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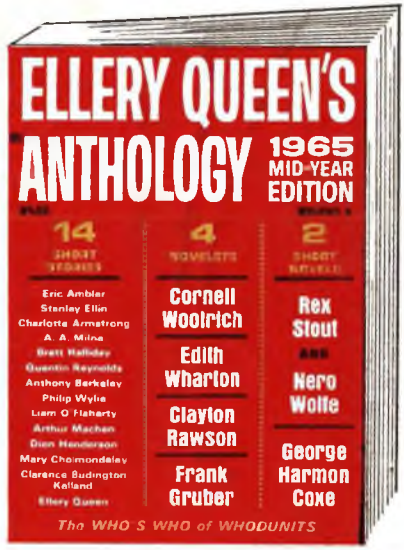

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name of magazine	*Honor Roll stories*	*percentage*
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The Saint Mystery Magazine	16	13.8%
Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine	11	9.5%
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a new **SPY** *story*

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MICHAEL GILBERT**

TITLE: ***Operation Prometheus***

TYPE: Counterespionage

AGENT: Mr. Calder

LOCALE: England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Mr. Calder showed every sign of having gone stark, even raving, mad—a dangerous state of mind for a secret service agent deeply involved in the most important assignment of his career . . .*

MR. FORTESCUE WAS THE MANager of the Westminster Branch of the London & Home Counties Bank. He was also head of the External Branch of the Joint Services Standing Intelligence Committee. In his first capacity, he welcomed Mr. Behrens into his office one fine morning in May; in his second, he turned to business as soon as the heavy mahogany door had sighed shut.

"I'm worried," he said. "About Calder."

"I'm not too happy about him myself," said Mr. Behrens. "We're neighbors, as well as friends, you know, and when a neighbor starts cutting you—"

"It's come to that, has it?"

"I used to go up to play backgammon with him—at least once a week, sometimes more. For the last three or four weeks he's been making excuses. And they've become such feeble excuses that I gathered the impression that what he really wanted was to be left alone."

"He leads a somewhat solitary life, doesn't he?"

"Entirely solitary. Apart from myself, the visiting tradespeople,

and an occasional hiker, I doubt if he sees anyone from year's end to year's end."

"Do you think," said Mr. Fortescue, "that he might be going mad?"

There was regret in his voice, but no surprise. Professional agents usually did come to an untimely end. The curious, involute, secretive, occasionally dangerous, and always responsible way of life took its sure toll of them. A few were killed by the enemy; others took their own lives; half a dozen, as Mr. Fortescue knew, were living in quiet country houses where the furniture was fixed to the floors and the inmates ate with plastic knives and forks and were shaved by a resident barber.

"I should have thought," said Mr. Behrens, "that Calder was the very last man to go that way."

"It's the strongest," said Mr. Fortescue, "who break the most unexpectedly. If it wasn't for Operation Prometheus this wouldn't be so serious. I mean," he added, as he saw the look of pain in Mr. Behrens' eyes, "I should, of course, be desperately sorry if something like that did happen to Calder. He's deserved well of his country. And I know that he's a very old and dear friend of yours."

"I quite understand," said Mr. Behrens. "How deeply involved is he?"

"He is one of three men—the other two are myself and Dick Harcourt—who know *all* the details. Prometheus is an immense operation, and a great many people have to know a bit about it—you know a bit about it yourself—but we are the only three who know it all. We have been in it from the beginning. Indeed, I recollect that it was Calder who christened it Operation Prometheus."

"Has the name any particular significance?" asked Mr. Behrens. He himself had been involved in an attempt to kidnap a Bulgarian general which had been known as Operation House Agent, and another, of such secrecy that the details cannot even now be discussed, called Operation Bubbles; and he had sometimes wondered who thought up the names, and on what principles, if any, they worked.

"There was a little more sense in this than in most," said Mr. Fortescue. "Prometheus was born of a union between the Sea, in the form of a nymph called Clymene, and a Mountain, represented by the Titan, Iapetus. When we first, seriously, turned our minds to the liberation and advancement of Albania—a people whose original name, as you no doubt know, means 'Sons of the Eagle'—Operation Prometheus seemed quite an apt piece of nomenclature."

"Do I gather that these plans may be coming to a head?"

