his best-selling capacities — and was inclined to go a few steps out of its way to let him know it. In due course therefore Roger, tired of being snubbed, betook himself and his tankard into a corner and surveyed the smoke-wreathed hubbub surlily.

Like gravitates to like. Into Roger's corner there imperceptibly edged a

woman, obviously as lonely as himself but wearing in place of a surly frown a fixed and determined smile. Roger surveyed her. She was a somewhat faded lady, of middle middle-age, who had once been prettier than she was now. Her clothes were worn as wrong as even female Bloomsbury can wear clothes, but unlike theirs were expensive. She was clearly out of place, and Roger decided that behind the fixed smile she was unhappy.

"Do you want to get away?" he said suddenly. "I do. Let's go."

The lady started. "Go away?" she repeated vaguely. "Oh, *no!* I think it's wonderful!"

"Do you?" Roger said glumly. "What in particular?"

"Oh, well . . . everything. I mean, all these authors and . . . and poets and people. Oh, I do so wish I could write. Perhaps you write, do you?"

"No," Roger said firmly.

"It must be wonderful to be able to, don't you think? Well . . . Mr. Bearstowe says he believes I could, if I could find a Theme. Er . . . you know Mr. Bearstowe's work, of course?"

There seemed so much appeal in the question that Roger, rather to his own surprise, succumbed. "Of course."

She's in love with him, he thought without enthusiasm, as he noted the pleasure, singularly tinged with relief, or even gratitude, which at once illumined his companion's face. He wondered who this Bearstowe was and why he was not looking after his own as he prepared for the worst.

He received it. A flood of Mr. Bearstowe promptly poured over him. "Mr. Bearstowe says . . ." Roger wondered how Mr. Bearstowe found time to say so much.

But all is salvage that falls into a novelist's dust-bin. Fascinated, Roger began planning a short story. It would be called "Mr. BearstoweSays . . .," and it would be about . . . well, it would be partly about Mr. Bearstowe.

"By the way, is Mr. Bearstowe here?" Roger asked.

"Oh, yes," the lady said eagerly. "He's over there." Her glance appeared to indicate a group of three bearded young men, one tall, one short, and one middling. There was nothing to show the height of Mr. Bearstowe. Roger could not decide whether he should be the tall, cadaverous young man, the short, bouncing young man, or the middling, might-be-anything young man.

There must be a triangle, of course. The faded lady's husband . . .

"Of course my husband isn't much interested in that sort of thing," the lady supplied, rather wistfully.

"Of course not," Roger said with gratitude. No, of course the husband mustn't be interested. The husband must be a self-made man, who married a little above him and now thinks he married below him: a self-opinionated, self-satisfied man, who . . .

"You see, my husband doesn't care for me to go to concerts without him, and as he doesn't care to go himself . . ."

"Exactly!" . . . who rules his wife

out of school as well as in, and won't let her go to concerts. Excellent. Probably one of those short, pompous little men.

"How tall is your husband?" Roger asked abruptly.

The lady looked taken aback. "How tall? Well, I don't really know."

"Oh, come, you must know whether your husband's tall or short," Roger said impatiently. Ridiculous woman! It was important that the husband should be short, because then Mr. Bearstowe could be the tall, cadaverous young man.

"No, I think he's just about . . . average."

"In a country of dwarfs, the average man is a giant," said Roger, inaccurately as well as inanely; but he judged that this was the sort of thing that the lady attended Bloomsbury parties to hear, and it seemed a pity that she shouldn't have at least one gem to carry away with her.

He was going on to supply more, out of sheer kindness, when his companion uttered a sudden exclamation and made a rush for the door. Through the doorway Roger just had a glimpse of a blond head throwing an abrupt nod in her direction, and Mr. Bearstowe passed — his secret still unsolved. All three young men had been blonds.

"Gentlemen prefer to be blonds," Roger muttered sourly.

"Was that an epigram, my sweet?" asked a familiar voice.

"Crystal!" Roger exclaimed with relief. "Fancy seeing you in this bear-pit. And talking of bears, who is Mr. Bearstowe? You know him of course?"

"Michael Bearstowe? Yes. Well, I don't know quite how to describe him. He would be a dilettante, if he had any money. But he hasn't. So he dilettantes on other people's."

"He's a sponger?" Roger asked delightedly. Oh, admirable, sponging, cadaverous Mr. Bearstowe, taking the wives of pompous average self-made men to concerts (wife paying)!

"I should say so. Why look so pleased about it?"

"Because it fits so nicely. Crystal, tell me more of this Bearstowe."

"I don't know that there's anything more to tell you. He's the type who runs after the wives of rich men, and feeds them Culture and Literature in return for temporary loans. A literary gigolo, you might call him. I hear he's got hold of some groceress now and is toting her everywhere."

"Groceress, Crystal?"

"The female of a grocer. At least, I understand that the husband makes big noises in Mincing Lane."

"It's perfect!" Roger said ecstatically. "I shall write the story this very evening."

Roger did not write the story that evening, or any evening; and within a week he had forgotten the very name of Bearstowe.

But Mr. Bearstowe's story was being written none the less, if by a different hand — and in a different medium.

"She seems terrible upset, sir," said the Station Sergeant doubtfully. "Crying her eyes out already, and she doesn't even know the body's been

found. I don't know whether she's fit to interrogate, sir."

"Well, try to get her to pull herself together," the Superintendent said impatiently. The bathing is dangerous round Penhampton, and one gets so inured to corpses after twenty years' police service that it is difficult to realize that the relatives are not equally hardened. In his home the Superintendent was the kindest of men, and loathed killing mice.

"You won't want to wait for this, Mr. Sheringham," the Superintendent added to his visitor. "A woman come to report her husband missing after bathing. As a matter of fact we've got the body already, but she doesn't know that. I'm afraid she'll go a bit hysterical when she does."

"No, I'll slide out," Roger agreed. "In any case, it looks as if the Colonel isn't coming this afternoon; so . . ."

He broke off. The Sergeant had returned already, with his charge. Roger, having no wish to intrude on the woman's grief, waited for them to pass before slipping quietly out. Then he caught sight of the woman's face and, after a moment of indecision, returned unobtrusively to his chair.

The woman was given a seat facing the Superintendent's desk. She had pulled herself together bravely, but from the clenched hands on her lap it was clear that she was vibrating with nerves.

The Superintendent made soothing noises. "Now, Mrs. Hutton, let me see . . . you're worried about your husband?"

The woman nodded, choked, and said: "Yes. He went out bathing this morning. I was to join him later. His clothes were on the beach, but . . . oh, I'm sure . . . I'm sure . . ."

"Now, now," said the Superintendent mechanically, and asked for further particulars.

These took some minutes to obtain, but amounted to very little. Mr. Edward Hutton, described as a wholesale provision merchant with an office in the City and a home in Streatham, had been staying with his wife in the little village of Penmouth, some five miles west of Penhampton. He had left the house at about half-past ten that morning, telling his wife that he was going to bathe. Mrs. Hutton had arranged to join him about noon, but when she arrived there was no sign of her husband, though his clothes were behind the same rock he always used for undressing purposes. Mrs. Hutton had called and searched, and then returned to her lodging. In the afternoon, being now thoroughly worried, she had decided to take the only 'bus of the day into Penhampton and report to the police.

The Superintendent nodded. "Very proper, madam. Now as to your husband's description, can you give us some idea of his appearance?"

Mrs. Hutton leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. "My husband is five foot seven . . . no, eight inches tall, not very broad, thinnish arms and legs, 34 inches chest measurement, rather long hands and feet, medium brown hair, clean-shaven,

grey-green eyes, and rather a pale complexion; he has an old appendicitis scar, and . . . oh, yes, there is a big mole under his left shoulder-blade."

The Superintendent could not restrain his admiration. "Upon my word, Mrs. Hutton, you reeled that off a treat. Very different from some of them, I assure you."

"I . . . I was thinking it out in the 'bus," the woman said faintly. "And . . . his passport, you know. I knew you'd want a description."

"Yes. Well . . ." Surreptitiously the Superintendent studied the description of the body now in the mortuary. It tallied in every particular.

With much sympathetic throat-clearing he proceeded to the distasteful task of warning Mrs. Hutton to prepare for a shock. He was very much afraid that in the mortuary now, if Mrs. Hutton would come along for just a moment. . . .

He sighed again as the woman gave every sign of imminent hysterics.

"He's here already? Must I see him? Must I? Won't . . . won't the description do?"

It took five minutes to get her into the mortuary to identify the body.

But once there she regained her calm. A curious dead-alive look came into her face as the Superintendent gently withdrew the sheet that covered the dead man's face.

"Yes," she whispered, tonelessly. "That's my husband. That's . . . Eddie."

And then Roger noticed a very curious thing. Like the others', his gaze had been fixed on the sheeted figure on the slab; but happening, by the merest chance, to glance round at Mrs. Hutton, he saw that her eyes were tightly closed. For all she knew, she might as well have been identifying a piece of cheese as her husband. Roger nudged the Superintendent.

The Superintendent understood and nodded back. "I'm afraid, madam," he said, as gently as he could, "you must *look* at him, you know."

Mrs. Hutton started violently, opened her eyes, looked at the dead man in front of her, and uttered a horrible, hoarse scream.

For a moment Roger thought she was going into hysterics again. He jumped forward, as did both the Superintendent and the Sergeant, and between them they hurried Mrs. Hutton back to the office. The Sergeant produced a glass of water, and within a few minutes the lady was able to stop sobbing and assure them that she was quite all right now, it was just the shock of seeing her own husband, actually lying there. . . .

"Shock, yes," said the Superintendent hastily. "Nasty thing, shock. I remember . . ."

When at last Mrs. Hutton got out her powder-compact, all three men heaved sighs of relief.

Roger, who had at last solved a problem which had been worrying him ever since he first saw Mrs. Hutton in the doorway, deemed it a good moment to introduce himself.

"Do you know that we've met be-

fore, Mrs. Hutton?" he said.

She looked at him vaguely. "No. Have we? Where?"

"At a party. I didn't know your name, nor you mine, and I've been wondering why your face seemed known to me. Now I remember. It was at a deadly beer-party about two years ago, soon after the beginning of the war. Do you remember? In Bloomsbury. By the way, have you seen Michael Bearstowe lately?"

Mrs. Hutton jumped to her feet, her face dead-white. For a moment she gazed wildly at Roger, then she collapsed on the floor in a dead faint.

"That wasn't kind of you, Mr. Sheringham," said the Superintendent reproachfully, when Mrs. Hutton had been finally tidied away into the care of the police matron. "I thought we'd got her round — why, she'd got her powder-puff out and all! — and then you go and do a thing like that."

"I didn't do anything," Roger said indignantly. "I only reminded her of a party we'd both been to and asked after an old friend of hers. Do you faint when people ask after your old friends?"

"You upset her."

"Apparently. But that's no reason for you to upset me. I might even try to upset you, in return. I might tell you, for instance, that the last time I saw that lady she was so vague that she couldn't tell me whether her husband was a tall man or a short one. Yet now she not only knows his height to an inch but his chest measurement too."

"Well, why not? She remembered it from his passport. She said so."

"They don't put your chest measurement on a passport."

The Superintendent frowned. "What exactly are you suggesting?"

Roger laughed. "Now don't get official, Super. I'm not suggesting anything. I merely hand you a queer little discrepancy, and you can do what you like with it. But," Roger added thoughtfully, "do you know, I would like to have another look at the body, if you've no objection."

"Oh, I've no objection. But you won't find anything. The doctor's been over him already, and death's due to drowning, all right. Still, have a look at him if you want."

Roger did not have the mortuary to himself. There were two other men already there. The Sergeant, who had been appointed Roger's conductor, indicated that they were the police surgeon and the detective inspector in charge of the C.I.D. of the Penhampton Police Force; and he left him to them.

The sheet had been withdrawn from the body and both men were standing by the slab, gazing down. Roger joined them.

"Pasty-faced beggar, eh?" remarked the doctor cheerfully.

"Certainly no advertisement for Penhampton's Bonnie Sunshine," Roger assented absently. He was remembering more and more.

Mr. Bearstowe Says . . . Yes, and the husband was to have been a

pompous, paunchy little bully, who wouldn't take his wife to concerts and wouldn't let her go by herself. Well, here he was face to face with the husband at last; and he certainly wasn't paunchy, and could hardly have been pompous. But that wasn't to say that he might not have been a bully, Roger thought, looking at the rather weak face and the indeterminate chin: the kind that bullies out of weakness instead of out of strength. Perhaps he was even that pathetic type, the artist *manqué* (his hands seemed to indicate the possibility) — *manqué*, and condemned to an office desk in Mincing Lane, and in consequence soured. Yes, and he had inherited the office-desk too, not achieved it; for this man had never made money, nor anything else, if Roger knew faces.

"Notice anything, Mr. Sheringham?" the Detective Inspector asked eagerly.

Roger laughed. "Afraid not, this time. Except that Mr. Hutton wasn't as spruce as he might have been."

"How do you make that out, sir?"

"He hadn't shaved this morning."

"Sorry, but he had," the doctor corrected with a smile. "That cut's fresh, at the side of his mouth."

"Well, he wanted a new blade," Roger said feebly.

"Like most of us," the doctor agreed. "But if you're really looking for queer details, what do you make of his back?" He signed to the Inspector, and the two of them turned the corpse over.

Roger saw that the skin on the back was badly lacerated, from the shoulders to the small of the back, and the elbows were almost raw. "Barnacles?" he suggested.

The doctor nodded. "Rocks covered with them. And it was among the rocks that the body was found. Still . . ."

"I see what you mean. If the body was washing about, why was it lacerated only in that particular area?"

"Yes, it's queer, isn't it? No doubt there's some simple explanation. Probably the man who found him pulled him in by the legs. That's all."

"No, doctor," put in the Inspector. "The body was wedged under a big rock at the side of a pool. Trewin, the farm-hand who happened to find him when he went down for a pail of seawater, says he picked him up straight from the pool.

"There's an abrasion on the front of the right thigh, where he was wedged," supplemented the doctor.

"Yes, but that's natural," Roger said. "Those scratches aren't."

"And here's another thing. I've an idea those lacerations were made during life. There were signs of free bleeding — freer than I should have expected."

"Very interesting," Roger commented. "Very queer."

"Don't think there's anything wrong, do you, sir?" asked the Inspector hopefully.

Roger's reply was lost in the sudden entrance of the Superintendent.

"Well, it seems we've caught a Tar-

tar," he announced, not without triumph. "Just had Scotland Yard on the phone. Caught me in the nick of time; another minute, and I'd have been gone. Seems this fellow was wanted by the Yard for Black Market stuff. They've got a warrant out against him, and they'd just heard he'd been seen in this vicinity."

Roger stared down at the dead man. "You never know, do you? Still, that weak chin . . ."

"Yes, yes; criminal type, obviously," pronounced the Superintendent. "Well, doctor, this is bound to raise the question of suicide. Any chance, do you think?"

"None that I can say. Of course he may have swum deliberately too far out, but there's nothing to show it."

"Are you going to check up on Mrs. Hutton's statement, Super?" Roger asked suddenly.

The Superintendent stared. "We'll make the usual routine enquiry at her lodging. Why, Mr. Sheringham?"

"I only wondered," Roger said mildly. "It would be interesting, for instance, if she took a bathing-dress out this morning, wouldn't it? Or if she left the house soon after her husband, and not at noon?"

"Why, Mr. Sheringham," said the Detective Inspector, whose job it would be to make these enquiries, "you don't think . . .?"

"I only think it might be quite an interesting case," Roger said.

As he trudged along the coarse sand the next afternoon, Roger wondered if he were wasting his time and energy. That Hutton had been murdered, he felt convinced; and the method was fairly obvious. But could the woman have done it? Physically, yes. But psychologically? Hardly. She was too vague, too woolly, too . . . too silly, poor woman.

Or did silliness not debar one from murder? Murder itself was usually very silly. Mrs. Hutton might not be the stuff of which strong, silent murderers were made; but mightn't she be a silly murderess? She was a hero-worshipper. How far would hero-worship carry her?

Roger's plodding feet seemed to be picking out a shambling refrain. *Mr. Bearstowe Says . . . Mr. Bearstowe Says . . .*

And supposing if Mr. Bearstowe said, "Pick up your husband's feet when he's bathing and hold them up in the air for a few minutes, out of sheer girlish *élan*, and then I shall be able to marry your Mincing Millions."

Oh, Mr. Bearstowe was in it all right. Why else faint at the mere mention of his name?

Yes, and of course there was the evidence of guilt all the time. First she wouldn't look at her murdered husband at all; then, when she was made to, took one peep, turned pea-green, and screamed. If that wasn't presumptive evidence of guilt, what was?

And reeling off the description in that silly way! Roger could almost hear the voice of tuition: "If they wonder how you've got it so pat, just

say you were thinking it out in the 'bus, or remembered it from his passport or something. They won't bother." And pat she certainly had got it, like a child repeating a lesson. Mr. Bearstowe should have devoted more time to his artistic effects.

But the Superintendent had smelt no rat. Roger thought the Superintendent rather a foolish man. Now that Inspector . . .

Yes, there the Inspector was, already. Then this must be the place.

The Inspector was feeling a little guilty himself. "You know, I oughtn't rightly to be doing this, Mr. Sheringham. The Super would be wild. He says it's a straightforward case of accident if ever he saw one, and you've got a bee in your bonnet about murder."

"I never so much as mentioned the word," Roger protested.

"No, but it was obvious what you thought. And I couldn't but agree that there seems something fishy about Mrs. Hutton. More I think of it, more it seems to me that she acted queer."

"Have you checked up at the lodgings?"

"Yes, but more of a country house than lodgings. Must have been costing them a tidy packet to stay there. They've got money to burn all right, those Huttons, in spite of the taxes and all. Still, her story's all right so far as it goes. She did leave at the time she said, and she didn't take a bathing-dress."

"Any signs of . . . worry?"

"No!" said the Inspector emphatically. "I asked that specially, and she was just as usual before she went out. Didn't answer her husband back when he laid down the law at breakfast as usual, or anything. But when she came back . . . ! Tears? Floods of 'em! And before he'd been missing long enough to make any ordinary wife do anything but curse about him making her wait for lunch, mark you."

"Umph! Remorse? I wonder." Roger felt a little puzzled. Bearstowe would hardly be the type to spring an unexpected murder on a foolish, possibly unreliable woman. He pushed the point aside. "Anyhow, where's the rock?"

The Inspector pointed it out. The tide had gone down far enough for Roger, balanced precariously on slippery seaweed, to be able to inspect the crevice in which the body had been wedged. It told him nothing.

He gazed thoughtfully round on the broken, rocky shore.

"Well, sir, if you don't want me any more, I think I'd like another word or two with Trewin. You never know. He might have noticed something."

"Do," Roger agreed. "I shall be poking round here for an hour or so if you like to pick me up on your way back."

But it did not take Roger an hour to find the thing which he had hardly expected to find. In only the third pool which he explored after the Inspector's disappearance, shining merrily on a bunch of seaweed only a few inches below the surface, was a gold ring, simply asking to be found.

Scarcely able to believe his luck, Roger examined it. It was a man's wedding-ring, and the inside was inscribed "E. H. — B. G. 18 November 1932."

Roger turned it slowly over in his hand. It was a chance in a million. And yet what did it prove? That Edward Hutton had been murdered in that particular pool, and none other. Not very much.

Roger dried himself on his handkerchief, and sat down to await the return of the Inspector.

He came, bursting with news. "The woman's in it all right, Mr. Sheringham. By a stroke of luck I found a man who was working in this field yesterday afternoon. He says he saw a woman on the beach about half-past three, and the description of the clothes tallies near enough."

"Mrs. Hutton didn't mention being on the beach then?"

"No, sir; she did not. But that's not all. There was a man with her."

"Ah!"

"You expected that, Mr. Sheringham?" asked the Inspector, a trifle disappointed.

"In a way. Well, what did they do?"

"By the looks of it they came out of a little cave under the cliff here. I must have a look there later. The farmhand thought they might be a larky couple, so he watched; but after a minute or two the man went back into the cave and the woman went off along the beach."

"Did you get any description of the man?"

"Nothing particular. Orange pullover, grey flannel trousers. Clean-shaven."

"Clean-shaven, eh? Yes, well, he would be, of course."

"Sir?"

"He had a beard last time I saw him, but beards are much too distinctive. Look here, Inspector, it's time I told you a few things. Let's sit down."