Mr. Fortescue placed the tips of his fingers together and said, "Albania is in a state of balance. Not the balance of tranquility, but the

balance of strong, opposing forces. In one direction, they are drawn to Russia—Enver Hoxha is an ardent Stalinist, even now that Stalinism has become unfashionable. In another direction, they have much in common with Yugoslavia—a union with Tito would please many. To the South they have strong, ancient, and sentimental ties with Greece."

"Pull devil, pull baker," said Mr. Behrens. "Who do we think will win?"

"We know who we'd *like* to win," said Mr. Fortescue. "Our money is on Greece. If Georgiades Mikalos could be sure of our help—sure that it would be effective—then it's pretty certain he'd have a good shot at it. But our Joint timing has got to be accurate—accurate to a hair's-breadth. The stakes are too high for error. Mikalos will not forget what happened to Xoxe."

"Where is Mikalos now?"

"In the hills behind Argyrokastron. Enver Hoxha has a fair idea where his hideout is, but he can't do much about it. Mikalos is well protected by his own partisans, and has, besides, a convenient back door into Greece. But if he is inaccessible to Enver, he is also inaccessible to us. And when the time comes we shall have to establish liaison with him. The idea was that Calder would go. He knows the country well—he was there with our mission in 1944. And he speaks the language."

"You say, the idea *was* that he should go. Do you now consider him too unreliable to send?"

"That is exactly what I want you to help me make my mind up about," said Mr. Fortescue.

Three days later Mr. Behrens trudged up the long winding hill, overhung with trees, which led to the hilltop on which Mr. Calder's solitary cottage stood.

He found the golden hound, Rasselas, lying on the front step. The dog seemed unhappy.

"Where is he?" said Mr. Behrens.

Rasselas thumped with his tail, and looked reproachfully over his shoulder, toward the interior of the house.

At this moment Mr. Calder appeared in the hall. He was wearing what looked like a white nightgown. Combined with his bald and tonsured head, it gave him the appearance of a disreputable monk. He blinked and frowned into the sunlight, then seemed to recognize Mr. Behrens, and said, "Come in. I'm very busy. But come in."

"If you're too busy to see me," said Mr. Behrens tartly, "I can always go back. After all, it's only two miles."

"No, no. Come in. You can probably help me."

Calder led the way into the sitting room.

"What on earth are you up to now?" said Mr. Behrens.

Across one end of the room was stretched an enormous piece of

blank white paper, pasted onto a backing of plywood. Coming closer, Mr. Behrens saw that six large pieces of lining paper had been joined together. Coming closer still, he saw that the paper was not, as he had supposed, blank. Considerable areas of it were covered with Mr. Calder's neat, crabbed writing, interspersed with curious symbols and pictures.

"I have been engaged for some weeks," said Mr. Calder. After a pause he went on, "I fear it may have made me seem unsociable, but I have been engaged in one of the most curious and most important tasks that I have ever undertaken in my life."

"I can't understand a word of it."

"Some of it is in a special shorthand which I use for this particular purpose. Otherwise I couldn't hope to get it all in."

"But what is it?"

"I am tracing the genealogy of Prometheus—back to Adam, and down to myself."

"Down to you?"

"Down to me," said Mr. Calder. He seemed to be entirely serious.

"But how," said Mr. Behrens mildly, "can you be sure that you *are* descended from Prometheus? Of course, I know that if one goes back far enough, everyone is descended from everyone else, approximately."

"There is nothing approximate about this. I have felt for some time that there was royal blood in my veins. But sometimes I have been aware that there is a higher plane than royalty. The plane of divinity."

Mr. Behrens looked at his old friend, and there was grief in his eyes. "Have you really come to believe this bosh?" he said.

Mr. Calder was not embarrassed.

"It is hard to grasp," he said, "but that is because you do not have the clue. Curiously enough, I was put on the track by Rasselas—"

The great dog, hearing its name, moved into the room and stood looking up at Mr. Calder. Mr. Calder patted his head absentmindedly.

"When you consider a dog's pedigree," he said, "you realize that it is essential to follow both the male *and* female lines. The mistake we make in human genealogy is concentrating on the male. Prometheus was no ordinary divinity. He was the inventor of architecture and astronomy, of writing and the use of figures, of prophecy, medicine, navigation, and metal-work. He inherited strength and intelligence from his father, imagination and curiosity from his mother. He bestowed on mankind the gifts of fire—from his father. And from his mother, the gift of hope."

"His mother's was the greater gift," said Mr. Behrens.

"I'm afraid you're right," Mr. Behrens said to Mr. Fortescue on the following afternoon.

The meeting took place in one of

the group of offices occupied by the Committee for European Coordination, in Richmond Terrace, under the shadow of the hideous new Air Ministry Building. The third man present was Commander Richard Harcourt, small, compact, dark, and energetic, and recognizable the length of St. James's as a product of the Royal Navy.

All Mr. Behrens knew about him was that he had had a Greek mother, and had made a big reputation for himself in submarines in the Adriatic during the war—two reasons, no doubt, for his presence on this particular Committee.

"The last time I saw him myself," said Mr. Fortescue, "he spoke somewhat wildly on the subject of classical mythology."

"Do you think he's gone broody?" said Commander Harcourt.

Mr. Behrens was familiar enough with the jargon of the Security Service to know what he meant.

"I didn't detect any ideological slant in his conversation," he said. "It was quite a generalized form of eccentricity."

"Basically, I'm sure he's still sound," said Mr. Fortescue.

"He may be sound," said the Commander, "but is he still a good security risk?"

The same thought was troubling them all. The store of secrets inside Mr. Calder's dome-shaped head was such that even a casual overspill would be priceless gleaning for the enemy.

"You'll have to keep as close an eye on him as you can," said Mr. Fortescue.

Mr. Behrens traveled sadly back to Lamperdown.

When Mr. Calder and he had retired from active service in M.I.6, they had been encouraged to set up house within a few miles of each other. They would thus be able, as Mr. Fortescue had put it, to give each other covering fire. It was a sensible precaution, which had already stood them in good stead more than once.

Mr. Behrens felt the defection of his ally very keenly. He was so silent at dinner that night that even his aunt, who was not given to small talk, noticed it. She supposed, since he had been up twice already that week to see his bank manager, that his troubles must be financial.

In the early hours of the following morning Mr. Behrens got quietly out of bed, put on a pair of flannel trousers that were hanging ready behind the door and pulled a sweater over his head. As an afterthought he opened the drawer of his bedside table and extracted a gun, which he dropped into his trouser pocket.

As he stood in silence in the front hall, he heard again the noise that had summoned him from sleep. It was a scratching—gentle but persistent, as if someone were making repeated but unsuccessful attempts to strike a match.

He walked across and opened the front door. The great dog Rasselas

was standing in the misty moonlight. He made no attempt to come in, but, when Mr. Behrens moved toward him, the animal sighed and backed away.

"Understood," said Mr. Behrens. "I'll have to get some shoes and a coat. Wait here."

It took them half an hour to climb the hill to Mr. Calder's cottage. The door was closed, but unlatched, and Mr. Behrens went through the place carefully. There was no sign of disturbance. There had been a wood fire in the grate and Mr. Behrens felt the ashes: There was still heat in them.

He went up to Mr. Calder's bedroom, and opened one or two of the drawers. Nothing seemed to have been disturbed. He returned to the sitting room, and here he noticed something.

The framed genealogy of Prometheus had disappeared.

Mr. Behrens was at Richmond Terrace by ten o'clock that morning, and since he had telephoned ahead, Mr. Fortescue and Commander Harcourt were waiting for him.

"I've shut the cottage up," said Mr. Behrens, "and told all the tradesmen that he's been called to the bedside of a sick cousin. His dog is with me for the time being. I thought I should have the devil of a job persuading Rasselas, but oddly enough he came quite quietly."

Mr. Fortescue nodded. It was the tradition of the Service. When a disaster occurred, you concentrated first on covering up. And this was a black disaster indeed.

"He'll have to be found," said Commander Harcourt. "Even if he's just had a brainstorm and wandered off somewhere, we can't leave him loose."

"No," said Mr. Fortescue. That was clear, too. "Is there any indication where he can have gone?"

"I had a word with the Stationmaster at the junction. There's a very early train for London—it leaves about five in the morning. Takes the milk up and brings the newspapers back. There was a man on it who might easily have been Calder."

"I have a feeling that London is the place to start," said Mr. Fortescue. "I'll get the Department onto it. Keep in touch."

The summons came three days later, after breakfast. It was a glorious morning of high summer, and Mr. Behrens was contemplating a quiet day among his hives when the telephone rang.

"Tottenham Court Road Police Station," said Mr. Fortescue. "And bring the dog with you."