They found a rock and made themselves comfortable in its lee. Roger lit his pipe, and then told his tale.

"Mind you," he concluded, "there's no evidence that the man's Bearstowe. After all, it was over two years ago and she may have got a new hero by now. But it's worth a few enquiries."

"I certainly will, sir. This alters everything. The Super's bound to O.K. me spending a bit of time on the case now. And what are you going to do, sir?"

"Me? Do you know," said Roger, "I should awfully like to ask Mrs. Hutton why she fainted at Bearstowe's name."

Roger did not put this interesting question, however. Instead, he left Mrs. Hutton in peace and went up to London.

His objective was Crystal Vane, and he was lucky enough to catch her the first time he rang up her flat.

Yes, so far as she knew the affair of Michael Bearstowe and his groceress had survived the war to date; Michael was on a good thing there, and it wasn't likely he'd let it go; no, he hadn't been called up — total exemption on some grounds or other; oh,

yes, conscientious objector, naturally.

"Would you say that Bearstowe was utterly unscrupulous in attaining his own ends?" Roger asked carefully.

"If you mean, would he boggle at a little thing like seducing his groceress if it was going to pay better dividends," Crystal began.

"No, no. Worse than that. Stick at absolutely nothing, I mean?"

But Crystal's journalistic nose scented news, and Roger had to promise her the first chance when the story broke. Then they discussed the possibilities. In the end Crystal gave it as her opinion that Mr. Bearstowe was probably quite unscrupulous enough for murder if driven to it, but it wouldn't be *like* him.

"I see," Roger said thoughtfully. "Then I wonder what did drive him. Something big, presumably. Money-troubles, do you think? They can be big enough, in all conscience. But what drove *her?* She doesn't look to me unscrupulous at all. It must have been something even bigger. Love, I suppose. You know, there's something queer about this case, Crystal."

"Why do you assume Mrs. Hutton was driven at all?" Crystal asked. "You say she was perfectly normal that morning. A woman of her type couldn't appear normal with her husband's murder in the offing."

"No. In fact she may not know it was murder at all, even now. Why shouldn't Mr. Bearstowe have said it was an accident, and she must just keep his name out of it for convenience? Yes! That explains her part much better. And yet . . . that excessive grief, for a husband she couldn't have loved? I don't know. No, it doesn't fit, somehow. I think I'll take a walk to Streatham."

But Streatham, it seemed, had nothing to tell Roger. Nor had Mincing Lane, where the offices of Hutton and Edwards were ominously closed.

But at Cartwright Mansions, W. 1, where Mr. Bearstowe had a flat of surprising opulence for one with no means, the porter told Roger that Mr. Bearstowe was away on holiday.

So that was one point established at any rate, Roger considered, or perhaps two — or even three. At any rate, he might as well take them back with him to Penhampton the next day, little though they amounted to. What I want, Roger thought, is a couple of nice, juicy coincidences.

He got one at Paddington the following morning, when he ran into Mrs. Hutton by the book-stall.

Mrs. Hutton appeared confused, and dissembled her joy at the meeting; but Roger was officiously helpful, and gladly paid the excess fare over his third-class ticket for the privilege of travelling first with Mrs. Hutton.

But Roger learned little. The carriage was too full of people (with third-class tickets) to allow of intimate conversation, and Mrs. Hutton was obviously far too scared of her companion to respond to intimacy even had they been alone in the middle of the Sahara.

As the train got into its rhythm, Roger listened to the refrain of the

wheels.

Mis-ter BEAR-stowe-says, Mis-ter BEAR-stowe-says . . .

"You don't need to look at him when you identify him. Just keep your eyes closed and say it's your husband. They won't notice."

Had Mr. Bearstowe said that?

But why not look at a dear husband, so sadly and accidentally drowned? Is one frightened of a dead husband, that one cannot look at him? No, it didn't fit. Mrs. Hutton must have some guilty knowledge, even if she wasn't privy before the fact.

Roger looked at the faded, once-pretty face. Mrs. Hutton caught him at it, started violently, blushed unnecessarily, and looked away.

Dash it, Roger thought; the woman's as nervous as a kitten. Why?

By the time the train reached Penhampton he still had no answer.

But if Roger felt that he had little to show for two days' work, that was certainly not the case with Detective-Inspector Brice. Almost before Roger had had time to ask for a cup of police-station tea, the Detective Inspector had burst into his story.

"You were right, Mr. Sheringham. We've found Bearstowe. Got on his track, that is. He was camping on the cliffs, not a mile from the scene of the crime."

"Ah!" said Roger, and noted that it now was officially a crime.

"And about half-past one — that's a couple of good hours after the murder, by our reckoning — at half-past one he was seen by the farmer on whose land he was camping taking his tent down. And he bolted for it, Mr. Sheringham. Packed his tent and things, all lightweight stuff, into the holder on his bicycle, and rode straight off.

"Now here's another point. When the farmer saw him, about half-past one, he hadn't shaved off his beard (yes, he still wore a beard; I found that out). When he was seen round about three o'clock, on the shore, he had."

"Ah!" Roger said again. "Yes, that's interesting. Sure of it?"

"Absolutely. The farmer was doing a bit of hedging, not fifty yards away. He says he could see Bearstowe quite plainly."

"How was he dressed?"

"The same. Pullover, and grey trousers."

"Any trace of the tent or bicycle?"

"None. He must have hidden 'em before he doubled back to meet Mrs. Hutton, and afterwards he picked 'em up and he's made off with them. We've put out an all-stations request for any solitary camper to be interrogated, anywhere."

"Quick work. Now here's another point. I take it that your times are correct? What time does the doctor say that death occurred?"

"Round about eleven o'clock, he thinks. Anyhow, not before ten or after one. He was dead when Bearstowe took down his tent, if that's what you mean, sir."

"Yes, partly. And when he was taking down his tent, at one-thirty, Bear-

stowe had his beard. Less than two hours after he hadn't. Well, here's my point. How did Bearstowe get hold of a razor? Men with beards don't carry them."

The Inspector beamed. "That question occurred to me, sir."

"I'm sure it did. I just meant, if he had a razor with him, wouldn't that show that the murder was premeditated? If he hadn't, it was probably done on the spur of the moment."

"Well, he hadn't," the Inspector said with pride. "He got hold of one, and I can tell you where he got it from. Look at this schedule, please, Mr. Sheringham."

Roger looked. The paper contained a minute inventory of the belongings of the late Mr. Hutton, as left in his rooms; it was complete down to spare collar-studs. Roger ran his eye quickly down the column. A shaving-brush and soap were listed; there was no razor.

"I say, that's good work," Roger said warmly. "You mean, Mrs. Hutton took it to him at three o'clock?"

"That's what she met him for, the second time," said the Inspector.

"The second time? Oh, I see. You mean, she met him first at twelve, and took instructions. Yes, of course." Roger drank his tea. "Well, that certainly seems to put the case in the bag, Inspector. So all you've got to do now is to find Bearstowe."

"Yes, and Mrs. Hutton," said the Inspector, not without resentment. "Gave us the slip yesterday she did, and got away to London. Went up to meet Bearstowe, for a tenner. We'll pick her up again all right, but she may have tipped him off that — oh, there you are, sir!"

"Ah! Mr. Sheringham!" said the Superintendent genially. "Well, you were right, sir. I don't mind admitting it. And now we've got you and Mrs. Hutton together again. Yes, our chap picked her up at the station and brought her along. It's time we asked Mrs. Hutton a few questions. Eh?"

"I quite agree. Well, we'll see her in here. No, don't go, Mr. Sheringham. You were in at the beginning, so you may as well see the end." He leaned over the Inspector's desk and pressed a bell.

In less than two minutes Mrs. Hutton was once again sitting on a police-chair confronting the Superintendent; but this time it was a frankly terrified woman, and a police official who no longer spoke kindly. Roger looked at her, waiting like a cornered mouse for the spring of the cat, and felt rather sick. She was such a silly woman. Who but a woman of almost sublime silliness would bring her lover a razor with which to shave off his beard, but omit to bring shaving-brush and soap?

Suddenly something in his brain went *click* and he saw the whole thing.

He glanced quickly from the Superintendent to the Inspector, calculating his chances. No, there was not a second to lose. In another moment the Superintendent might ruin the whole thing. He must charge in, and brave the wrath that would certainly come.

"Superintendent, may I ask Mrs. Hutton just one question first?"

The Superintendent looked surprised but gave permission.

Roger moved his chair so that he could look at the woman more directly. "Mrs. Hutton, do you mind telling me this: are you sure you really know what happened on Penmouth beach that morning?"

Mrs. Hutton's jaw dropped. Obviously she had not expected the question; equally obviously, she did not know how to answer it.

Roger followed it quickly with another. "Do you know, for instance, that *murder* had been committed?"

Mrs. Hutton started to her feet, prepared to scream, thought better of it, and fainted.

"Mr. Sheringham!" exclaimed the Superintendent, in real anger.

Once more Mrs. Hutton was borne unconscious into the back regions.

"Listen, Super!" Roger pleaded. "The whole point was that Mrs. Hutton never knew that murder had been committed. If you'd broken it gently, you'd have given her time to adjust herself to the idea; and she might have decided to help cover it up. Now she's had a bad shock — and she'll talk!"

"Humph!" The Superintendent was by no means mollified.

"We've been making a mistake from the beginning," Roger continued urgently. "A fundamental mistake. I've only just realized it. You see, this murder *was* planned. A long time ago, I fancy. A pit was carefully dug for us, and we fell into it. At first sight, I must say, it looks a terrific gamble, and yet . . . police procedure is so rigid. Yes, that's the clue: police procedure is so rigid. Your own procedure protected the murderer, Super. He'd banked on it.

"It was clever," Roger continued musingly. "He killed two birds with one stone, you see. That warrant for Hutton's arrest . . . he must have got wind of it somehow. By the way, was Hutton insured? I think you'll find he was. Yes, of course he must have been. Heavily. That's another thing Mrs. Hutton was intended to do: collect the insurance money. That was to be a tidy windfall for him to cash in on, you see, even if everything else went up the spout.

"Of course the bathing appointment was carefully arranged. Right time, right place, deserted beach and all the rest. And then . . . up with his heels in some convenient pool, and what does it matter if his back gets scratched on the barnacles so long as his head stays under water? Nothing simpler! Then wedge the body where with any luck it won't drift loose for a few tides; and even if it does, what's the odds?

"Mrs. Hutton of course knew nothing in advance. That puzzled me from the first. How could such a foolish woman, however amiable, be trusted with murder-plans? Obviously not. And naturally, when she met him on the beach, he told her it was an accident. But what a convenient accident! It could be made to fit right in

with their own plans. So he told her the tale, and about the warrant and everything, and how the authorities would probably confiscate everything by way of a post-mortem fine except the insurance money, and why he must be kept out of it all, and what she must do. I expect he had some difficulty in rehearsing her, owing to floods of tears; that's why he didn't emphasize the importance of details as he should have done. And so of course she managed to give things away. She would. That was the one flaw in his plan, having to rely on poor Mrs. Hutton. But he had no choice.

"So that was that. And if things went right, there was his future all nicely secured, and — his hated rival out of the way! Yes, I think he was really jealous. He must have been fond of Mrs. Hutton in his own way. After all, she suited him very well. Anyhow, he couldn't stand having a rival in her regard, so . . . exit rival! Hence those tears. She was fond of the rival, you see. Much too fond, in his conceited opinion.

"Now shall I tell you what suddenly gave it away to me? It was that shaving-brush and soap. How like Mrs. Hutton, I thought, to take her lover a razor to shave off his beard with and not take the shaving-brush and soap; and I wondered if even Mrs. Hutton could have been so silly. Well, of course she wasn't. The shaving-soap wasn't taken because soap doesn't lather in sea-water, so it would be no use. Ridiculous little point for such a case to hang on, isn't it? But the case does hang on it. Because Mrs. Hutton wouldn't know a thing like that. Therefore it wasn't she who left the shaving-soap behind, therefore it wasn't she who took the razor, therefore —"

"Then who did take the razor?" interrupted the Superintendent.

"Of course, the murderer! Just as he brought that false beard to Penmouth with him, bought probably months ago. By the way, how delighted he must have been with that orange pullover. You see, any bearded face surmounting an orange pullover is just the same at fifty yards as any other bearded face surmounting —"

"Here, what's all this?" The Superintendent looked his bewilderment. "False beards? Orange pullovers? What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Roger gently, "that you shouldn't have relied on Mrs. Hutton's sole identification of her husband's body. You see, the body you've got in that mortuary isn't Hutton's. It's Bearstowe's."

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Susan Glaspell is the fourth Pulitzer Prizewinner to appear in EQMM. The previous three were T. S. Stribling, Ellen Glasgow, and Marc Connelly; still to come are Louis Bromfield, Elmer Rice, and we hope, others.

According to Edward J. O'Brien, Susan Glaspell once attended a murder trial and out of this experience wrote "A Jury of Her Peers." That is not the way the author herself tells it. According to Susan Glaspell, she became interested in writing for the theatre when her first husband organized the Provincetown Players; one of her earliest ventures was a one-act play called "Trifles," suggested by an Iowa newspaper account. "Trifles" became a famous one-act play and is still being produced by little theatres all over the country. Then, because the medium of the short story permitted certain expansions, Susan Glaspell took the material of "Trifles" and recast it as "A Jury of Her Peers."

Like the play, the short story became a famous piece of literature. It was first printed in "Every Week," issue of March 5, 1917. It was then included by Mr. O'Brien in his THE BEST SHORT STORIES OF 1917. *Since that time it has appeared in various other literary anthologies.*

We have left for the last the most interesting part of this publishing history — an important bibliographic revelation. "A Jury of Her Peers" has never been included in any of Susan Glaspell's own books published in America — but it has had a separate book publication in England! In 1927 Ernest Benn, the London publisher, issued A JURY OF HER PEERS *— the single short story — as one of his "Yellow Book" series, bound in yellow wrappers. The edition was limited to only 250 copies, all signed by the author. This slim and fragile booklet is a genuine first edition, virtually unknown to American book collectors. We don't know how many of the original 250 copies have been lost or destroyed, but if you started looking now for a copy of the autographed first edition, the odds are you would still be looking for it in 1955. This modern rarity has an honored place in your Editor's collection of books of detective-crime short stories.*

"A Jury of Her Peers" is a murder story — murder at the old, lonesome-looking Wright farm. It's a story of country men looking for evidence while country women are looking at little things. It's a story of trifles. It's a classic story of a woman judged by a jury of her peers. . . .

A JURY OF HER PEERS

by SUSAN GLASPELL

WHEN Martha Hale opened the storm-door and got a cut of the north wind, she ran back for her big woolen scarf. As she hurriedly wound that round her head her eye made a scandalized sweep of her kitchen. It was no ordinary thing that called her away — it was probably farther from ordinary than anything that had ever happened in Dickson County. But what her eye took in was that her kitchen was in no shape for leaving: her bread all ready for mixing, half the flour sifted and half

unsifted.

She hated to see things half done; but she had been at that when the team from town stopped to get Mr. Hale, and then the sheriff came running in to say his wife wished Mrs. Hale would come too — adding, with a grin, that he guessed she was getting scarey and wanted another woman along. So she had dropped everything right where it was.

"Martha!" now came her husband's impatient voice. "Don't keep folks waiting out here in the cold."

She again opened the storm-door, and this time joined the three men and the one woman waiting for her in the big two-seated buggy.

After she had the robes tucked around her she took another look at the woman who sat beside her on the back seat. She had met Mrs. Peters the year before at the county fair, and the thing she remembered about her was that she didn't seem like a sheriff's wife. She was small and thin and didn't have a strong voice. Mrs. Gorman, sheriff's wife before Gorman went out and Peters came in, had a voice that somehow seemed to be backing up the law with every word. But if Mrs. Peters didn't look like a sheriff's wife, Peters made it up in looking like a sheriff. He was to a dot the kind of man who could get himself elected sheriff — a heavy man with a big voice, who was particularly genial with the law-abiding, as if to make it plain that he knew the difference between criminals and non-criminals. And right there it came into Mrs. Hale's mind, with a stab, that this man who was so pleasant and lively with all of them was going to the Wrights' now as a sheriff.

"The country's not very pleasant this time of year," Mrs. Peters at last ventured, as if she felt they ought to be talking as well as the men.

Mrs. Hale scarcely finished her reply, for they had gone up a little hill and could see the Wright place now, and seeing it did not make her feel like talking. It looked very lonesome this cold March morning. It had always been a lonesome-looking place. It was down in a hollow, and the poplar trees around it were lonesome-looking trees. The men were looking at it and talking about what had happened. The county attorney was bending to one side of the buggy, and kept looking steadily at the place as they drew up to it.

"I'm glad you came with me," Mrs. Peters said nervously, as the two women were about to follow the men in through the kitchen door.

Even after she had her foot on the door-step, her hand on the knob, Martha Hale had a moment of feeling she could not cross that threshold. And the reason it seemed she couldn't cross it now was simply because she hadn't crossed it before. Time and time again it had been in her mind, "I ought to go over and see Minnie Foster" — she still thought of her as Minnie Foster, though for twenty years she had been Mrs. Wright. And then there was always something to do and Minnie Foster would go from

her mind. But *now* she could come.

The men went over to the stove. The women stood close together by the door. Young Henderson, the county attorney, turned around and said:

"Come up to the fire, ladies."

Mrs. Peters took a step forward, then stopped. "I'm not — cold," she said.

The men talked for a minute about what a good thing it was the sheriff had sent his deputy out that morning to make a fire for them, and then Sheriff Peters stepped back from the stove, unbuttoned his outer coat, and leaned his hands on the kitchen table in a way that seemed to mark the beginning of official business. "Now, Mr. Hale," he said in a sort of semi-official voice, "before we move things about, you tell Mr. Henderson just what it was you saw when you came here yesterday morning."

The county attorney was looking around the kitchen.

"By the way," he said, "has anything been moved?" He turned to the sheriff. "Are things just as you left them yesterday?"

Peters looked from cupboard to sink; from that to a small worn rocker a little to one side of the kitchen table.

"It's just the same."

"Somebody should have been left here yesterday," said the county attorney.

"Oh — yesterday," returned the sheriff, with a little gesture as of yesterday having been more than he could bear to think of. "When I had to send Frank to Morris Center for that man who went crazy — let me tell you, I had my hands full *yesterday*. I knew you could get back from Omaha by today, George, and as long as I went over everything here myself——"

"Well, Mr. Hale," said the county attorney, in a way of letting what was past and gone go, "tell just what happened when you came here yesterday morning."

Mrs. Hale, still leaning against the door, had that sinking feeling of the mother whose child is about to speak a piece. Lewis often wandered along and got things mixed up in a story. She hoped he would tell this straight and plain, and not say unnecessary things that would just make things harder for Minnie Foster. He didn't begin at once, and she noticed that he looked queer — as if standing in that kitchen and having to tell what he had seen there yesterday morning made him almost sick.

"Harry and I had started to town with a load of potatoes," Mrs. Hale's husband began.

Harry was Mrs. Hale's oldest boy. He wasn't with them now, for the very good reason that those potatoes never got to town yesterday and he was taking them this morning, so he hadn't been home when the sheriff stopped to say he wanted Mr. Hale to come over to the Wright place and tell the county attorney his story there, where he could point it all out.

"We came along this road," Hale was going on, with a motion of his

hand to the road over which they had just come, "and as we got in sight of the house I says to Harry, 'I'm goin' to see if I can't get John Wright to take a telephone.' You see," he explained to Henderson, "unless I can get somebody to go in with me they won't come out this branch road except for a price *I* can't pay. I'd spoke to Wright about it once before; but he put me off, saying folks talked too much anyway, and all he asked was peace and quiet — guess you know about how much he talked himself. But I thought maybe if I went to the house and talked about it before his wife, and said all the women-folks liked the telephones, and that in this lonesome stretch of road it would be a good thing — well, I said to Harry that that was what I was going to say — though I said at the same time that I didn't know as what his wife wanted made much difference to John ——"

Now, there he was! — saying things he didn't need to say. Mrs. Hale tried to catch her husband's eye, but fortunately the county attorney interrupted with:

"Let's talk about that a little later, Mr. Hale. I do want to talk about that, but I'm anxious now to get along to just exactly what happened when you got here."

When he began this time, it was very deliberately and carefully:

"I didn't see or hear anything. I knocked at the door. And still it was all quiet inside. I knew they must be up — it was past eight o'clock. So I knocked again, louder, and I thought I heard somebody say, 'Come in.' I wasn't sure — I'm not sure yet. But I opened the door — this door," jerking a hand toward the door by which the two women stood, "and there, in that rocker" — pointing to it — "sat Mrs. Wright."

Everyone in the kitchen looked at the rocker. It came into Mrs. Hale's mind that that rocker didn't look in the least like Minnie Foster — the Minnie Foster of twenty years before. It was a dingy red, with wooden rungs up the back, and the middle rung was gone, and the chair sagged to one side.

"How did she — look?" the county attorney was inquiring.

"Well," said Hale, "she looked — queer."

"How do you mean — queer?"

As he asked it he took out a notebook and pencil. Mrs. Hale did not like the sight of that pencil. She kept her eye fixed on her husband, as if to keep him from saying unnecessary things that would go into that notebook and make trouble.

Hale did speak guardedly, as if the pencil had affected him too.

"Well, as if she didn't know what she was going to do next. And kind of — done up."

"How did she seem to feel about your coming?"

"Why, I don't think she minded — one way or other. She didn't pay much attention. I said, 'Ho' do, Mrs. Wright? It's cold, ain't it?' And she said, 'Is it?' — and went on pleatin' at her apron.

"Well, I was surprised. She didn't

ask me to come up to the stove, or to sit down, but just set there, not even lookin' at me. And so I said: 'I want to see John.' And then she laughed. I guess you would call it a laugh.

"I thought of Harry and the team outside, so I said, a little sharp, 'Can I see John?' 'No,' says she — kind of dull like. 'Ain't he home?' says I. Then she looked at me. 'Yes,' says she, 'he's home.' 'Then why can't I see him?' I asked her, out of patience with her now. "Cause he's dead,' says she, just as quiet and dull — and fell to pleatin' her apron. 'Dead?' says I, like you do when you can't take in what you've heard.

"She just nodded her head, not getting a bit excited, but rockin' back and forth.

" 'Why — where is he?' says I, not knowing *what* to say.

"She just pointed upstairs — like this" — pointing to the room above.

"I got up, with the idea of going up there myself. By this time I — didn't know what to do. I walked from there to here; then I says: 'Why, what did he die of?'

" 'He died of a rope round his neck,' says she; and just went on pleatin' at her apron."

Hale stopped speaking, and stood staring at the rocker, as if he were still seeing the woman who had sat there the morning before. Nobody spoke; it was as if everyone were seeing the woman who had sat there the morning before.

"And what did you do then?" the county attorney at last broke the silence.

"I went out and called Harry. I thought I might — need help. I got Harry in, and we went upstairs." His voice fell almost to a whisper. "There he was — lying over the ——"

"I think I'd rather have you go into that upstairs," the county attorney interrupted, "where you can point it all out. Just go on now with the rest of the story."

"Well, my first thought was to get that rope off. It looked ——"

He stopped, his face twitching.

"But Harry, he went up to him, and he said, 'No, he's dead all right, and we'd better not touch anything.' So we went downstairs. She was still sitting that same way. 'Has anybody been notified?' I asked. 'No,' said she, unconcerned.

" 'Who did this, Mrs. Wright?' said Harry. He said it business-like, and she stopped pleatin' at her apron. 'I don't know,' she says. 'You don't *know?*' says Harry. 'Weren't you sleepin' in the bed with him?' 'Yes,' says she, 'but I was on the inside.' 'Somebody slipped a rope round his neck and strangled him, and you didn't wake up?' says Harry. 'I didn't wake up,' she said after him.

"We may have looked as if we didn't see how that could be, for after a minute she said, 'I sleep sound.'

"Harry was going to ask her more questions, but I said maybe that weren't our business; maybe we ought to let her tell her story first to the coroner or the sheriff. So Harry went fast as he could over to High

Road — the Rivers' place, where there's a telephone."

"And what did she do when she knew you had gone for the coroner?" The attorney got his pencil in his hand all ready for writing.

"She moved from that chair to this one over here" — Hale pointed to a small chair in the corner — "and just sat there with her hands held together and looking down. I got a feeling that I ought to make some conversation, so I said I had come in to see if John wanted to put in a telephone; and at that she started to laugh, and then she stopped and looked at me — scared."

At sound of a moving pencil the man who was telling the story looked up.

"I dunno — maybe it wasn't scared," he hastened; "I wouldn't like to say it was. Soon Harry got back, and then Dr. Lloyd came, and you, Mr. Peters, and so I guess that's all I know that you don't."

He said that last with relief, and moved a little, as if relaxing. Everyone moved a little. The county attorney walked toward the stair door.

"I guess we'll go upstairs first — then out to the barn and around."

He paused and looked around the kitchen.

"You're convinced there was nothing important here?" he asked the sheriff. "Nothing that would — point to any motive?"

The sheriff too looked all around, as if to re-convince himself.

"Nothing here but kitchen things," he said, with a little laugh for the insignificance of kitchen things.

The county attorney was looking at the cupboard — a peculiar, ungainly structure, half closet and half cupboard, the upper part of it being built in the wall, and the lower part just the old-fashioned kitchen cupboard. As if its queerness attracted him, he got a chair and opened the upper part and looked in. After a moment he drew his hand away sticky.

"Here's a nice mess," he said resentfully.

The two women had drawn nearer, and now the sheriff's wife spoke.

"Oh — her fruit," she said, looking to Mrs. Hale for sympathetic understanding. She turned back to the county attorney and explained: "She worried about that when it turned so cold last night. She said the fire would go out and her jars burst."

Mrs. Peters' husband broke into a laugh.

"Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder, and worrying about her preserves!"

The young attorney set his lips.

"I guess before we're through she may have something more serious than preserves to worry about."

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Hale's husband, with good-natured superiority, "women are used to worrying over trifles."

The two women moved a little closer together. Neither of them spoke. The county attorney seemed suddenly to remember his manners — and think of his future.

"And yet," said he, with the gal-

lantry of a young politician, "for all their worries, what would we do without the ladies?"

The women did not speak, did not unbend. He went to the sink and began washing his hands. He turned to wipe them on the roller towel — whirled it for a cleaner place.

"Dirty towels! Not much of a housekeeper, would you say, ladies?"

He kicked his foot against some dirty pans under the sink.

"There's a great deal of work to be done on a farm," said Mrs. Hale stiffly.

"To be sure. And yet" — with a little bow to her — "I know there are some Dickson County farm-houses that do not have such roller towels."

"Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands aren't always as clean as they might be."

"Ah, loyal to your sex, I see," he laughed. He stopped and gave her a keen look. "But you and Mrs. Wright were neighbors. I suppose you were friends, too."

Martha Hale shook her head.

"I've seen little enough of her of late years. I've not been in this house — it's more than a year."

"And why was that? You didn't like her?"

"I liked her well enough," she replied with spirit. "Farmers' wives have their hands full, Mr. Henderson. And then ——" She looked around the kitchen.

"Yes?" he encouraged.

"It never seemed a very cheerful place," said she, more to herself than to him.

"No," he agreed; "I don't think anyone would call it cheerful. I shouldn't say she had the home-making instinct."

"Well, I don't know as Wright had, either," she muttered.

"You mean they didn't get on very well?" he was quick to ask.

"No; I don't mean anything," she answered, with decision. As she turned a little away from him, she added: "But I don't think a place would be any the cheerfuller for John Wright's bein' in it."

"I'd like to talk to you about that a little later, Mrs. Hale," he said. "I'm anxious to get the lay of things upstairs now."

He moved toward the stair door, followed by the two men.

"I suppose anything Mrs. Peters does'll be all right?" the sheriff inquired. "She was to take in some clothes for her, you know — and a few little things. We left in such a hurry yesterday."

The county attorney looked at the two women whom they were leaving alone there among the kitchen things.

"Yes — Mrs. Peters," he said, his glance resting on the woman who was not Mrs. Peters, the big farmer woman who stood behind the sheriff's wife. "Of course Mrs. Peters is one of us," he said, in a manner of entrusting responsibility. "And keep your eye out, Mrs. Peters, for anything that might be of use. No telling; you women might come upon a clue to the motive — and that's the thing

we need."

Mr. Hale rubbed his face after the fashion of a showman getting ready for a pleasantry.

"But would the women know a clue if they did come upon it?" he said; and, having delivered himself of this, he followed the others through the stair door.

The women stood motionless and silent, listening to the footsteps, first upon the stairs, then in the room above.

Then, as if releasing herself from something strange, Mrs. Hale began to arrange the dirty pans under the sink, which the county attorney's disdainful push of the foot had deranged.

"I'd hate to have men comin' into my kitchen," she said testily — "snoopin' round and criticizin'."

"Of course it's no more than their duty," said the sheriff's wife, in her manner of timid acquiescence.

"Duty's all right," replied Mrs. Hale bluffly; "but I guess that deputy sheriff that come out to make the fire might have got a little of this on." She gave the roller towel a pull. "Wish I'd thought of that sooner! Seems mean to talk about her for not having things slicked up, when she had to come away in such a hurry."

She looked around the kitchen. Certainly it was not "slicked up." Her eye was held by a bucket of sugar on a low shelf. The cover was off the wooden bucket, and beside it was a paper bag — half full.

Mrs. Hale moved toward it.

"She was putting this in there," she said to herself — slowly.

She thought of the flour in her kitchen at home — half sifted. She had been interrupted, and had left things half done. What had interrupted Minnie Foster? Why had that work been left half done? She made a move as if to finish it — unfinished things always bothered her — and then she glanced around and saw that Mrs. Peters was watching her — and she didn't want Mrs. Peters to get that feeling she had got of work begun and then — for some reason — not finished.

"It's a shame about her fruit," she said, and walked toward the cupboard that the county attorney had opened, and got on the chair, murmuring: "I wonder if it's all gone."

It was a sorry enough looking sight, but "Here's one that's all right," she said at last. She held it toward the light. "This is cherries, too." She looked again. "I declare I believe that's the only one."

With a sigh, she got down from the chair, went to the sink, and wiped off the bottle.

"She'll feel awful bad, after all her hard work in the hot weather. I remember the afternoon I put up my cherries last summer."

She set the bottle on the table, and, with another sigh, started to sit down in the rocker. But she did not sit down. Something kept her from sitting down in that chair. She straightened — stepped back, and, half turned away, stood looking at it, seeing the woman who had sat there "pleatin' at her apron."

The thin voice of the sheriff's wife broke in upon her: "I must be getting those things from the front room closet." She opened the door into the other room, started in, stepped back. "You coming with me, Mrs. Hale?" she asked nervously. "You — you could help me get them."

They were soon back — the stark coldness of that shut-up room was not a thing to linger in.

"My!" said Mrs. Peters, dropping the things on the table and hurrying to the stove.

Mrs. Hale stood examining the clothes the woman who was being detained in town had said she wanted.

"Wright was close!" she exclaimed, holding up a shabby black skirt that bore the marks of much making over. "I think maybe that's why she kept so much to herself. I s'pose she felt she couldn't do her part; and then, you don't enjoy things when you feel shabby. She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively — when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls, singing in the choir. But that — oh, that was twenty years ago."

With a carefulness in which there was something tender, she folded the shabby clothes and piled them at one corner of the table. She looked up at Mrs. Peters, and there was something in the other woman's look that irritated her.

"She don't care," she said to herself. "Much difference it makes to her whether Minnie Foster had pretty clothes when she was a girl."

Then she looked again, and she wasn't so sure; in fact, she hadn't at any time been perfectly sure about Mrs. Peters. She had that shrinking manner, and yet her eyes looked as if they could see a long way into things.

"This all you was to take in?" asked Mrs. Hale.

"No," said the sheriff's wife; "she said she wanted an apron. Funny thing to want," she ventured in her nervous little way, "for there's not much to get you dirty in jail, goodness knows. But I suppose just to make her feel more natural. If you're used to wearing an apron ——. She said they were in the bottom drawer of this cupboard. Yes — here they are. And then her little shawl that always hung on the stair door."

She took the small gray shawl from behind the door leading upstairs.

Suddenly Mrs. Hale took a quick step toward the other woman.

"Mrs. Peters!"

"Yes, Mrs. Hale?"

"Do you think she — did it?"

A frightened look blurred the other thing in Mrs. Peters' eyes.

"Oh, I don't know," she said, in a voice that seemed to shrink away from the subject.

"Well, I don't think she did," affirmed Mrs. Hale stoutly. "Asking for an apron, and her little shawl. Worryin' about her fruit."

"Mr. Peters says ——." Footsteps were heard in the room above; she stopped, looked up, then went on in a lowered voice: "Mr. Peters says — it looks bad for her. Mr. Henderson is awful sarcastic in a speech, and he's

going to make fun of her saying she didn't — wake up."

For a moment Mrs. Hale had no answer. Then, "Well, I guess John Wright didn't wake up — when they was slippin' that rope under his neck," she muttered.

"No, it's *strange*," breathed Mrs. Peters. "They think it was such a — funny way to kill a man."

"That's just what Mr. Hale said," said Mrs. Hale, in a resolutely natural voice. "There was a gun in the house. He says that's what he can't understand."

"Mr. Henderson said, coming out, that what was needed for the case was a motive. Something to show anger — or sudden feeling."

"Well, I don't see any signs of anger around here," said Mrs. Hale. "I don't ——"

She stopped. It was as if her mind tripped on something. Her eye was caught by a dish-towel in the middle of the kitchen table. Slowly she moved toward the table. One half of it was wiped clean, the other half messy. Her eyes made a slow, almost unwilling turn to the bucket of sugar and the half empty bag beside it. Things begun — and not finished.

After a moment she stepped back, and said, in that manner of releasing herself: "Wonder how they're finding things upstairs? I hope she had it a little more red up there. You know" — she paused, and feeling gathered — "it seems kind of *sneaking:* locking her up in town and coming out here to get her own house to turn against her!"

"But, Mrs. Hale," said the sheriff's wife, "the law is the law."

I s'pose 'tis," answered Mrs. Hale shortly.

She turned to the stove, worked with it a minute, and when she straightened up she said aggressively:

"The law is the law — and a bad stove is a bad stove. How'd you like to cook on this?" — pointing with the poker to the broken lining. She opened the oven door and started to express her opinion of the oven; but she was swept into her own thoughts, thinking of what it would mean, year after year, to have that stove to wrestle with. The thought of Minnie Foster trying to bake in that oven — and the thought of her never going over to see Minnie Foster ——

She was startled by hearing Mrs. Peters say:

"A person gets discouraged — and loses heart."

The sheriff's wife had looked from the stove to the pail of water which had been carried in from outside. The two women stood there silent, above them the footsteps of the men who were looking for evidence against the woman who had worked in that kitchen. That look of seeing into things, of seeing through a thing to something else, was in the eyes of the sheriff's wife now. When Mrs. Hale next spoke to her, it was gently:

"Better loosen up your things, Mrs. Peters. We'll not feel them when we go out."

Mrs. Peters went to the back of the room to hang up the fur tippet she was

wearing. A moment later she exclaimed, "Why, she was piecing a quilt," and held up a large sewing basket piled high with quilt pieces.

Mrs. Hale spread some of the blocks out on the table.

"It's log-cabin pattern," she said, putting several of them together. "Pretty, isn't it?"

They were so engaged with the quilt that they did not hear the footsteps on the stairs. Just as the stair door opened Mrs. Hale was saying:

"Do you suppose she was going to quilt it or just knot it?"

The sheriff threw up his hands.

"They wonder whether she was going to quilt it or just knot it!" he cried.

There was a laugh for the ways of women, a warming of hands over the stove, and then the county attorney said briskly:

"Well, let's go right out to the barn and get that cleared up."

"I don't see as there's anything so strange," Mrs. Hale said resentfully, after the outside door had closed on the three men — "our taking up our time with little things while we're waiting for them to get the evidence. I don't see as it's anything to laugh about."

"Of course they've got awful important things on their minds," said the sheriff's wife apologetically.

They returned to an inspection of the block for the quilt. Mrs. Hale was looking at the fine, even sewing, and preoccupied with thoughts of the woman who had done that sewing, when she heard the sheriff's wife say, in a queer tone:

"Why, look at this one."

She turned to take the block held out to her.

"The sewing," said Mrs. Peters, in a troubled way. "All the rest of them have been so nice and even — but — this one. Why, it looks as if she didn't know what she was about!"

Their eyes met — something flashed to life, passed between them; then, as if with an effort, they seemed to pull away from each other. A moment Mrs. Hale sat there, her hands folded over that sewing which was so unlike all the rest of the sewing. Then she had pulled a knot and drawn the threads.

"Oh, what are you doing, Mrs. Hale?" asked the sheriff's wife.

"Just pulling out a stitch or two that's not sewed very good," said Mrs. Hale mildly.

"I don't think we ought to touch things," Mrs. Peters said, a little helplessly.

"I'll just finish up this end," answered Mrs. Hale, still in that mild, matter-of-fact fashion.

She threaded a needle and started to replace bad sewing with good. For a little while she sewed in silence. Then, in that thin, timid voice, she heard:

"Mrs. Hale!"

"Yes, Mrs. Peters?"

"What do you suppose she was so — nervous about?"

"Oh, *I* don't know," said Mrs. Hale, as if dismissing a thing not important enough to spend much time on. "I

don't know as she was — nervous. I sew awful queer sometimes when I'm just tired."

She cut a thread, and out of the corner of her eye looked up at Mrs. Peters. The small, lean face of the sheriff's wife seemed to have tightened up. Her eyes had that look of peering into something. But next moment she moved, and said in her indecisive way:

"Well, I must get those clothes wrapped. They may be through sooner than we think. I wonder where I could find a piece of paper — and string."

"In that cupboard, maybe," suggested Mrs. Hale, after a glance around.

One piece of the crazy sewing remained unripped. Mrs. Peters' back turned, Martha Hale now scrutinized that piece, compared it with the dainty, accurate sewing of the other blocks. The difference was startling. Holding this block made her feel queer, as if the distracted thoughts of the woman who had perhaps turned to it to try and quiet herself were communicating themselves to her.

Mrs. Peters' voice roused her.

"Here's a bird-cage," she said. "Did she have a bird, Mrs. Hale?"

"Why, I don't know whether she did or not." She turned to look at the cage Mrs. Peters was holding up. "I've not been here in so long." She sighed. "There was a man last year selling canaries cheap — but I don't know as she took one. Maybe she did. She used to sing real pretty herself."

"Seems kind of funny to think of a bird here." She half laughed — an attempt to put up a barrier. "But she must have had one — or why would she have a cage? I wonder what happened to it."

"I suppose maybe the cat got it," suggested Mrs. Hale, resuming her sewing.

"No; she didn't have a cat. She's got that feeling some people have about cats — being afraid of them. When they brought her to our house yesterday, my cat got in the room, and she was real upset and asked me to take it out."

"My sister Bessie was like that," laughed Mrs. Hale.

The sheriff's wife did not reply. The silence made Mrs. Hale turn around. Mrs. Peters was examining the bird-cage.

"Look at this door," she said slowly. "It's broke. One hinge has been pulled apart."

Mrs. Hale came nearer.

"Looks as if someone must have been — rough with it."

Again their eyes met — startled, questioning, apprehensive. For a moment neither spoke nor stirred. Then Mrs. Hale, turning away, said brusquely:

"If they're going to find any evidence, I wish they'd be about it. I don't like this place."

"But I'm awful glad you came with me, Mrs. Hale." Mrs. Peters put the bird-cage on the table and sat down. "It would be lonesome for me — sitting here alone."

"Yes, it would, wouldn't it?" agreed Mrs. Hale, a certain very determined

naturalness in her voice. She had picked up the sewing, but now it dropped in her lap, and she murmured in a different voice: "But I tell you what I *do* wish, Mrs. Peters. I wish I had come over sometimes when she was here. I wish — I had."

"But of course you were awful busy, Mrs. Hale. Your house — and your children."

"I could've come," retorted Mrs. Hale shortly. "I stayed away because it weren't cheerful — and that's why I ought to have come. I" — she looked around — "I've never liked this place. Maybe because it's down in a hollow and you don't see the road. I don't know what it is, but it's a lonesome place, and always was. I wish I had come over to see Minnie Foster sometimes. I can see now ——" She did not put it into words.

"Well, you mustn't reproach yourself," counseled Mrs. Peters. "Somehow, we just don't see how it is with other folks till — something comes up."

"Not having children makes less work," mused Mrs. Hale, after a silence, "but it makes a quiet house — and Wright out to work all day — and no company when he did come in. Did you know John Wright, Mrs. Peters?"

"Not to know him. I've seen him in town. They say he was a good man."

"Yes — good," conceded John Wright's neighbor grimly. "He didn't drink, and kept his word as well as most, I guess, and paid his debts. But he was a hard man, Mrs. Peters. Just to pass the time of day with him ——" She stopped, shivered a little. "Like a raw wind that gets to the bone." Her eye fell upon the cage on the table before her, and she added, almost bitterly: "I should think she would've wanted a bird!"

Suddenly she leaned forward, looking intently at the cage. "But what do you s'pose went wrong with it?"

"I don't know," returned Mrs. Peters; "unless it got sick and died."

But after she said it she reached over and swung the broken door. Both women watched it as if somehow held by it.

"You didn't know — her?" Mrs. Hale asked, a gentler note in her voice.

"Not till they brought her yesterday," said the sheriff's wife.

"She — come to think of it, she was kind of like a bird herself. Real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and — fluttery. How — she — did — change."

That held her for a long time. Finally, as if struck with a happy thought and relieved to get back to everyday things, she exclaimed:

"Tell you what, Mrs. Peters, why don't you take the quilt in with you? It might take up her mind."

"Why, I think that's a real nice idea, Mrs. Hale," agreed the sheriff's wife, as if she too were glad to come into the atmosphere of a simple kindness." There couldn't possibly be any objection to that, could there? Now, just what will I take? I wonder if her patches are in here — and her things."

They turned to the sewing basket.

"Here's some red," said Mrs. Hale, bringing out a roll of cloth. Underneath that was a box. "Here, maybe her scissors are in here — and her things." She held it up. "What a pretty box! I'll warrant that was something she had a long time ago — when she was a girl."

She held it in her hand a moment; then, with a little sigh, opened it.

Instantly her hand went to her nose.

"Why ——!"

Mrs. Peters drew nearer — then turned away.

"There's something wrapped up in this piece of silk," faltered Mrs. Hale.

Her hand not steady, Mrs. Hale raised the piece of silk. "Oh, Mrs. Peters!" she cried, "it's ——"

Mrs. Peters bent closer.

"It's the bird," she whispered.

"But, Mrs. Peters!" cried Mrs. Hale. "*Look* at it! Its *neck* — look at its neck! It's all — other side *to*."

The sheriff's wife again bent closer.

"Somebody wrung its neck," said she, in a voice that was slow and deep.

And then again the eyes of the two women met — this time clung together in a look of dawning comprehension, of growing horror. Mrs. Peters looked from the dead bird to the broken door of the cage. Again their eyes met. And just then there was a sound at the outside door.

Mrs. Hale slipped the box under the quilt pieces in the basket, and sank into the chair before it. Mrs. Peters stood holding to the table. The county attorney and the sheriff came in.

"Well, ladies," said the county attorney, as one turning from serious things to little pleasantries, "have you decided whether she was going to quilt it or knot it?"

"We think," began the sheriff's wife in a flurried voice, "that she was going to — knot it."

He was too preoccupied to notice the change that came in her voice on that last.

"Well, that's very interesting, I'm sure," he said tolerantly. He caught sight of the cage. "Has the bird flown?"

"We think the cat got it," said Mrs. Hale in a voice curiously even.

He was walking up and down, as if thinking something out.

"Is there a cat?" he asked absently.

Mrs. Hale shot a look up at the sheriff's wife.

"Well, not *now*," said Mrs. Peters. "They're superstitious, you know; they leave."

The county attorney did not heed her. "No sign at all of anyone having come in from the outside," he said to Peters, in the manner of continuing an interrupted conversation. "Their own rope. Now let's go upstairs again and go over it, piece by piece. It would have to have been someone who knew just the ——"

The stair door closed behind them and their voices were lost.

The two women sat motionless, not looking at each other, but as if peering into something and at the same time holding back. When they spoke now it was as if they were afraid of what they

were saying, but as if they could not help saying it.

"She liked the bird," said Martha Hale, low and slowly. "She was going to bury it in that pretty box."

"When I was a girl," said Mrs. Peters, under her breath, "my kitten — there was a boy took a hatchet, and before my eyes — before I could get there ——" She covered her face an instant. "If they hadn't held me back I would have" — she caught herself, looked upstairs where footsteps were heard, and finished weakly — "hurt him."

Then they sat without speaking or moving.

"I wonder how it would seem," Mrs. Hale at last began, as if feeling her way over strange ground — "never to have had any children around." Her eyes made a slow sweep of the kitchen, as if seeing what that kitchen had meant through all the years. "No, Wright wouldn't like the bird," she said after that — "a thing that sang. She used to sing. He killed that too." Her voice tightened.

Mrs. Peters moved uneasily.

"Of course we don't know who killed the bird."

"I knew John Wright," was Mrs. Hale's answer.

"It was an awful thing was done in this house that night, Mrs. Hale," said the sheriff's wife. "Killing a man while he slept — slipping a thing round his neck that choked the life out of him."

Mrs. Hale's hand went out to the bird-cage.

"His neck. Choked the life out of him."

"We don't *know* who killed him," whispered Mrs. Peters wildly. "We don't *know*."

Mrs. Hale had not moved. "If there had been years and years of — nothing, then a bird to sing to you, it would be awful — still — after the bird was still."

It was as if something within her not herself had spoken, and it found in Mrs. Peters something she did not know as herself.

"I know what stillness is," she said, in a queer, monotonous voice. "When we homesteaded in Dakota, and my first baby died — after he was two years old — and me with no other then ——"

Mrs. Hale stirred.

"How soon do you suppose they'll be through looking for the evidence?"

"I know what stillness is," repeated Mrs. Peters, in just that same way. Then she too pulled back. "The law has got to punish crime, Mrs. Hale," she said in her tight little way.

"I wish you'd seen Minnie Foster," was the answer, "when she wore a white dress with blue ribbons, and stood up there in the choir and sang."

The picture of that girl, the fact that she had lived neighbor to that girl for twenty years, and had let her die for lack of life, was suddenly more than she could bear.

"Oh, I *wish* I'd come over here once in a while!" she cried. "That was a crime! That was a crime! Who's going to punish that?"

"We mustn't take on," said Mrs.

Peters, with a frightened look toward the stairs.

"I might 'a' *known* she needed help! I tell you, it's *queer*, Mrs. Peters. We live close together, and we live far apart. We all go through the same things — it's all just a different kind of the same thing! If it weren't — why do you and I *understand?* Why do we *know* — what we know this minute?"

She dashed her hand across her eyes. Then, seeing the jar of fruit on the table, she reached for it and choked out:

"If I was you I wouldn't *tell* her her fruit was gone! Tell her it *ain't.* Tell her it's all right — all of it. Here — take this in to prove it to her! She — she may never know whether it was broke or not."

Mrs. Peters reached out for the bottle of fruit as if she were glad to take it — as if touching a familiar thing, having something to do, could keep her from something else. She got up, looked about for something to wrap the fruit in, took a petticoat from the pile of clothes she had brought from the front room, and nervously started winding that round the bottle.

"My!" she began, in a high, false voice, "it's a good thing the men couldn't hear us! Getting all stirred up over a little thing like a — dead canary." She hurried over that. "As if that could have anything to do with — with —— My, wouldn't they *laugh?*"

Footsteps were heard on the stairs.

"Maybe they would," muttered Mrs. Hale — "maybe they wouldn't."

"No, Peters," said the county attorney incisively; "it's all perfectly clear, except the reason for doing it. But you know juries when it comes to women. If there was some definite thing — something to show. Something to make a story about. A thing that would connect up with this clumsy way of doing it."

In a covert way Mrs. Hale looked at Mrs. Peters. Mrs. Peters was looking at her. Quickly they looked away from each other. The outer door opened and Mr. Hale came in.

"I've got the team round now," he said. "Pretty cold out there."

"I'm going to stay here awhile by myself," the county attorney suddenly announced. "You can send Frank out for me, can't you?" he asked the sheriff. "I want to go over everything. I'm not satisfied we can't do better."

Again, for one brief moment, the two women's eyes found one another.

The sheriff came up to the table.

"Did you want to see what Mrs. Peters was going to take in?"

The county attorney picked up the apron. He laughed. "Oh, I guess they're not very dangerous things the ladies have picked out."

Mrs. Hale's hand was on the sewing basket in which the box was concealed. She felt that she ought to take her hand off the basket. She did not seem able to. He picked up one of the quilt blocks which she had piled on to cover the box. Her eyes felt like fire. She had a feeling that if he took up the

basket she would snatch it from him.

But he did not take it up. With another little laugh, he turned away.

"No; Mrs. Peters doesn't need supervising. For that matter, a sheriff's wife is married to the law. Ever think of it that way, Mrs. Peters?"

Mrs. Peters was standing beside the table. Mrs. Hale shot a look up at her; but she could not see her face. Mrs. Peters had turned away. When she spoke, her voice was muffled.

"Not — just that way," she said.

"Married to the law!" chuckled Mrs. Peters' husband. He moved toward the door into the front room, and said to the county attorney:

"I just want you to come in here a minute, George. We ought to take a look at these windows."

"Oh — windows," said the county attorney scoffingly.

"We'll be right out, Mr. Hale," said the sheriff to the farmer.

Hale went to look after the horses. The sheriff followed the county attorney into the other room. Again — for one final moment — the two women were alone in that kitchen.

Martha Hale sprang up, her hands tight together, looking at that other woman, with whom it rested. At first she could not see her eyes, for the sheriff's wife had not turned back since she turned away at that suggestion of being married to the law. But now Mrs. Hale made her turn back. Her eyes made her turn back. Slowly, unwillingly, Mrs. Peters turned her head until her eyes met the eyes of the other woman. There was a moment when they held each other in a steady, burning look in which there was no evasion nor flinching.

Then Martha Hale's eyes pointed the way to the basket in which was hidden the thing that would make certain the conviction of the other woman — that woman who was not there and yet who had been there with them all through that hour.

For a moment Mrs. Peters did not move. And then she did it. With a rush forward, she threw back the quilt pieces, got the box, tried to put it in her handbag. It was too big. Desperately she opened it, started to take the bird out. But there she broke — she could not touch the bird. She stood there helpless, foolish.

There was the sound of a knob turning in the inner door. Martha Hale snatched the box from the sheriff's wife, and got it in the pocket of her big coat just as the sheriff and the county attorney came back.

"Well, Henry," said the county attorney facetiously, "at least we found out that she was not going to quilt it. She was going to — what is it you call it, ladies?"

Mrs. Hale's hand was against the pocket of her coat.

"We call it — knot it, Mr. Henderson."

Among the rare and curious items not listed in any standard bibliography of criminology is the following book:

> DETECTIVE THEORY AND PRACTICE: A Thorough and Comprehensive Exposé of Criminal Practices, Together With a General Survey of Wrongdoing and Its Pursuit; Including the Art of Shadowing, Deducting, etc., etc.
>
> Published in South Kingston, New York, by The Acme International Detective Correspondence School, [1941]; first edition, 8vo, red pictorial cloth; also in full calf, issued simultaneously, but sold to subscribers only; edited by Chief Inspector J. J. O'B.
>
> "A veritable anatomy of detection"
> — *South Kingston Klarion*

Lesson XXXV (Advanced Arson) contains an authoritative treatise on the origin and development of criminal pyromania, its cause and effect, its prevention and cure. Case histories, culled from confidential sources, include the remarkable confession of the fellow in North Wilbraham, Mass., who contrived arson in absentia *by means of a homing pigeon; the startling revelation of the bright lad in Joplin, Mo., who used movie film as a fuse and came a cropper because the film showed Betty Grable's legs; and numerous other feats of firebugging.*

But for all its authentic and definitive scope, no case history in this apocrypha manual can hold a candle to the extraordinary tale of P. Moran and his first Incendiary Investigation. Seriously, P. Moran grows in stature with each succeeding misadventure. The "gorjous" Pete now stands alone as the Mail Order Master Manhunter, the Correspondence-School Sleuth Supreme, the Defective-Detective De Luxe.

P. MORAN, FIRE-FIGHTER

by PERCIVAL WILDE

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

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

. . . This concludes the first, or elementary, lesson on the important subject of Bank Robbery. If you have studied the preceding lessons carefully, you will remember that every Crime is divided into three parts, viz., the Plan, the Execution, the Get-Away. Re-read this lesson and then ask yourself which of the three parts requires the most attention from the Bank Robber. Can you understand why, when a Bank Robbery is contemplated, one group may do the Planning, another may be responsible for the Execution, and a third may be used to help in the Get-Away?

Why should the young Detective study Bank Robbery carefully? Here

is a hint which will help you find the correct answer: when the Detective solves a Crime he often receives a Reward which is a percentage of the money recovered. Now, take out your pencil and calculate which is more, 1% of $10, which might be snatched with a woman's handbag, or 1% of $100,000, which might be stolen from a Bank? (To find 1% multiply by 100, change dollars to cents, and point off two places from the right.) Set yourself practical problems like this, and see how rapidly you will advance in the well-paid and fascinating profession for which we are preparing our students.

J. J. O'B.

P.S. Try to send in your lesson more promptly than the last, together with your payment for the next lesson, which is very interesting, also exciting, because it is called "The Work of the Hotel Detective." You have already had "Hold-Ups, Elementary," so after that will come "Hold-Ups, Intermediate," which will prepare you for "Hold-Ups, Advanced," which is a post-graduate course offered to specially qualified students.

J. J. O'B.

TELEGRAM.

CHIEF INSPECTOR, ACME INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL, SOUTH KINGSTON, N. Y.

SKIP BANK ROBBERIES SEND ELEMENTARY ARSON INTERMEDIATE ARSON ADVANCED ARSON.

OPERATIVE P. MORAN

DAY LETTER.

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

COLLECT YOUR TELEGRAM RECEIVED STOP ARRANGEMENT COURSE RESULT MUCH STUDY AND EXPERIENCE STOP POSITIVELY NO ARSON UNTIL LESSON FOURTEEN WHICH IS ELEMENTARY ARSON ONLY STOP INTERMEDIATE AND ADVANCED ARSON BOTH POSTGRADUATE COURSES FOR WHICH YOU ARE UNPREPARED BUT WILL SUPPLY NOW AT EXTRA CHARGE PAYABLE IN ADVANCE AT YOUR OWN RISK STOP AWAIT YOUR INSTRUCTIONS STOP.

CHIEF INSPECTOR, ACME INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL.

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

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

Well, I don't know why you had to use up four extra words to say "Your telegram received stop," because how could you answer it if you did not receive it, and when you answered I deducted right off you received it, and those four words were extra and I had to pay nine cents for them; and I don't know why you said "Stop" at the end which was also extra, because when you don't put in "Stop" the telegraph operator has got to stop when the writing leaves off which is the end of the message and there is nothing else to say.

Well, now I suppose I got to tell you

why I can't get my mind on "Bank Robbery, Elementary," and the same for "Intermediate" ditto and "Advanced," and why I want to learn about Arson which I thought was short for Arsonic the first time the girl in the sweater said that word only I didn't let on.

The boss and the missus have gone to visit his mother-in-law for a week or ten days. That is not my idea of a vacation, but it takes all kinds of folks to make a world, and if it suits the boss it is O. K. with me. Generally when the boss is away I hang out at the store which Harvey Link has rented on North Main Street between the meat-market and the Surrey National Bank. It used to be a barber-shop before Ferd Heinkel, the barber, was drafted, only Harvey cannot shave himself without cutting his throat, he says, so Harvey took down the red and white pole until he can make up his mind if he is going to open a plumbing store or put in a line of house and barn paints if he can get them; and there is a pool-table in the back room because it used to be a pool-room once, and all I need is more practice Harvey says and then I won't lose my shirt to him shooting pool. Harvey says he does not want to play me any more, he is sick and tired of taking my money, but he has got to give me my revenge so that I am there every night regular and also afternoons when I have not got anything else to do, and I am going to give Harvey a trimming before I get through with him. But yesterday I was in the garage changing two tires, because the last thing the boss says is, "Peter, we got to rotate the tires like it shows in this diagram which is a war-time measure to promote conversation," and he has written down so many things I got to do that I could not play pool in the afternoons anyhow, when I heard a car pull up outside and then I saw a shadow on the floor. I deducted right off somebody was casting that shadow, which had on pants and two legs and one head, and when I looked up I observed it was a girl, and she had plenty of oomph, especially in that tricky sweater she was wearing.

I started to say, "Excuse me, but will you kindly get the hell out of my light, can't you see I'm working, you dumn cluck," before I observed it was a girl, and I guess most of it slipped out before I observed she had copper-colored hair and lips with orange lipstick and cute feet in shoes which had holes in front and the nails on her big toes were orange like her lips, so I said "Excuse me" again three or four times.

She smiled and she said, "Oh, I'm so sorry! Oh, I really and truly am sorry! Oh, I didn't know you-all were so busy! Oh, I'll go away though I've driven miles and miles just to see you, and I'll come back some other time."

That is what I would have said she should do if she was a man, but though it may be news to you, I am not exactly cold when the opposite sect is concerned. I said, "Forget it, miss; I mean, what can I do for you?"

She said, "Oh, are you Mr. Moran?" and when I said, "That's me," she smiled some more and said, "Oh, is it really possible that I am talking to Mr. Peter Moran, the great detective?"

Well, I could not tell a lie, so I said, "Yes," and she said, "Oh, I'm thrilled! Oh, I'm so thrilled! Oh, I feel your eyes boring right through me! Oh, I feel them hitting me right here and going on like a couple of gimlets!"

I read somewhere how we great detectives got to be indulgent and modest with our public, so I just said, "It's all right, ma'am: I most generally have that effect on folks."

She came up close and she looked right up in my eyes: "Oh, I can see that, Mr. Moran! Oh, I believe every word of it! Oh, I guess you-all know more about little me than I know about myself."

I said, "No, in this case I cannot deduct much. Outside of deducting that you are a Southerner, that you like to work in the garden, that your husband is an officer in the Army, and that he loves you though he only has been married to you a short time, I cannot deduct hardly anything."

She jumped. " 'Deduct?' You mean 'deduce'? No, you-all said 'deduct,' so 'deduct' it is. But honey-chile, that's simply wonderful! Oh, it's just too, too wonderful! Oh, how under the sun could you-all deduct so much?"

Well, I could see no harm in explaining just a little. "It is because I have trained myself to be observant, like it says in Lesson II."

"Go on! Oh, please go on!"

"You are a Southerner because Southerners that come from south of Mason and Dixie's line say 'honey-chile' and 'you-all.'"

"You're right! I mean, you-all are right! Go on!"

"You are also a Southerner because there is a Georgia license on that 1939 Chevvy you parked outside and Georgia is in the South."

"Oh, Mr. Moran, you're uncanny!"

"There is dirt on the knees of the slacks you are wearing: soft garden dirt, not like the dirt on the floor of this garage."

"Of course! I love my garden dearly! But the husband in the Army?"

"You are wearing two silver bars on a pin on your sweater." I saw that right off because that was where I was looking when she said I was looking through the sweater which I wish I could do only I can't because my eyes are good but they are not that good. "Some fellows would say you got two boy-friends and they are both first lieutenants, but I know better. He's a captain and the wedding-ring on your hand says you married him."

"Right! Oh, absolutely right! But how could you-all tell he loves me? Tell me quick, honeychile!"

"Well, you've just had a hair-do, and they aren't cheap these days, and it is just after the first of the month, so I deduct he came through with a check beside what the government pays you, and he wouldn't do that if he didn't love you; but I guess any fellow that is married to a girl like you would love

you, so that is an easy one and you got to ask me something harder."

"Mr. Moran, you-all got second sight or something, and I am sure glad to know he loves me, because if he didn't, I would lay me down and die this minute, 'pon my word I would!" She looked real pretty when she said that, with the corners of her mouth pulled down like she was going to bust out crying, and then she grinned: "How did you-all know I wasn't married long? See any rice in my hair, honey-chile?"

I liked it when she called me 'honey-chile,' which nobody ever called me before, but I just said, "No rice, ma'am, which is good to eat, and folks don't throw it any more than they throw old shoes these days; but you have not been married long because you are too young, which I could see with half an eye the moment I looked at you, which was not exactly painful, I will tell the world, if you don't mind my being so frank and open, because that is my nature and I guess I am like that."

She wasn't offended, but that was because I have a way with women. She put her little hand on my arm, and I could feel my heart throw in a couple of extra beats. "Oh, Mr. Moran, you are even more wonderful than they told me you would be! Oh, I'm so glad I came to you-all! Mr. Moran, could I talk to you in confidence?"

I looked around, and there wasn't anybody in sight, and I remembered what I read in a magazine which Mrs. McRae gave me with a lot of other magazines to send to the Army and the Navy because when they are not killing people they like to read about murderers killing people, so I said, "Pray proceed, madam. I am all attention."

Well, I will not tell you in her own words what she said because every other word was "Oh," and a lot of it was strictly personal, like "Oh, Mr. Moran, when I look in your eyes I'm positively afraid of you-all! You are uncanny, you are Erie, etc., etc.," and "Oh, Mr. Moran, etc., etc.," but her name is Mrs. Diana Darby and she has hired me to watch out for Arson at the old Birdsall place every night until Sunday from 8 P.M. in the evening until 6 A.M. in the morning and she has paid me ten dollars in advance.

And now, how about those lessons?

TELEGRAM.

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

COLLECT SENDING LESSONS ELEMENTARY INTERMEDIATE ADVANCED ARSON EXPRESS COLLECT NINE DOLLARS.

CHIEF INSPECTOR, ACME INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL.

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

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

Well, I guess you just couldn't help telegraphing eleven words when you

could have said it in ten, and two of the words were "Collect," which was rubbing it in; and you didn't have to telegraph the lessons were coming because Charley Daniels who is the expressman brought them C.O.D. right after the telegram came and I was so mad I would have sent them right back only Charley would have opened the package himself because he says you can open a package before you pay for it, and it wouldn't do for a fellow like Charley to read about Arson and start the villagers talking in a little village.

So you got your nine dollars and I got the lessons, and I will say that fellow in Advanced Arson, which is the lesson I studied first, was pretty cute when he fixed a burning-glass so the sun would shine through it six months after he left home and touch off a pile of wood shavings and set the house afire, and how the insurance company found out that was what he did beats the Dutch; but I guess the insurance companies are a smart bunch and they study Advanced Arson also or they would be out of business.

Diana works for an insurance company, and that is why she wants a detective like me with lots of experience to help. They are worried about the Birdsall house, which is way at the south end of the village, because it is insured for a lot of money and they got the tip somebody is going to burn it down. And they want a brainy man to stop that and naturally they thought about me.

Diana says, "Oh, Mr. Moran, we're afraid of Arson."

I says, "I would be, too," though like I wrote you, the first time she said it I didn't know what that word meant only I was too clever to tell her that.

"Speaking confidentially, what do you know about the Birdsall place?"

"I know all about it."

"Oh, I knew we had gone to the right man when we picked you! Tell me, honey-chile!"

Well, I told her how it belonged to the Birdsall brothers, Abner, who is rich, and Silas, who is poor, and they have hated each other ever since their father died and left the house to his two sons jointly because he figured it would bring them together. Abner won't sell because then Silas will get half, and Silas can't sell without Abner agreeing which Abner won't; and Silas can't live there because he can't afford it, and Abner won't live there because then Silas could move right in with him; so nobody has lived there for nigh on to fifteen years and the place is going to rack and ruin.

Diana said, "Exactly. The poor brother would like to burn the house down and make money, and that is Arson, and we would like you-all to stop it, Mr. Moran."

That sounded funny to me. "If Silas Birdsall wanted to burn that there house for the insurance money why would he wait fifteen years to do it? And anyhow Silas is a good coot and he lives in a little shack on the Amenia Union road and he wouldn't burn down a chicken-house much less

a regular mansion with eight rooms and one bath. And if he has waited so long, what makes you think he will not wait fifteen years more?"

She said, "Oh, Mr. Moran, may I call you Peter, which is sudden, but I have taken a sudden liking to you-all, I could not tell you that, Peter. But I can tell you this, honey-chile: the insurance expires next Sunday and when it expires my company is not going to renew it. But we got a letter which says in confidence so I can't repeat what it says somebody is going to burn down that house between now and Sunday, and how much would you-all charge to sleep there five nights and keep an eye on things and let me know if you see anything suspicious and look out for the company's interests and not budge from that there place between 8 P.M. and 6 A.M. both inclusive daylight-saving time?"

I said, "Mrs. Darby, may I call you Diana, well, Diana, I guess that can be arranged if the financial arrangements are liberal like they should be."

"Oh, I'm so glad! I'm so glad! Oh, I'm sure we can satisfy you-all!"

"And how do I go back and fourth because I cannot use this boat on which I am working which belongs to the boss who trusts me and besides he wrote down what the speedometer said before he left?"

"Ride your bike, Peter. I see it standing against the wall of the garage, and it is not more than a couple of miles to the Birdsall place." Well, I was kind of disappointed because while a 1939 Chevvy is not so hot it is better than a bike, and she guessed what I was thinking. "I would let you have the loan of my car, honey-chile, only I will be living at the Surrey Inn all week and I got to use it when I inspect insurance for the insurance company also when I get a hair-do or a manicure, etc., etc."

"O. K., the bike will be extra. Do I have to stay awake all of them nights, because that will be extra also?"

"No, you don't have to stay awake if you're a light sleeper."

"O. K., that describes me, I am a light sleeper like I am a light dancer, and how much time do I get off?"

"Time off?"

"When the boss and the missus is out of town I go to Harvey Link's new store on North Main Street every night, and I shoot pool with Harvey on the pool-table which he has in the back room. Harvey will think it is funny if I don't stop in."

"You'll have to give it up for this week, honey-chile. Oh, Peter, you will do that for me, won't you?"

She is looking right up at me when she says that, and our faces are not more than six inches apart, and if I tried to kiss her she would have to duck mighty quick to get out of the way; but I am thinking how much can I ask her for sleeping at Birdsall's for five nights and what is the most the insurance company will pay and can I trust her till the end of the week or do I ask her for something right away, and I am hard and like steel which is the right way for a great detective. I

says, "Diana, how will you know if I stay on the job? Maybe I will be getting on my bike and shooting a couple of games with Harvey. . . ."

That is only a bluff. Of course I wouldn't be doing that because it is a good four miles from Birdsall's at the south end of the village to Harvey's store on North Main Street, and Harvey says he can tell when I have been riding my bike because it hurts my stroke, but she doesn't let me finish. "Honey-chile, acting as the representative of the insurance company I will tell Harvey that you will be working on a secret mission until Sunday, and I will also drop in once in a while at Birdsall's to see you are on the job."

It was my turn to say "Oh!"

"It wouldn't do any good for little me to watch, because I am not strong enough to wrestle with Silas Birdsall when he comes in the dead of night to burn down his house like it says in the confidential letter, but you can stop him, Peter, and I will look in unexpectedly when you are on duty just to make sure you are earning your money and to get your reports. And now, how much will it be?"

Well, we struck a bargain and it is a secret, so I can't tell you how much the insurance company is going to pay me, which is nobody's business but mine and theirs and Diana's anyhow; but she slipped me a ten-spot in the garage taking it out of the right hip-pocket of her slacks which did not have any front pockets because that is the way they are made, and she will have four twenties and another ten-spot ready for me Sunday morning if the Birdsall place has not burned down before then, and I guess it will be the easiest money I ever earned.

And the night before last which was Tuesday was the first I kept watch at Birdsall's. The house was locked up and I couldn't get in though I tried the doors and the windows, but I brought a blanket and a pillow and a flashlight and I was tight asleep on the side porch when Diana came by and I didn't wake up until she stepped on me in the dark.

I said, "Stop! Who goes there? Advance, friend, and be countersigned."

She said, "Don't shoot, Peter. It's little me," and then she said, "Oh, you poor dear, why don't you go in the house to sleep? It would be more comfortable, and besides it looks like it was going to rain."

I said, "No. The house is locked, which was the first thing I investigated, and if I broke in Abner Birdsall would be mean enough to have me sent to the clink for it."

She said, "Oh!" just like that, "Oh!"

"If a window was broken, I could sleep in the house, but if I broke it myself it would be breaking and entering like it says in Lesson V."

She thought that one over. She took my hand. "Peter, would you like me to break a window for you?"

I said, "No. I am on the watch, and besides I am a law-abiding citizen," and I fixed my pillow again, and

maybe I was dreaming, so I will not swear to it, but if I had to swear to it I would swear that Diana kissed me good night after I got settled down with the blanket up under my chin to go to sleep.

TELEGRAM.

PETER MORAN,

C/O MR. R. B. MCRAE, SURREY, CONN. CASE SOUNDS FISHY STOP INSURANCE COMPANY FEARING ARSON WOULD CANCEL POLICY IMMEDIATELY STOP WIRE NAME AND ADDRESS OF COMPANY.

CHIEF INSPECTOR, ACME INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL.

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

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

I didn't answer your telegram which came yesterday which was Friday because I am not so dumn as you think and if that is what you think you got another guess coming. When I wrote you Diana paid me ten dollars in advance before I started work you jacked up the price of the lessons from one dollar apiece to three dollars apiece. Three times three is nine, and what there is left out of the ten dollars after paying Charley Daniels the express collect looks like what is left out of my pay when I have been shooting pool with Harvey Link and my stroke has not been working right, and that is not counting the telegram I sent you and the two collect telegrams you sent me and I had to pay for all of them. And if I told you the name of the insurance company you could telegraph them you will take the case for less leaving me out in the cold; so my answer is a dignified silence besides which I don't know the name of the insurance company.

It is Saturday morning now and the job will be finished tomorrow and then I will be sitting pretty. But I will say I am having a fine time reading the lessons, and I will not forget the fellow who trained a homing pigeon and when he went to Florida he took it along and when he was good and ready he let it go and it flew all the way back to North Wilbraham, Mass., and when it walked through the entrance in the coop there was an electric wire which was hooked up with a battery and some chemicals and when the house burned down the fellow who owned it was living 1,681 miles away, but they pinned it on him just the same because the pigeon coop did not burn and when they looked at it they said, "Hello, look at the wire!" I guess that fellow found out it wasn't worth the trouble because if he had stayed in North Wilbraham he could have tossed a match in the house and he would have ended up in jail anyhow, only he would not have had a vacation in Florida. And I liked the story about the bright lad who bought a mile of movie film which burns like nobody's business and he unreeled it all the way from the storage warehouse he was hired to burn down to

the saloon where he was going to have his alibi drinking beer at the bar, but when he touched a match to the end of the film and the fire began to run through the streets of Joplin, Mo., all the way back to the storage warehouse, he was out of luck, because a cop who saw the film recognized it was pictures of Betty Grable's legs and he cut off a big hunk because he did not want to see those pictures going to waste, and when the fire came along the cop said "There is more to this than meets the eye," and he followed the ashes of the film right through the door of the saloon and after that it was curtains for the bright lad. And I liked the story about the fellow with the cake of ice which melted when spring came, so the bomb would not go off till then only he forgot the water would wet the powder, and the story about the fellow who hooked up the bell on his telephone to a lot of matches and when he shut the house and called up from long distance in Chicago they did not answer and the house would have burned down and he would have been richer by $30,000 like he planned only the operator gave him the wrong number so that story ended like he did not expect.

I was prowling around the Birdsall house last night because you can never tell I might find some pictures of Betty Grable's legs etc., etc., when I heard Diana's car coming coughing like it was missing on two or three cylinders, so I hid in the bushes near the road and I waited till she got out and then I grabbed her and held on.

A low voice says, "It's me, honeychile."

I says like I was surprised, "Diana!"

She says, "That's right, Peter. I'm checking up on you-all, just to see if you're doing a good job."

I says, "Well, it is pretty dark, so you can't see good, but I will tell you I am." I turned my electric flashlight on her, and she was looking prettier than ever, with the orange lipstick, and the orange toenails, and the sweater with the pin with two silver bars.

She says, "Are you still sleeping on the porch, Peter?"

I says, "Come with me, and I will show you where I am sleeping."

The barn is not more than ten or twelve feet from the house, and the door is locked, but most of the windows are broken and anybody can get in, which I found out the night before. I took her by the hand, and I helped her through a window and up into the haymow, where it is warm and comfortable, especially after I have lit a candle so I don't use up the batteries in my flashlight, because you can't buy those batteries today on account of the war and if they go dead on you you are just out of luck. So she sits down in the hay with me, and I showed her Lesson XXXV, which is Advanced Arson if you have forgotten, and you can bet her eyes stuck out when I told her about the fellow in North Wilbraham, Mass., and the fellow in Joplin, Mo., and the other fellows in Advanced Arson because I

have not worked down to Intermediate Arson and Elementary Arson yet and I expect the stories there will not be half as good. "Oh," she says, "that men could be so wicked!"

"Yes, Diana," I says, "sooner or later you got to learn the facts of life."

Her hand is laying on mine, maybe accidental and maybe not, and I roll over to her a little and she does not roll away, and the first thing you know her arms are around my neck and my arms are around her waist. And I observe that orange lipstick don't taste worse than the other kinds, and she has a cute little nose which keeps getting in the way and I laugh about it and so does she and I tell her about a picture which is called "What the prettiest girl in the world looks like while you are kissing her," with just one big eye instead of two though I observed she has got two, and she looks like that and we laugh some more.

By and by I says, "Diana, you certainly are a warm baby."

She says, "Oh, Peter, have you forgotten I was born in Mobile in Georgia where it is topical, and look out, honey-chile, or the candle will fall over in the hay and then I will be a lot warmer than I want to be."

I says, "O. K.," and I fix the candle, but I had found out what I was after, because while she was hugging me and kissing me and running her fingers through my hair which has been done by a lot of other girls, I was slipping my hands in the hip-pockets in her slacks which are all the pockets she has got in those slacks because I wanted to see if she had four twenty-dollar bills and one ten-spot, like she promised, but there was nothing in those hip-pockets except a handkerchief and the keys to her car and a compact with orange lipstick I could deduct though I did not take it out and open it, and the compact was so small you could not put one ten-spot in it let alone one ten-spot and four twenties.

By and by she stops kissing me, and she holds my head in her two hands which are over my ears, and I peck at her lips and she dodges, and I peck again and she dodges, and I peck again and this time I do it real fast and I do not miss. It is a long kiss which reminds me of the movies, because they do not have those long ones there.

She sighs and she says, "Like bobbing for apples on Halloween when I was just a young tot," and I says, "Yes," but now I am thinking about her hip-pockets and the money which she promised me which I did not find in them, and I am hard and like steel.

I says, "Diana, now that you have seen what a good worker I am and how I always do every job thorough, how about giving me a lift down to Harvey's so I can shoot a couple of games with him?"

I says that just to get a rise out of her because it is now 2 A.M. in the morning and folks in Surrey do not stay up that late.

She says, "Oh, no!"

"Why not?"

"Honey-chile, I'm paying you-all to stay right here."

"How do I know I'm going to be paid?"

"Oh, Peter, I promised."

"Well, show me the money."

She looks at me funny, which I can observe by the candle light. "Oh, so that is why you were going through my pockets and you thought I did not notice it? I didn't get the idea right away." She stands up and she laughs, and she is as pretty as ever when she laughs, though there is not much orange lipstick left on her lips after what they have been through. "Oh, Peter, I am young and innocent, but my old colored mammy, way down South in Mobile, where I have lived all my life, always told me it is reckless to leave cash money laying loose in your pockets when you are expecting to be invited up into a haymow, so I have put the money in a safe place and you will get it sure as shooting Sunday morning."

"What is the safe place?"

"Oh, I hid it in the car."

"Diana, that is a bad place to hide cash money, especially if it is my money. Suppose you lose it. . . ."

"Don't worry, honey-chile. There's plenty more where it came from. But I do declare, honey-chile, when it comes to making love you got a style which is different from the other boys I have met."

Well, all the girls tell me that, so it is not exactly news to me, and she kisses me good night a couple of times and I would like it better only my mind is not on kissing and I don't know why.

She says, "Sleep well, honey-chile, no, you needn't see me back to the car, but I will be here tomorrow night at about the same time, and if you are very good maybe I will come up in the haymow again," and I turn on the flashlight so she can see her way through the window which has some broken glass in it.

The moon is up now and I watched her walking down to the road, and there was something funny about her only I do not know what it is until she has started back for the village. Then it comes to me like a ton of brick: the first time I saw her there was fresh soft dirt on her knees from working in her garden, and there was fresh soft dirt in the same place tonight, and what would it be doing there if she is living at the Surrey Inn like she says and she would not be working in somebody else's garden? And there is something else funny, because why did she expect I was going to invite her up into the haymow if she did not know I was sleeping there? And when I turned around to blowout the candle and go to sleep the candle was shining on something bright and silvery, and it was the pin with the two silver bars she was wearing on her sweater and I deducted it fell off when she hugged me in the hay.

I looked at the pin and I thought about all the money that is coming to me and I had an idea and maybe I will tell you about it in my next letter.

NIGHT LETTER.
PETER MORAN,
C/O MR. R. B. MCRAE, SURREY, CONN. COLLECT MOBILE NOT IN GEORGIA STOP SOUTHERN CHILDREN DONT BOB FOR APPLES HALLOWEEN BECAUSE APPLES NOT GROWN IN SOUTH STOP DIRT ON KNEES SUGGESTS DIANA DIGGING FOR BURIED TREASURE DURING DAY HIRING YOU GUARD PREMISES NIGHT STOP ADVISE EXAMINING GROUNDS FOR FRESHLY TURNED EARTH STOP IF HELP NEEDED WIRE IMMEDIATELY.
CHIEF INSPECTOR, ACME INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL.

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

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

Well, the Lakeville telephone operator who telephones telegrams to Surrey says, "The night letter is collect."

I says, "I have been paying for a lot of collect telegrams lately. I would like to listen to this one before I agree to pay for it."

She says, "No, you cannot do that which is against the company's rules, but it is from the Chief Inspector, Peter, and it begins with something you had ought to know, besides which it is fifty words exactly with no words extra."

I says, "Well, if that is the case, go ahead and shoot," and after she reads it I says, "What was it I had ought to know?" and she says, "Peter, you had ought to know your geography," and hangs up.

That is a low-down trick to play on me, because I knew all along Mobile was in Florida and if Diana lied when she said she bobbed for apples there what is the difference because you can bet she played other children's games especially post-office. But I got on to her when she forgot to call me "you-all" after she got mad at me in the haymow, and the less said about the rest of your telegram the better, so I will say nothing excepting it was a good guess about buried treasure only it wasn't buried.

Now it is Monday and the case is over, and I will tell you about the idea I had even if I did not get around to using it.

I do not trust the opposite sect, especially when they owe me money, so on Saturday night I sat in the haymow studying Advanced Arson so long the candle burned down a couple of inches and it was new when I started, but I did not have my mind on Arson. I was waiting for Diana but I was not going to let her go until she paid up, so when it got to be near 2 A.M. in the morning I sneaked down to the side of the road and I hid my bicycle in some bushes and I hid in the bushes also. I could see the light from the candle in the barn and Diana would see it; only when she got out to go up in the haymow like she promised I would unscrew the cap on one of her tires and I would let the air out with that pin with the two silver bars,

and then she couldn't drive back to the village and she would pay up before I changed the tire for her and maybe I would get two bits extra for changing the tire.

I got worried when the village clock struck 2 and she did not come; and then it struck the half-hour which was half-past two and the moon began to shine and it was lonely waiting except for the candle shining from the haymow where I left it.

Then I heard her old boat coughing while it climbed the hill, and it sounded better than before so I deducted she had bought new sparkplugs, and I waited, hiding in the bushes.

She stopped about twenty feet away.

She opened the door of her car and she looked out.

She could see the candle all right, because she was looking right at it, and I deducted she would wait a minute and touch up her nose and her lips and her cheeks before she went to the haymow; but it teaches you you must not trust women because all of a sudden she let in the gears again and she went on, and in the moonlight I could see her turning around where the road gets wider and you can turn without backing. I was thinking that over, because maybe she was going to stop when she got the car turned around, but she didn't. She didn't even slow up when she went by again. Her windows were open, and I could hear her laughing fit to split — and I jumped on my bike and I followed.

Well, a bike cannot keep up with a car even if it is a ratty old one which cannot do over 30 or 40 miles an hour, and I was worried. It wasn't so easy to see the car, either, because she forgot to turn on the lights; but the road is straight all the way to the village, and every now and then I could spot her way ahead.

I wasn't a bit surprised when she passed the Surrey Inn and kept on going. I followed, riding on one side of the road so if she looked back she wouldn't see me, and she went straight through the village as fast as that old jaloppy would take her.

She turned into North Main Street more than a mile ahead, and I says to myself, "Peter, theregoesyour money and you can kiss it goodby," but when I got to the corner and raced around, never expecting to lay eyes on her again, there was her car parked in front of Harvey Link's store, and there was no mistaking it because I could see the Georgia license plain by the big light they got outside the Surrey National Bank.

I back-pedaled so hard I almost fell off the bike because I didn't know if Diana was sitting in the car or what she was doing, and I hid in the shadows just in time because the door to Harvey's opened and she came out and she put something in the car and she went right back in the store again. Well, maybe that would be my money which she promised to have ready for me, and maybe she was going to keep her word and not cheat me after I worked so hard, and when I sneaked

up to the car and turned my flashlight on what was in it, I was right, because there was a stack of five-dollar bills that must have been a foot high besides two stacks of tens and one of twenties.

A bargain is a bargain, so all I took was one ten and four twenties, though when I saw all that cash money I wished I had asked her for more especially when she had such a lot. But I am honest even if I am a detective and in my hand I had her pin with the silver bars and it was her property which I wanted to give back to her, so I looked for a place to put it. If I dropped it on the floor of the car it would get lost. If I put it on the seat she would sit on it sure thing in the dark, and the pin was long and sharp and it would hurt. I looked at the ignition lock on the car and the key was not there, so I pushed the pin in the lock good and hard with the two silver bars showing plain where she could not miss them, and I got back to the shadows quick before she came out once more and Harvey was with her and this time they were both carrying packages. I would have said, "Hello, Harvey," and "Hello, Diana, why didn't you tell me you were friends?" Only I was mad because she had so much money and she could have been liberal with me just as easy as not.

After they went inside I wheeled the bike around the corner. I had earned my pay all right because now it would be 6 A.M. in a couple of hours.

I started riding home.

I went slow because it was quiet and peaceful and I had lots to think about, and besides the moon was behind a cloud and it was hard to see the road.

I was tired, or I would have gone to Birdsall's first to pick up those lessons about Arson, but I figured I would stop in Sunday afternoon or maybe Monday morning after I had a good sleep. And then the fire-siren started screeching and lights started going on all over the village and there was a bright glow from the south and it was growing brighter every minute.

I was off Main Street by that time, and I got off the bike and watched. First a couple of cars went by heading south, and then the fire-engine, going lickety-spit with the muffler-cutout wide open, and then a lot more cars, because when there is a fire in a New England village everybody goes and if it is in the night they don't even wait to get dressed. They put on raincoats or dressing-gowns or whatever is handy, and if it is in winter they stand near the fire where it is sociable and warm. A lot of bikes headed south also, with boys and men riding on them, and when I joined the parade I guess I was near the tail end of it. . . .

Yes, it was the Birdsall house, and it was one of the best fires we ever had in Surrey. It was the barn that had caught first, so the fire department turned the hoses on it and they saved some of the hay, but while they were doing that the fire spread to the house and that burned to the ground.

Hank Pruitt, who is chief of the volunteer fire company, says to me,

"Pete, what do you make of it?"

I says, "What do you mean, Hank, what do I make out of what?"

"Well, you're a detective I'm told. Why should an old house catch fire when there ain't nobody living in it? Why should the barn catch fire when it's been closed for fifteen years? Somebody started that there fire, Pete. Maybe it was some bum who was sleeping in the barn, and then we'll find his body when we get the ashes cooled down. What is your guess?"

I started to answer and then I stopped, because in school once when I was making a noise the teacher had me write a hundred times "Silence is golden," and the fellow who said that said a mouthful. I says, "Hank, I am a good detective, and I never guess. That is my last word, and that is final."

And now I will paste in a clipping from the Lakeville paper:

BANK ROBBERY FOILED IN SURREY

A daring attempt to rob the Surrey National Bank in the wee sma' hours early Sunday morning was foiled by the alertness of Trooper Alonzo Pratt of the Canaan Barracks. Trooper Pratt was hurrying to the fire at the old Birdsall place when he saw two persons who had been trying to start an automobile with Georgia license plates leap from it and run away as he approached. They disappeared in the darkness, but the trooper's suspicions had been aroused. He examined the automobile and found it crammed with packages of money. "There was more money there than I have ever seen in my life," said Pratt.

Since the car was parked in front of the bank, Pratt blew his police whistle, and citizens who responded were sent for H. O. Bascomb, president, and J. Harry Tefft, cashier, by whom a hurried investigation was made. It was found that a tunnel had been dug from the rear of an adjoining store to the vault of the bank, and that all of the cash, aggregating $41,783.47 had been removed. With Trooper Pratt and town constables Hubbard and Fisk guarding them with drawn revolvers, Mr. Bascomb and Mr. Tefft counted the money as it was brought back into the bank, and found a total of $41,693.47, indicating that the robbers got away with only $90.

The *News* reporter was allowed to crawl through the tunnel which connected the store and the bank vault. It was a marvel of ingenuity, having been excavated through soft dirt but having been shored so cleverly that it could not collapse, and it must have taken a long time to construct.

According to Trooper Pratt, the store had been recently rented by a man who called himself Harvey Link, and who has not been seen since Saturday. Trooper Pratt said: "Harvey Link dug that tunnel. How he got the time to do it I don't know. He wasn't running any business in that store, but there was a pool-table in the back room, and there was some friend dropping in every afternoon and every night to play pool with him. I passed his store after midnight a week ago, and he was still playing."

Pratt states positively that one of the persons who jumped from the car as he approached was the man known as Harvey Link. He describes Link's accomplice as a woman who was wearing a sweater. It is believed that Link and the woman boarded the milk-train which

stops at Surrey Station at 3:53 A.M. and escaped. The police have already identified the automobile as the property of an Army captain, from whose wife it was stolen in Worcester, Mass., ten days ago.

In the gutter in front of the Link store the *News* reporter found part of a broken pin representing an Army captain's bars in miniature. It was hoped that the inscription engraved on the reverse, "Jack to Irene, June, 1944," would supply a clue to the identity of the robbers, but it was soon discovered that the pin had been stolen with the car. By a remarkable coincidence the pointed, or business end of the pin, was found in the ignition lock of the automobile. "That was why they couldn't start the car," said Trooper Pratt. "The pin was pushed in so deep that we couldn't get a grip on it with pliers, and when we tried other tools, they just pushed it in further. We couldn't get it out until mechanics from the service station took the lock apart."

Mr. H. O. Bascomb, president of the bank, asks the *News* to state: "Ninety dollars is a trifling loss to the Surrey National Bank, whose deposits, in any event, are guaranteed by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. The bank is grateful to Trooper Pratt, who frightened away the robbers and almost caught them, and we would pay him a liberal reward if it were not forbidden by the laws of the state of Connecticut. In the meantime we continue to solicit the business of our friends and neighbors, particularly calling their attention to our safe-deposit department, which is protected by a modern vault."

The bank's advertisement, inviting contractors in Surrey and nearby villages to submit sealed bids for putting a new reinforced concrete floor into the vault will be found on another page.

The good citizens of Surrey had plenty of thrills in the wee sma' hours early Sunday morning, for the old Birdsall house, at the southern end of the village, burned to the ground at about the same time. The loss was covered by insurance.

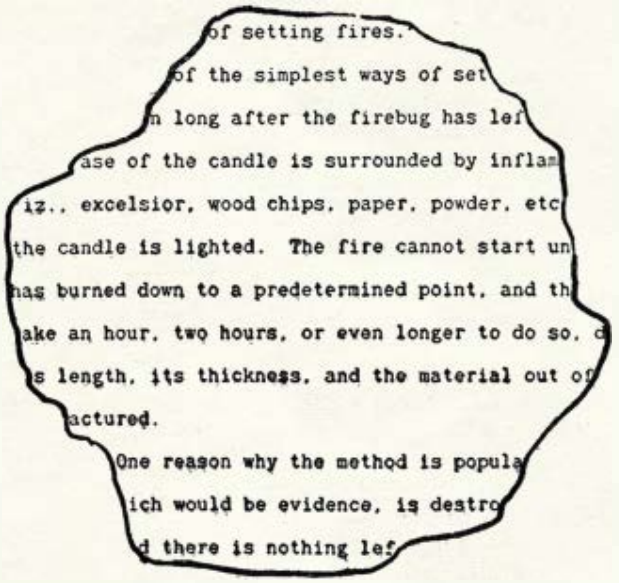
Well, I can put two and two together just as good as the next fellow. It took four or five nights to dig that tunnel. I used to drop in regular, like I said, and Harvey had got to get me out of the way because if I saw a big hole in the floor in the back room I would have started deducting and he could not let a brainy detective like me do that. Harvey figured it was worth money to keep me away, and that was why Diana hired me to sleep at Birdsall's and why she kept her eye on me because they didn't want me dropping in and catching Harvey digging. But I was brainier than they thought especially when I saw the soft fresh dirt on Diana's pants which meant she was digging also, and if there was a reward I would put in a claim for it right now but as there is no reward I will not argue with Alonzo Pratt who is entitled to it.

P.S. A man from the insurance company just came to see me. He says, "We understand you're the local private detective, and we'd like you to look into the Birdsall fire. The place was insured with us, and the fire was no accident."

I says, "What makes you think that?"

"Here is a piece of paper which we found in the ashes of the barn. Most

of it got burned but you can read what is left:



Well, I never read that before. Maybe it is in Intermediate Arson or in Elementary Arson, but you remember I started with Advanced Arson, and I never did get down to that easy stuff; and now I'm out the nine dollars I paid for the lessons besides the express collect I paid to Charley Daniels.

The man says, "The water from the hoses hit this piece. That's why the edges burned but the middle didn't."

I says, "Gee whillikens," which is sometimes the best thing to say.

"Mr. Moran, maybe the bank can't pay a reward to the cop who saved a pile of money for it, but the insurance companies ain't like that. No, siree sir! The fellows that touched off the Birdsall place didn't get into my company heavy, because we wouldn't insure a shack like that for more than a couple of thousand bucks; but if you can help us to get our hands on them, we'll make it worth your while."

I think that over, and I says, "Them? Them?"

"Sure!"

"More than one fellow?"

"Yep, and we'd like to get 'em both. There's the fellow who set the fire. He's small fry, and he's not important. But there's the guy that wrote out directions for him, and he's the master mind. If we can catch that guy, maybe we can break up the whole ring. Get it?"

I says, "Sure, I get it."

He says, "Take good care of that paper."

"I will."

"This is my card. Telegraph me if you find out something."

"I will."

He shakes hands with me before he drives off. "This is your retainer," he says, and when I look at the palm of my hand, there is money in it, only I will not tell you how much because I earned it and every cent of it is mine.

Then I put the paper away, and I put it away so careful that maybe I won't remember where I put it. I am good at remembering, but sometimes I am just as good at forgetting.

Hoping you are the same,

P. MORAN.

It is a strange coincidence that Dashiell Hammett's "The Tenth Clue" is the tenth Dashiell Hammett story your Editor has reprinted in EQMM and in anthologies. Here is the complete record to date for those of you who might wish to backtrack on the Hammett saga and read or re-read the earlier gems:

"Too Many Have Lived" — EQMM, Fall 1941
"A Man Called Spade" — 101 YEARS' ENTERTAINMENT
"Fly Paper" — EQMM, July 1942
"His Brother's Keeper" — SPORTING BLOOD
"They Can Only Hang You Once" — EQMM, March 1943
"The Judge Laughed Last" — EQMM, March 1944
"One Hour" — EQMM, May 1944
"The Gutting of Couffignal" — EQMM, November 1944
"Death on Pine Street" — EQMM, January 1945

(This record does not include the editing of the first three books of Hammett shorts — THE ADVENTURES OF SAM SPADE AND OTHER STORIES, THE CONTINENTAL OP and THE RETURN OF THE CONTINENTAL OP, which contain six stories not listed above.)

"The Tenth Clue" is another Continental Op story. It started like a detective's dream. Clues galore, clues to burn — nine of them in a single case! All the Continental Op had to do was pursue one clue after the other, and with time and patience the case was bound to crack. There was only one hitch: it didn't. Was our Continental Op discouraged? Not by a long shot! The Op added, subtracted, and divided — and came up with a tenth clue! And that was the clue that broke the criminal's back . . .

THE TENTH CLUE

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

MR. LEOPOLD GANTVOORT is not at home," the servant who opened the door said, "but his son, Mr. Charles, is — if you wish to see him."

"No. I had an appointment with Mr. Leopold Gantvoort for nine or a little after. It's just nine now. No doubt he'll be back soon. I'll wait."

"Very well, sir."

He stepped aside for me to enter the house, took my overcoat and hat, guided me to a room on the second floor — Gantvoort's library — and left me. I picked up a magazine from the stack on the table, pulled an ash tray over and made myself comfortable.

An hour passed. I stopped reading and began to grow impatient. Another hour passed — and I was fidgeting.

A clock somewhere below had begun to strike eleven when a young man of twenty-five or -six, tall and slender,

with remarkably white skin and very dark hair and eyes, came into the room.

"My father hasn't returned yet," he said. "It's too bad that you should have been kept waiting all this time. Isn't there anything I could do for you? I am Charles Gantvoort."

"No, thank you." I got up from my chair, accepting the courteous dismissal. "I'll get in touch with him tomorrow."

"I'm sorry," he murmured, and we moved toward the door together.

As we reached the hall an extension telephone in one corner of the room we were leaving buzzed softly, and I halted in the doorway while Charles Gantvoort went over to answer it.

His back was toward me as he spoke into the instrument.

"Yes. Yes. Yes!" — sharply — "*What?* Yes" — very weakly — "Yes."

He turned slowly around and faced me with a face that was gray and tortured, with wide shocked eyes and gaping mouth.

"Father," he gasped, "is dead — killed!"

"Where? How?"

"I don't know. That was the police. They want me to come down at once."

He straightened his shoulders with an effort, pulling himself together, put down the telephone, and his face fell into less strained lines.

"You will pardon my —"

"Mr. Gantvoort," I interrupted his apology, "I am connected with the Continental Detective Agency. Your father called up this afternoon and asked that a detective be sent to see him tonight. He said his life had been threatened. He hadn't definitely engaged us, however, so unless you —"

"Certainly! You are employed! If the police haven't already caught the murderer I want you to do everything possible to catch him."

"All right! Let's get down to headquarters."

Half a dozen police detectives were waiting for us when he reached the detective bureau. O'Gar — a bullet-headed detective-sergeant who dresses like the village constable in a movie, wide-brimmed black hat and all, but who isn't to be put out of the reckoning on that account — was in charge of the investigation. He and I had worked on two or three jobs together before, and hit it off excellently.

He led us into one of the small offices below the assembly room. Spread out on the flat top of a desk there were a dozen or more objects.

"I want you to look these things over carefully," the detective-sergeant told Gantvoort, "and pick out the ones that belonged to your father."

I looked at the things on the table while Charles Gantvoort made his selections. An empty jewel case; a memoranda book; three letters in slit envelopes that were addressed to the dead man; some other papers; a bunch of keys; a fountain pen; two white linen handkerchiefs; two pistol cartridges; a gold watch, with a gold knife and a gold pencil attached to it by a gold-and-platinum chain; two leather

wallets, one of them very new and the other worn; some money, both paper and silver; and a small portable typewriter, bent and twisted, and matted with hair and blood. Some of the other things were smeared with blood and some were clean.

Gantvoort picked out the watch and its attachments, the keys, the fountain pen, the memoranda book, the handkerchiefs, the letters and other papers, and the older wallet.

"These were father's," he told us. "I've never seen any of the others before. I don't know, of course, how much money he had with him tonight, so I can't say how much of this is his."

"You're sure none of the rest of this stuff was his?" O'Gar asked.

"I don't think so, but I'm not sure. Whipple could tell you." He turned to me. "He's the man who let you in tonight. He looked after father, and he'd know positively whether any of these other things belonged to him."

One of the police detectives went to the telephone to tell Whipple to come down immediately.

I resumed the questioning.

"Is anything that your father usually carried with him missing? Anything of value?"

"Not that I know of. All of the things that he might have been expected to have with him seem to be here."

"At what time tonight did he leave the house?"

"Before seven-thirty. Possibly as early as seven."

"Know where he was going?"

"He didn't tell me, but I supposed he was going to call on Miss Dexter."

The faces of the police detectives brightened, and their eyes grew sharp. I suppose mine did, too. There are many, many murders with never a woman in them anywhere; but seldom a very conspicuous killing.

"Who's this Miss Dexter?" O'Gar took up the inquiry.

"She's well—" Charles Gantvoort hesitated. "Well, father was on very friendly terms with her and her brother. He usually called on them — on her several evenings a week. In fact, I suspected that he intended marrying her."

"Who and what is she?"

"Father became acquainted with them six or seven months ago. I've met them several times, but don't know them very well. Miss Dexter — Creda is her given name — is about twenty-three years old, I should judge, and her brother Madden is four or five years older. He is in New York now, or on his way there, to transact some business for father."

"Did your father tell you he was going to marry her?"

"No; but it was pretty obvious that he was very much — ah — infatuated. We had some words over it a few days ago — last week. Not a quarrel, you understand, but words. From the way he talked I feared that he meant to marry her."

"What do you mean 'feared'?" O'Gar snapped at that word.

Charles Gantvoort's pale face flushed a little, and he cleared his throat em-

barrassedly.

"I don't want to put the Dexters in a bad light to you. I don't think — I'm sure they had nothing to do with father's — with this. But I didn't care especially for them — didn't like them. I thought they were — well — fortune hunters, perhaps. Father wasn't fabulously wealthy, but he had considerable means. And, while he wasn't feeble, still he was past fifty-seven, old enough for me to feel that Creda Dexter was more interested in his money than in him."

"How about your father's will?"

"The last one of which I have any knowledge — drawn up two or three years ago — left everything to my wife and me jointly. Father's attorney, Mr. Murray Abernathy, could tell you if there was a later will, but I hardly think there was."

"Your father had retired from business, hadn't he?"

"Yes; he turned his import and export business over to me about a year ago. He had quite a few investments scattered around, but he wasn't actively engaged in the management of any concern."

O'Gar looked at me.

"Anything else you want to ask?"

"Yes. Mr. Gantvoort, do you know, or did you ever hear your father or anyone else speak of an Emil Bonfils?"

"No."

"Did your father ever tell you that he had received a threatening letter? Or that he had been shot at on the street?"

"No."

"Was your father in Paris in 1902?"

"Very likely. He used to go abroad every year up until the time of his retirement from business."

O'Gar and I took Gantvoort around to the morgue to see his father, then. The dead man wasn't pleasant to look at, even to O'Gar and me, who hadn't known him except by sight. I remembered him as a small wiry man, always smartly tailored, and with a brisk springiness that was far younger than his years.

He lay now with the top of his head beaten into a red pulpy mess.

We left Gantvoort at the morgue and set out afoot for the Hall of Justice.

"What's this deep stuff you're pulling about Emil Bonfils and Paris in 1902?" the detective-sergeant asked as soon as we were out in the street.

"This: the dead man phoned the Agency this afternoon and said he had received a threatening letter from an Emil Bonfils with whom he had had trouble in Paris in 1902. He also said that Bonfils had shot at him the previous evening, in the street. He wanted somebody to come around and see him about it tonight. And he said that under no circumstances were the police to be let in on it — that he'd rather have Bonfils get him than have the trouble made public. That's all he would say over the phone; and that's how I happened to be on hand when Charles Gantvoort was notified of his father's death."

O'Gar whistled softly.

"That's something!" he exclaimed.

"Wait till we get back to headquarters — I'll show you something."

Whipple was waiting in the assembly room when we arrived at headquarters. His face at first glance was as smooth and mask-like as when he had admitted me to the house on Russian Hill earlier in the evening. But beneath his perfect servant's manner he was twitching and trembling.

We took him into the little office where we had questioned Charles Gantvoort.

Whipple verified all that the dead man's son had told us. He was positive that neither the typewriter, the jewel case, the two cartridges, or the newer wallet had belonged to Gantvoort.

We couldn't get him to put his opinion of the Dexters in words, but that he disapproved of them was easily seen. Miss Dexter, he said, had called up on the telephone three times this night at about eight o'clock, at nine, and at nine-thirty. She had asked for Mr. Leopold Gantvoort each time, but she had left no message. Whipple was of the opinion that she was expecting Gantvoort, and he had not arrived.

He knew nothing, he said, of Emil Bonfils or of any threatening letters. Gantvoort had been out the previous night from eight until midnight. Whipple had not seen him closely enough when he came home to say whether he seemed excited or not. Gantvoort usually carried about a hundred dollars in his pockets.

"Is there anything that you know of that Gantvoort had on his person tonight which isn't among these things on the desk?" O'Gar asked.

"No, sir. Everything seems to be here — watch and chain, money, memorandum book, wallet, keys, handkerchiefs, fountain pen — everything that I know of."

"Did Charles Gantvoort go out tonight?"

"No, sir. He and Mrs. Gantvoort were at home all evening."

"Positive?"

Whipple thought a moment.

"Yes, sir, I'm fairly certain. But I know Mrs. Gantvoort wasn't out. To tell the truth, I didn't see Mr. Charles from about eight o'clock until he came downstairs with this gentleman" — pointing to me — "at eleven. But I'm fairly certain he was home all evening. I think Mrs. Gantvoort said he was."

Then O'Gar put another question — one that puzzled me at the time.

"What kind of collar buttons did Mr. Gantvoort wear?"

"You mean Mr. Leopold?"

"Yes."

"Plain gold ones, made all in one piece. They had a London jeweler's mark on them."

"Would you know them if you saw them?"

"Yes, sir."

We let Whipple go home then.

"Don't you think," I suggested when O'Gar and I were alone with this deskload of evidence that didn't mean anything at all to me yet, "it's time you were loosening up and telling me what's what?"

"I guess so — listen! A man named Lagerquist, a grocer, was driving through Golden Gate Park tonight, and passed a machine standing on a dark road, with its lights out. He thought there was something funny about the way the man in it was sitting at the wheel, so he told the first patrolman he met about it.

"The patrolman investigated and found Gantvoort sitting at the wheel — dead — with his head smashed in and this dingus" — putting one hand on the bloody typewriter — "on the seat beside him. That was at a quarter of ten. The doc says Gantvoort was killed — his skull crushed — with this typewriter.

"The dead man's pockets, we found, had all been turned inside out; and all this stuff on the desk, except this new wallet, was scattered about in the car — some of it on the floor and some on the seats. This money was there too — nearly a hundred dollars of it. Among the papers was this."

He handed me a sheet of white paper upon which the following had been typewritten:

> L. F. G. —
>
> I want what is mine. 6,000 miles and 21 years are not enough to hide you from the victim of your treachery. I mean to have what you stole.
>
> E. B.

"L. F. G. could be Leopold F. Gantvoort," I said. "And E. B. could be Emil Bonfils. Twenty-one years is the time from 1902 to 1923, and 6,000 miles is, roughly, the distance between Paris and San Francisco."

I laid the letter down and picked up the jewel case. It was a black imitation leather one, lined with white satin, and unmarked in any way.

Then I examined the cartridges. There were two of them, S. W. .45-caliber, and deep crosses had been cut in their soft noses — an old trick that makes the bullet spread out like a saucer when it hits.

"These in the car, too?"

"Yep — and this."

From a vest pocket O'Gar produced a short tuft of blond hair — hairs between an inch and two inches in length. They had been cut off, not pulled out by the roots.

"Any more?"

There seemed to be an endless stream of things.

He picked up the new wallet from the desk — the one that both Whipple and Charles Gantvoort had said did not belong to the dead man — and slid it over to me.

"That was found in the road, three or four feet from the car."

It was of a cheap quality, and had neither manufacturer's name nor owner's initials on it. In it were two ten-dollar bills, three small newspaper clippings, and a typewritten list of six names and addresses, headed by Gantvoort's.

The three clippings were apparently from the Personal columns of three different newspapers — the type wasn't the same — and they read:

GEORGE —
Everything is fixed. Don't wait too long.
D. D. D.

R. H. T. —
They do not answer.
FLO.

CAPPY. —
Twelve on the dot and look sharp.
BINGO.

The names and addresses on the typewritten list, under Gantvoort's, were:

Quincy Heathcote, 1223 S. Jason Street, Denver; B. D. Thornton, 96 Hughes Circle, Dallas; Luther G. Randall, 615 Columbia Street, Portsmouth; J. H. Boyd Willis, 4544 Harvard Street, Boston; Hannah Hindmarsh, 218 E. 79th Street, Cleveland.

"What else?" I asked when I had studied these.

The detective-sergeant's supply hadn't been exhausted yet.

"The dead man's collar buttons — both front and back — had been taken out, though his collar and tie were still in place. And his left shoe was gone. We hunted high and low all around, but didn't find either shoe or collar buttons."

"Is that all?"

I was prepared for anything now.

"What the hell do you want?" he growled. "Ain't that enough?"

"How about fingerprints?"

"Nothing stirring! All we found belong to the dead man."

"How about the machine he was found in?"

"A coupe belonging to a Doctor Wallace Girargo. He phoned in at six this evening that it had been stolen from near the corner of McAllister and Polk Streets. We're checking up on him — but I think he's all right."

The things that Whipple and Charles Gantvoort had identified as belonging to the dead man told us nothing. We went over them carefully, but to no advantage. The memoranda book contained many entries, but they all seemed totally foreign to the murder. The letters were quite as irrelevant.

The serial number of the typewriter with which the murder had been committed had been removed, we found — apparently filed out of the frame.

"Well, what do you think?" O'Gar asked when we had given up our examination of our clues.

"I think we want to find Monsieur Emil Bonfils."

"It wouldn't hurt to do that," he grunted. "I guess our best bet is to get in touch with these five people on the list with Gantvoort's name. Suppose that's a murder list? That this Bonfils is out to get all of them?"

"Maybe. We'll get hold of them anyway. Maybe we'll find that some of them have already been killed. But whether they have been killed or are to be killed or not, it's a cinch they have some connection with this affair. I'll get off a batch of telegrams to the Agency's branches, having the

names on the list taken care of. I'll try to have the three clippings traced, too."

O'Gar looked at his watch and yawned.

"It's after four. What say we knock off and get some sleep? I'll leave word for the department's expert to compare the typewriter with that letter signed E.B. and with that list to see if they were written on it. I guess they were, but we'll make sure. I'll have the park searched all around where we found Gantvoort as soon as it gets light enough to see, and maybe the missing shoe and the collar buttons will be found. And I'll have a couple of the boys out calling on all the typewriter shops in the city to see if they can get a line on this one."

I stopped at the nearest telegraph office and got off a wad of messages. Then I went home to dream of nothing even remotely connected with crime or the detecting business.

At eleven o'clock that same morning, when, brisk and fresh with five hours' sleep under my belt, I arrived at the police detective bureau, I found O'Gar slumped down at his desk, staring dazedly at a black shoe, half a dozen collar buttons, a rusty flat key, and a rumpled newspaper — all lined up before him.

"What's all this? Souvenir of your wedding?"

"Might as well be." His voice was heavy with disgust. "Listen to this: one of the porters of the Seamen's National Bank found a package in the vestibule when he started cleaning up this morning. It was this shoe — Gantvoort's missing one — wrapped in this sheet of a five-day-old *Philadelphia Record*, and with these collar buttons and this old key in it. The heel of the shoe, you'll notice, has been pried off, and is still missing. Whipple identifies it all right, as well as two of the collar buttons, but he never saw the key before. These other four collar buttons are new, and common gold-rolled ones. The key don't look like it had had much use for a long time. What do you make of all that?"

I couldn't make anything out of it.

"How did the porter happen to turn the stuff in?"

"Oh, the whole story was in the morning papers — all about the missing shoe and collar buttons and all."

"What did you learn about the typewriter?" I asked.

"The letter and the list were written with it, right enough; but we haven't been able to find where it came from yet. We checked up the doc who owns the coupe, and he's in the clear. We accounted for all his time last night. Lagerquist, the grocer who found Gantvoort, seems to be all right, too. What did you do?"

"Haven't had any answers to the wires I sent last night. I dropped in at the Agency on my way down this morning, and got four operatives out covering the hotels and looking up all the people named Bonfils they can find — there are two or three families by that name listed in the directory. Also I sent our New York branch a

wire to have the steamship records searched to see if an Emil Bonfils had arrived recently; and I put a cable through to our Paris correspondent to see what he could dig up."

"I guess we ought to see Gantvoort's lawyer — Abernathy — and that Dexter woman before we do anything else," the detective-sergeant said.

"I guess so," I agreed, "let's tackle the lawyer first. He's the most important one, the way things now stand."

Murray Abernathy, attorney-at-law, was a long, stringy, slow-spoken old gentleman who still clung to starched-bosom shirts. He was too full of what he thought were professional ethics to give us as much help as we had expected; but by letting him talk — letting him ramble along in his own way — we did get a little information from him. What we got amounted to this:

The dead man and Creda Dexter had intended being married the coming Wednesday. His son and her brother were both opposed to the marriage, it seemed, so Gantvoort and the woman had planned to be married secretly in Oakland, and catch a boat for the Orient that same afternoon; figuring that by the time their lengthy honeymoon was over they could return to a son and brother who had become resigned to the marriage.

A new will had been drawn up, leaving half of Gantvoort's estate to his new wife and half to his son and daughter-in-law. But the new will had not been signed yet, and Creda Dexter knew it had not been signed. She knew — and this was one of the few points upon which Abernathy would make a positive statement — that under the old will, still in force, everything went to Charles Gantvoort and his wife.

The Gantvoort estate, we estimated from Abernathy's roundabout statements and allusions, amounted to about a million and a half in cash value. The attorney had never heard of Emil Bonfils, he said, and had never heard of any threats or attempts at murder directed toward the dead man. He knew nothing — or would tell us nothing — that threw any light upon the nature of the thing that the threatening letter had accused the dead man of stealing.

From Abernathy's office we went to Creda Dexter's apartment, in a new and expensively elegant building only a few minutes' walk from the Gantvoort residence.

Creda Dexter was a small woman in her early twenties. The first thing you noticed about her were her eyes. They were large and deep and the color of amber, and their pupils were never at rest. Continuously they changed size, expanded and contracted — slowly at times, suddenly at others — ranging incessantly from the size of pinheads to an extent that threatened to blot out the amber irises.

With the eyes for a guide, you discovered that she was pronouncedly feline throughout. Her every movement was the slow, smooth, sure one of a cat; and the contours of her rather

pretty face, the shape of her mouth, her small nose, the set of her eyes, the swelling of her brows, were all cat-like. And the effect was heightened by the way she wore her hair, which was thick and tawny.

"Mr. Gantvoort and I," she told us after the preliminary explanations had been disposed of, "were to have been married the day after tomorrow. His son and daughter-in-law were both opposed to the marriage, as was my brother Madden. They all seemed to think that the difference between our ages was too great. So to avoid any unpleasantness, we had planned to be married quietly and then go abroad for a year or more, feeling sure that they would all have forgotten their grievances by the time we returned.

"That was why Mr. Gantvoort persuaded Madden to go to New York. He had some business there — something to do with the disposal of his interest in a steel mill — so he used it as an excuse to get Madden out of the way until we were off on our wedding trip. Madden lived here with me, and it would have been nearly impossible for me to have made any preparations for the trip without him seeing them."

"Was Mr. Gantvoort here last night?" I asked her.

"No. I expected him — we were going out. He usually walked over — it's only a few blocks. When eight o'clock came and he hadn't arrived, I telephoned his house, and Whipple told me that he had left nearly an hour before. I called up again, twice, after that. Then, this morning, I called up again before I had seen the papers, and I was told that he — "

She broke off with a catch in her voice — the only sign of sorrow she displayed throughout the interview. The impression of her we had received from Charles Gantvoort and Whipple had prepared us for a more or less elaborate display of grief on her part. But she disappointed us. There was nothing crude about her work — she didn't even turn on the tears for us.

"Was Mr. Gantvoort here night before last?"

"Yes. He came over at a little after eight and stayed until nearly twelve. We didn't go out."

"Did he ever say anything to you about his life being threatened?"

"No."

"Do you know Emil Bonfils?"

"No."

"Ever hear Mr. Gantvoort speak of him?"

"No."

"At what hotel is your brother staying in New York?"

"I don't know."

"When did he leave San Francisco?"

"Thursday — four days ago."

O'Gar and I walked six or seven blocks in thoughtful silence after we left Creda Dexter's apartment, and then he spoke.

"A sleek kitten — that dame! Rub her the right way, and she'll purr pretty. Rub her the wrong way — and look out for the claws! And say, it wouldn't hurt to look her brother up and see if he's really in New York. If

he is there today it's a cinch he wasn't here last night."

"We'll do that," I agreed. "This Creda Dexter wasn't any too sure that her brother wasn't in on the killing. And there's nothing to show that Bonfils didn't have help. I can't figure Creda being in on the murder, though. She knew the new will hadn't been signed. There'd be no sense in her working herself out of that three-quarters of a million berries."

We sent a lengthy telegram to the Continental's New York branch, and then dropped in at the Agency to see if any replies had come to the wires I had got off the night before.

They had.

None of the people whose names appeared on the typewritten list with Gantvoort's had been found; not the least trace of any of them. Two of the addresses given were altogether wrong. There were no houses with those numbers on those streets — and there never had been.

What was left of the afternoon, O'Gar and I spent going over the street between Gantvoort's house on Russian Hill and the building in which the Dexters lived. We questioned everyone we could find — man, woman and child — who lived, worked, or played along any of the three routes the dead man could have taken.

We found nobody who had heard the shot that had been fired by Bonfils on the night before the murder. We found nobody who had seen anything suspicious on the night of the murder. Nobody who remembered having seen him picked up in a coupe.

Then we called at Gantvoort's house and questioned Charles Gantvoort again, his wife, and all the servants — and we learned nothing. So far as they knew, nothing belonging to the dead man was missing — nothing small enough to be concealed in the heel of a shoe.

The shoes he had worn the night he was killed were one of the three pairs made in New York for him two months before. He could have removed the heel of the left one, hollowed it out sufficiently to hide a small object in it, and then nailed it on again; though Whipple insisted that he would have noticed the effects of any tampering with the shoe unless it had been done by an expert repairman.

This field exhausted, we returned to the Agency. A telegram had just come from the New York branch, saying that none of the steamship companies' records showed the arrival of an Emil Bonfils from either England, France, or Germany within the past six months.

The operatives who had been searching the city for Bonfils had all come in empty-handed. They had found and investigated eleven persons named Bonfils in San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, and Alameda. Their investigations had definitely cleared all eleven. None of these Bonfilses knew an Emil Bonfils. Combing the hotels had yielded nothing.

O'Gar and I went to dinner together — a quiet, grouchy sort of

meal during which we didn't speak six words apiece — and then came back to the Agency to find that another wire had come in from New York.

> Madden Dexter arrived McAlpin Hotel this morning with Power of Attorney to sell Gantvoort interest in B. F. and F. Iron Corporation. Denies knowledge of Emil Bonfils or of murder. Expects to finish business and leave for San Francisco tomorrow.

I let the sheet of paper upon which I had decoded the telegram slide out of my fingers, and we sat listlessly facing each other across my desk, looking vacantly each at the other.

"It's a funny one," O'Gar said softly to himself at last.

I nodded. It was.

"We got nine clues," he spoke again presently, "and none of them have got us a damned thing.

"Number one: the dead man called up you people and told you that he had been threatened and shot at by an Emil Bonfils that he'd had a run-in with in Paris a long time ago.

"Number two: the typewriter he was killed with and that the letter and list were written on. We're still trying to trace it, but with no breaks so far. What the hell kind of a weapon was that, anyway? It looks like this fellow Bonfils got hot and hit Gantvoort with the first thing he put his hand on. But what was the typewriter doing in a stolen car? And why were the numbers filed off it?"

I shook my head to signify that I couldn't guess the answer, and O'Gar went on enumerating our clues.

"Number three: the threatening letter, fitting in with what Gantvoort said over the phone that afternoon.

"Number four: those two bullets with the crosses in their snoots.

"Number five: the jewel case.

"Number six: that bunch of yellow hair.

"Number seven: the fact that the dead man's shoe and collar buttons were carried away.

"Number eight: the wallet, with two ten-dollar bills, three clippings, and the list in it, found in the road.

"Number nine: finding the shoe next day, wrapped up in a five-day-old Philadelphia paper, and with the missing collar buttons, four more, and a rusty key in it.

"That's the list. If they mean anything at all, they mean that Emil Bonfils — whoever he is — was flimflammed out of something by Gantvoort in Paris in 1902, and that Bonfils came to get it back. He picked Gantvoort up last night in a stolen car, bringing his typewriter with him — for God knows what reason! Gantvoort put up an argument, so Bonfils bashed in his noodle with the typewriter, and then went through his pockets, apparently not taking anything. He decided that what he was looking for was in Gantvoort's left shoe, so he took the shoe away with him. And then — but there's no sense to the collar button trick, or the phoney list, or — "

"Yes, there is!" I cut in, sitting up,

wide awake now. "That's our tenth clue — the one we're going to follow from now on. That list was, except for Gantvoort's name and address, a fake. Our people would have found at least one of the five people whose names were on it if it had been on the level. But they didn't find the least trace of any of them. And two of the addresses were of street numbers that didn't exist!

"That list was faked up, put in the wallet with the clippings and twenty dollars — to make the play stronger — and planted in the road near the car to throw us off-track. And if that's so, then it's a hundred to one that the rest of the things were cooked up too!

"From now on I'm considering all those nine lovely clues as nine bum steers. And I'm going just exactly contrary to them. I'm looking for a man whose name isn't Emil Bonfils, and whose initials aren't either E or B; who isn't French, and who wasn't in Paris in 1902. A man who hasn't light hair, doesn't carry a .45-calibre pistol, and has no interest in Personal advertisements in newspapers. A man who didn't kill Gantvoort to recover anything that could have been hidden in a shoe or on a collar button. That's the sort of a guy I'm hunting for now!"

The detective-sergeant screwed up his little green eyes reflectively and scratched his head.

"Maybe that ain't so foolish!" he said. "You might be right at that. Suppose you are — what then? That Dexter kitten didn't do it — it cost her three-quarters of a million. Her brother didn't do it — he's in New York. And, besides, you don't croak a guy just because you think he's too old to marry your sister. Charles Gantvoort? He and his wife are the only ones who make any money out of the old man dying before the new will was signed. We have only their word for it that Charles was home that night. The servants didn't see him between eight and eleven. You were there, and you didn't see him until eleven. But me and you both believe him when he says she *was* home all that evening. And neither of us think he bumped the old man off — though of course he might. Who then?"

"This Creda Dexter," I suggested, "was marrying Gantvoort for his money, wasn't she? You don't think she was in love with him, do you?"

"No. I figure, from what I saw of her, that she was in love with the million and a half."

"All right," I went on. "Now she isn't exactly homely — not by a long shot. Do you reckon Gantvoort was the only man who ever fell for her?"

"I got you! I got you!" O'Gar exclaimed. "You mean there might have been some young fellow in the running who didn't have any million and a half behind him, and who didn't take kindly to being nosed out by a man who did. Maybe — maybe."

"Well, suppose we bury all this stuff we've been working on and try out that angle."

"Suits me," he said. "Starting in the morning, then, we spend our time hunting for Gantvoort's rival for the

paw of this Dexter kitten."

But it wasn't as simple as it sounded.

All our digging into her past failed to bring to light one man who could be considered a suitor. She and her brother had been in San Francisco three years. We traced them back the length of that period, from apartment to apartment. We questioned everyone we could find who even knew her by sight. And nobody could tell us of a single man who had shown an interest in her besides Gantvoort. Nobody, apparently, had ever seen her with any man except Gantvoort or her brother.

All of which, while not getting us ahead, at least convinced us that we were on the right trail. There must have been, we argued, at least one man in her life in those three years besides Gantvoort. She wasn't — unless we were very much mistaken — the sort of woman who would discourage masculine attention; and she was certainly endowed by nature to attract it. And if there was another man, then the very fact that he had been kept so thoroughly under cover strengthened the probability of him having been mixed up in Gantvoort's death.

We were unsuccessful in learning where the Dexters had lived before they came to San Francisco, but we weren't so very interested in their earlier life. Of course it was possible that some old-time lover had come upon the scene again recently; but in that case it should have been easier to find the recent connection than the old one.

There was no doubt, our explorations showed, that Gantvoort's son had been correct in thinking the Dexters were fortune hunters. All their activities pointed to that, although there seemed to be nothing downright criminal in their pasts.

I went up against Creda Dexter again, spending an entire afternoon in her apartment, banging away with question after question, all directed toward her former love affairs. Who had she thrown over for Gantvoort and his million and a half? And the answer was always *nobody* — an answer that I didn't choose to believe.

We had Creda Dexter shadowed night and day — and it carried us ahead not an inch. Perhaps she suspected that she was being watched. Anyway, she seldom left her apartment, and then on only the most innocent of errands. We had her apartment watched whether she was in it or not. Nobody visited it. We tapped her telephone — and all our listening-in netted us nothing. We had her mail covered — and she didn't receive a single letter.

Meanwhile, we had learned where the three clippings found in the wallet had come from — from the Personal columns of a New York, a Chicago, and a Portland newspaper. The one in the Portland paper had appeared two days before the murder, the Chicago one four days before, and the New York one five days before. All three of those papers would have been on the San Francisco newsstands the day of the murder — ready to be purchased and cut out by anyone who was

looking for material to confuse detectives with.

The Agency's Paris correspondent had found no less than six Emil Bonfilses — all bloomers so far as our job was concerned.

But O'Gar and I weren't worrying over Emil Bonfils any more — that angle was dead and buried. We were plugging away at our new task — the finding of Gantvoort's rival.

Thus the days passed, and thus the matter stood when Madden Dexter was due to arrive home from New York.

Our New York branch had kept an eye on him until he left that city, and had advised us of his departure, so I knew what train he was coming on. I wanted to put a few questions to him before his sister saw him.

If I had known him by sight I could have picked him up when he left his train at Oakland, but I didn't know him; and I didn't want to carry Charles Gantvoort or anyone else along with me to pick him out for me.

So I went up to Sacramento that morning, and boarded his train there. I put my card in an envelope and gave it to a messenger boy in the station. Then I followed the boy through the train, while he called out:

"Mr. Dexter! Mr. Dexter!"

In the last car — the observation-club car — a slender, dark-haired man in well-made tweeds turned from a window and held out his hand to the boy.

I studied him while he nervously tore open the envelope and read my card. His chin trembled slightly just now, emphasizing the weakness of a face that couldn't have been strong at its best. Between twenty-five and thirty, I placed him; with his hair parted in the middle and slicked down; large, too-expressive brown eyes; small well-shaped nose; neat brown mustache; very red, soft lips — that type.

I dropped into the chair beside him when he looked up from the card.

"You are Mr. Dexter?"

"Yes," he said. "I suppose it's about Mr. Gantvoort's death that you want to see me?"

"Uh-huh. I wanted to ask you a few questions, and since I happened to be in Sacramento, I thought that by riding back on the train with you I could ask them without taking up too much of your time."

"If there's anything I can tell you," he assured me, "I'll be only too glad to do it. But I told the New York detectives all I knew, and they didn't seem to find it of much value."

"Well, the situation has changed some since you left New York." I watched his face closely as I spoke. "What we thought of no value then may be just what we want now."

I paused while he moistened his lips and avoided my eyes. He may not know anything, I thought, but he's certainly jumpy. I let him wait a few minutes while I pretended deep thoughtfulness. If I played him right, I was confident I could turn him inside out.

"Of the men with whom your

sister was acquainted," I came out with it at last, "who, outside of Mr. Gantvoort, was the most attentive?"

He swallowed audibly, looked out of the window, fleetingly at me, and then out of the window again.

"Really, I couldn't say."

"All right. Let's get at it this way. Suppose we check off one by one all the men who were interested in her and in whom she was interested."

His gaze flickered around to meet mine for a second, with a sort of timid desperation in his eyes.

"I know it sounds foolish, but I, her brother, couldn't give you the name of even one man in whom Creda was interested before she met Gantvoort. She never, so far as I know, had the slightest feeling for any man before she met him. Of course it is possible that there may have been someone I didn't know anything about, but —"

It did sound foolish, right enough! The Creda Dexter I had talked to — a sleek kitten, as O'Gar had put it — didn't impress me as being at all likely to go very long without having at least one man in tow. This pretty little guy in front of me was lying. There couldn't be any other explanation.

I went at him tooth and nail. But when he reached Oakland early that night he was still sticking to his original statement — that Gantvoort was the only one of his sister's suitors that he knew anything about. And I knew that I had blundered, had underrated Madden Dexter, had played my hand wrong in trying to shake him down too quickly — in driving too directly at the point I was interested in. He was either a lot stronger than I had figured him, or his interest in concealing Gantvoort's murderer was much greater than I had thought it would be.

But I had this much: if Dexter was lying — and there couldn't be much doubt of that — then Gantvoort *had* had a rival, and Madden Dexter believed or knew that this rival had killed Gantvoort.

When we left the train at Oakland I knew I was licked, that he wasn't going to tell me what I wanted to know — not this night, anyway. But I clung to him, stuck at his side when we boarded the ferry for San Francisco, in spite of the obviousness of his desire to get away from me. There's always a chance of something unexpected happening; so I continued to ply him with questions as our boat left the slip.

Presently a man came toward where we were sitting — a big burly man in a light overcoat, carrying a black bag.

"Hello, Madden!" he greeted my companion, striding over to him with outstretched hand. "Just got in and was trying to remember your phone number," he said, setting down his bag, as they shook hands warmly.

Madden Dexter turned to me.

"I want you to meet Mr. Smith," he told me, and then gave my name to the big man, adding, "he's with the Continental Detective Agency here."

That tag — clearly a warning for Smith's benefit — brought me to my

feet, all watchfulness. But the ferry was crowded — a hundred persons were within sight of us, all around us. I relaxed, smiled pleasantly, and shook hands with Smith. Whoever Smith was, and whatever connection he might have with the murder — and if he hadn't any, why should Dexter have been in such a hurry to tip him off to my identity? — he couldn't do anything here. The crowd around us was all to my advantage.

That was my second mistake of the day.

Smith's left hand had gone into his overcoat pocket — or rather, through one of those vertical slits that certain styles of overcoats have so that inside pockets may be reached without unbuttoning the overcoat. His hand had gone through that slit, and his coat had fallen away far enough for me to see a snub-nosed automatic in his hand — shielded from everyone's sight but mine — pointing at my waist-line.

"Shall we go on deck?" Smith asked — and it was an order.

I hesitated. I didn't like to leave all these people who were so blindly standing and sitting around us. But Smith's face wasn't the face of a cautious man. He had the look of one who might easily disregard the presence of a hundred witnesses.

I turned around and walked through the crowd. His right hand lay familiarly on my shoulder as he walked behind me; his left hand held his gun, under the overcoat, against my spine.

The deck was deserted. A heavy fog, wet as rain — the fog of San Francisco Bay's winter nights — lay over boat and water, and had driven everyone else inside. It hung about us, thick and impenetrable; I couldn't see so far as the end of the boat.

I stopped.

Smith prodded me in the back.

"Farther away, where we can talk," he rumbled in my ear.

I went on until I reached the rail.

The entire back of my head burned with sudden fire . . . tiny points of light glittered in the blackness before me . . . grew larger . . . came rushing toward me.

Semi-consciousness! I found myself mechanically keeping afloat somehow and trying to get out of my overcoat. The back of my head throbbed devilishly. My eyes burned. I felt heavy and logged, as if I had swallowed gallons of water.

The fog hung low and thick on the water — there was nothing else to be seen anywhere. By the time I had freed myself of the encumbering overcoat my head had cleared somewhat, but with returning consciousness came increased pain.

A light glimmered mistily off to my left, and then vanished. From out of the misty blanket, from every direction, in a dozen different keys, from near and far, fog-horns sounded. I stopped swimming and floated on my back, trying to determine my whereabouts.

I was somewhere in San Francisco Bay, and that was all I knew, though I

suspected the current was sweeping me out toward the Golden Gate.

A little while passed, and I knew that I had left the path of the Oakland ferries — no boat had passed close to me for some time. I was glad to be out of that track. In this fog a boat was a lot more likely to run me down than to pick me up.

The water was chilling me, so I turned over and began swimming, just vigorously enough to keep my blood circulating while I saved my strength until I had a definite goal to try for.

A horn began to repeat its roaring note nearer and nearer, and presently the lights of the boat upon which it was fixed came into sight. One of the Sausalito ferries, I thought.

It came quite close to me, and I halloed until I was breathless and my throat was raw. But the boat's siren, drowned my shouts.

The boat went on and the fog closed in behind it.

The current was stronger now, and my attempts to attract the attention of the Sausalito ferry had left me weaker. I floated, letting the water sweep me where it would, resting.

Another light appeared ahead of me suddenly — hung there for an instant — disappeared.

Weariness settled upon me, and a sense of futility. The water was no longer cold. I was warm with a comfortable, soothing numbness. My head stopped throbbing; there was no feeling at all in it now. No lights, now, but the sound of fog-horns . . . fog-horns . . . fog-horns ahead of me, behind me, to either side; annoying me, irritating me.

But for the moaning horns I would have ceased all effort. They had become the only disagreeable detail of my situation — the water was pleasant, fatigue was pleasant. But the horns tormented me. I cursed them petulantly and decided to swim until I could no longer hear them, and then, in the quiet of the friendly fog, go to sleep. . . .

Now and then I would doze, to be goaded into wakefulness by the wailing voice of a siren.

"Those damned horns! Those damned horns!" I complained aloud, again and again.

One of them, I found presently, was bearing down upon me from behind, growing louder and stronger. I turned and waited. Lights, dim and steaming, came into view.

With exaggerated caution to avoid making the least splash, I swam off to one side. When this nuisance was past I could go to sleep. I sniggered softly to myself as the lights drew abreast, feeling a foolish triumph in my cleverness in eluding the boat. Those damned horns. . . .

Life — the hunger for life — all at once surged back into my being.

I screamed at the passing boat, and with every iota of my being struggled toward it. Between strokes I tilted up my head and screamed. . . .

When I returned to consciousness for the second time that evening, I

was lying on my back on a baggage truck, which was moving. Men and women were crowding around staring at me with curious eyes.

I sat up.

"Where are we?" I asked.

A little red-faced man in uniform answered my question.

"Just landing in Sausalito. Lay still. We'll take you over to the hospital."

I looked around.

"How long before this boat goes back to San Francisco?"

"Leaves right away."

I slid off the truck and started back aboard the boat.

"I'm going with it," I said.

Half an hour later, shivering and shaking in my wet clothes, keeping my mouth clamped tight so that my teeth wouldn't sound like a dice-game, I climbed into a taxi at the Ferry Building and went to my flat.

There, I swallowed half a pint of whisky, rubbed myself with a coarse towel until my skin was sore, and, except for an enormous weariness and a worse headache, I felt almost human again.

I reached O'Gar by phone, asked him to come up to my flat right away, and then called up Charles Gantvoort.

"Have you seen Madden Dexter yet?" I asked him.

"No, but I talked to him over the phone. He called me up as soon as he got in. I asked him to meet me in Mr. Abernathy's office in the morning, so we could go over that business he transacted for father."

"Can you call him up now and tell him that you have been called out of town — will have to leave early in the morning — and that you'd like to run over to his apartment tonight?"

"Why, yes, if you wish."

"Good! Do that. I'll call for you in a little while and go over to see him with you."

"What is —"

"I'll tell you about it when I see you," I cut him off.

O'Gar arrived as I was finishing dressing.

"So he told you something?" he asked, knowing of my plan to meet Dexter on the train and question him.

"Yes," I said with sour sarcasm, "but I came near forgetting what it was. I grilled him all the way from Sacramento to Oakland, and couldn't get a whisper out of him. On the ferry coming over he introduces me to a man he calls Mr. Smith, and he tells Mr. Smith that I'm a gum-shoe. This, mind you, all happens in the middle of a crowded ferry! Mr. Smith puts a gun in my belly, marches me out on deck, raps me across the back of the head, and dumps me into the bay."

"You have a lot of fun, don't you?" O'Gar grinned, and then wrinkled his forehead. "Looks like Smith would be the man we want then — the buddy who turned the Gantvoort trick. But what the hell did he want to give himself away for?"

"Dexter knew I was hunting for one of his sister's former lovers, of course. And he must have thought I knew a whole lot more than I do, or he wouldn't have made that raw play

— tipping my mitt to Smith right in front of me.

"It may be that after Dexter lost his head and made that break on the ferry, Smith figured that I'd be on to him soon, if not right away; and so he'd take a desperate chance on putting me out of the way. But we'll know all about it in a little while," I said, as we went down to the waiting taxi and set out for Gantvoort's.

"You ain't counting on Smith being in sight, are you?" the detective-sergeant asked.

"No. He'll be holed up somewhere until he sees how things are going. But Madden Dexter will have to be out in the open to protect himself. He has an alibi, so he's in the clear so far as the actual killing is concerned. And with me supposed to be dead, the more he stays in the open, the safer he is. But it's a cinch that he knows what this is all about, though he wasn't necessarily involved in it. As near as I could see, he didn't go out on deck with Smith and me tonight. Anyway he'll be home. And this time he's going to talk!"

Charles Gantvoort was standing on his front steps when we reached his house. He climbed into our taxi and we headed for the Dexters' apartment.

At the Dexters' door I stepped past Gantvoort and pressed the button.

Creda Dexter opened the door. Her amber eyes widened and her smile faded as I stepped past her.

I walked swiftly down the little hallway and turned into the first room through whose open door a light showed.

And came face to face with Smith!

We were both surprised, but his astonishment was a lot more profound than mine. Neither of us had expected to see the other; but I had known he was still alive, while he had every reason for thinking me at the bottom of the bay.

I took advantage of his greater bewilderment to the extent of two steps toward him before he went into action.

One of his hands swept down.

I threw my right fist at his face — threw it with every ounce of my 180 pounds behind it, re-enforced by the memory of every second I had spent in the water, and every throb of my battered head.

His hand, already darting down for his pistol, came back up too late to fend off my punch.

Something clicked in my hand as it smashed into his face, and my hand went numb.

But he went down — and lay where he fell.

I jumped across his body to a door on the opposite side of the room, pulling my gun loose with my left hand.

"Dexter's somewhere around!" I called over my shoulder to O'Gar, who with Gantvoort and Creda, was coming through the door by which I had entered. "Keep your eyes open!"

I dashed through the four other rooms of the apartment, pulling closet doors open, looking everywhere

— and I found nobody.

Then I returned to where Creda Dexter was trying to revive Smith, with the assistance of O'Gar and Gantvoort.

The detective-sergeant looked over his shoulder at me.

"Who do you think this joker is?" he asked.

"My friend Mr. Smith."

"Gantvoort says he's Madden Dexter."

Charles Gantvoort nodded his head.

"This is Madden Dexter," he said.

We worked upon Dexter for nearly ten minutes before he opened his eyes.

As soon as he sat up we began to shoot questions and accusations at him, hoping to get a confession out of him before he recovered from his shakiness — but he wasn't that shaky.

All we could get out of him was:

"Take me if you want to. If I've got anything to say I'll say it to my lawyer, and to nobody else."

Creda Dexter, who had stepped back after her brother came to, and was standing a little way off, watching us, suddenly came forward.

"What have you got on him?" she demanded, imperatively.

"I wouldn't want to say," I countered, "but I don't mind telling you this much. We're going to give him a chance in a nice modern court-room to prove that he didn't kill Leopold Gantvoort."

"He was in New York!"

"He was not! He had a friend who went to New York as Madden Dexter and looked after Gantvoort's business under that name. But if this is the real Madden Dexter then the closest he got to New York was when he met his friend on the ferry to get from him the papers connected with the B. F. & F. Iron Corporation transaction; and learned that I had stumbled upon the truth about his alibi — even if I didn't know it myself at the time."

She jerked around to face her brother.

"Is that on the level?" she asked him.

"I'll say all I've got to say to my lawyer," he repeated.

"You will?" she shot back at him. "Well, I'll say what I've got to say right now!"

She flung around to face me again.

"Madden is not my brother at all! My name is Ives. Madden and I met in St. Louis about four years ago, drifted around together for a year or so, and then came to Frisco. He was a con man — still is. He made Mr. Gantvoort's acquaintance six or seven months ago, and was getting him all ribbed up to unload a fake invention on him. He brought him here a couple of times, and introduced me to him as his sister. We usually posed as brother and sister.

"Then, after Mr. Gantvoort had been here a couple times, Madden decided to change his game. He thought Mr. Gantvoort liked me, and that we could get more money out of him by working a fancy sort of badger-game on him. I was to lead the old man on until I had him wrapped around my finger — until we had him

tied up so tight he couldn't get away — had something on him — something good and strong. Then we were going to shake him down for plenty.

"Everything went along fine for a while. He fell for me — fell hard. And finally he asked me to marry him. We had never figured on that. Blackmail was our game. But when he asked me to marry him I tried to call Madden off. I admit the old man's money had something to do with it — it influenced me — but I had come to like him a little for himself.

"So I told Madden all about it, and suggested that we drop the other plan, and that I marry Gantvoort. I promised to see that Madden was kept supplied with money — I knew I could get whatever I wanted from Mr. Gantvoort.

"But Madden wouldn't hear of it. He'd have got more money in the long run by doing as I suggested — but he wanted his little handful right away. And to make him more unreasonable he got one of his jealous streaks. He beat me one night!

"That settled it. I made up my mind to ditch him. I told Mr. Gantvoort that my brother was bitterly opposed to our marrying, and he could see that Madden was carrying a grouch. So he arranged to send Madden East on that steel business, to get him out of the way until we were off on our wedding trip. And we thought Madden was completely deceived — but I should have known that he would see through our scheme. We planned to be gone about a year, and by that time I thought Madden would have forgotten me — or I'd be fixed to handle him if he tried to make any trouble.

"As soon as I heard that Mr. Gantvoort had been killed I had a hunch that Madden had done it. But then it seemed like a certainty that he was in New York the next day, and I thought I had done him an injustice. And I was glad he was out of it. But now —"

She whirled around to her confederate.

"Now I hope you swing!"

She spun around to me again. No sleek kitten, this, but a furious, spitting cat, with claws and teeth bared.

"What kind of looking fellow was the one who went to New York for him?"

I described the man I had talked to on the train.

"Evan Felter," she said, after a moment of thought. "He used to work with Madden. You'll probably find him hiding in Los Angeles. Put the screws on him and he'll spill all he knows — he's a weak sister!

"How do you like that?" she spat at Madden Dexter. "How do you like that for a starter? You messed up my little party, did you? Well, I'm going to spend every minute of my time from now until they pop you off helping them pop you!"

And she did, too. With her assistance it was no trick at all to gather up the rest of the evidence we needed to hang the man who left too many clues.

(Continued from other side)

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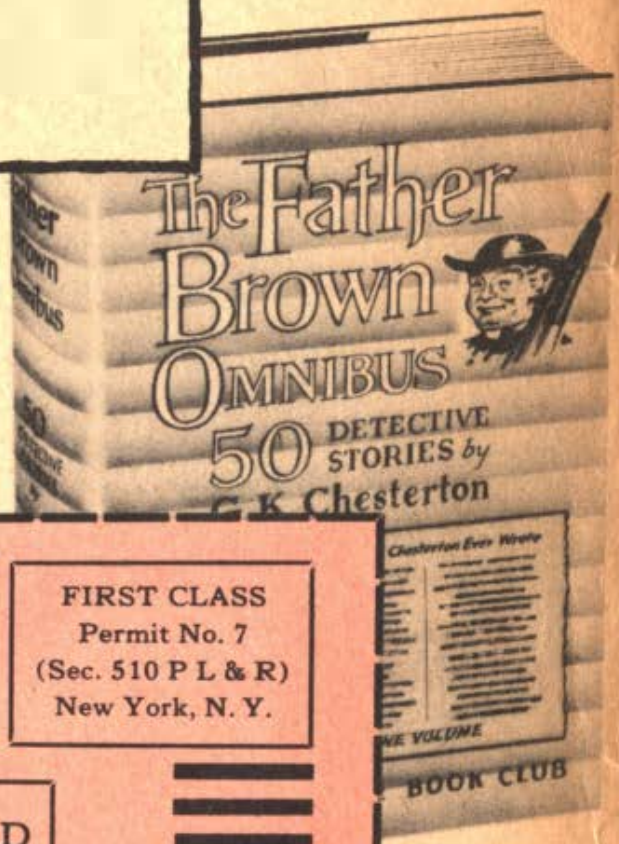

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