Mr. Behrens found three men in shirt-sleeves in the Superintendent's baking oven of an office—the Superintendent himself, Detective Inspector Inskip, and Commander Harcourt. They were studying a large-scale street map as Mr. Beh-

rens came in. The heat, which had been so pleasant in the country, was a heavy burden in London.

"One of our men spotted him in Charlotte Street yesterday evening," said the Commander. "He lost him, but as Calder seemed to be shopping, it seems likely that he's hiding out somewhere in the area. That's the idea we're working on, anyway."

The Superintendent nodded, even though the whole affair seemed to him to be quite irregular. The man they were looking for had apparently committed no offense, and there was no warrant in existence for his apprehension. Nevertheless, his instructions, which he had received personally from the Assistant Commissioner in the early hours of that morning, were too specific to admit of argument or even of discussion.

"I've got men blocking the roads —" he demonstrated on the map. "I gather you're going in to look for him. Inskip will be with you. He knows the area well, but it won't be easy to search."

"We're hoping the dog will help us," said the Commander.

"Rather you than me," said the Superintendent. "Best get going."

Mr. Behrens recollected having visited Mr. Calder, some years before, when his old friend had been lying in a private ward of the Woolavington Wing of the Middlesex Hospital suffering from what was described on his medical sheet as "multiple gunshot wounds" (and was, in fact, the aftereffects of a nearly successful attempt by a German student to exterminate him with a home-made bomb). On these visits Mr. Behrens had walked to the hospital from the Tottenham Court Road, through the maze of courts and alleys which lies to the north of Oxford Street. And he had noticed what a curious chunk of Central Europe had settled itself into this small area—a sort of *Quartier Latin* whose existence was unsuspected by Londoners who kept to the main roads.

The larger shops were mostly tailors, furriers, and bootmakers, but there were smaller and more curious trades: wig-makers and button-molders, gilders, glass polishers, key cutters and bead stringers. There were shops which sold bath chairs and perambulators, shops which sold harps, and shops which sold trusses; bakers, butchers, cut-price wine shops, delicatessen stores; and hundreds of cafés—tiny, fly-blown places devoted to the fellow nationals of the proprietor—Greeks, Cypriots, Poles, Danzigers.

The heat wave had brought the women out onto the rickety, first-story balconies, where they sat in frowsy housecoats and dressing gowns, surveying life as it passed up and down the steaming street in front of their dispassionate eyes; men in cotton singlets and tight trousers, lounging in the cafés or

basking in the sun; and, of course, swarms of children.

It was the children who attached themselves to Rasselas. A chattering, expectant covey of them followed him everywhere.

"What's the point of it?" growled Inspector Inskip. "Are they waiting for the dog to do tricks, or what?"

"Children have always loved Rasselas," said Mr. Behrens. Where the other two were hot and cross, he was perversely cheerful. He found the gaudy streets, with their dirty shop-fronts and exciting smells, stimulating.

"It seems to me," said Commander Harcourt, "that we're on a wild goose chase. The finest bloodhound in England couldn't smell out his owner in—this." He waved his hand at the street ahead.

They had been quartering the area systematically, taking each road in turn, walking down it on one side and up it on the other. Now they had reached the end of Surrey Street, and a choice of two narrow passages lay ahead of them.

"Oh, I think he'll tell us if Mr. Calder is anywhere about," said Mr. Behrens. "He doesn't do it by smell. He does it by instinct."

"He must have a hell of an instinct to work in these conditions," said the Inspector.

"Let's take the left-hand one first," said the Commander. "It looks a bit cleaner."

At the end of the passage Rasselas paused for the first time of his own accord. He was staring up at the back of the building which lay between them and the parallel passage. Then he swung round and padded off down the pavement. The men followed.

His objective was the other passage, and the house at the end of it. It was a lonely relic of the Blitz, standing, like a surviving tooth in an ancient head, among the shored-up stumps of its fellows. The ground floor was a shop, but the window was so grimy that it was impossible to tell what merchandise it dealt in. The name above the door was Margolis.

Rasselas sank onto his haunches outside the door, and stared upward. It was a three-story house. The windows were curtained and uncommunicative.

"If he was a game dog," said the Commander, "I should say he was pointing. Do you know anything about this place?"

The Inspector said, "An old woman keeps it—a Greek, I think. She's never given us any trouble."

Rasselas' tail had begun to thump gently against the pavement. The children had fallen silent. They looked hopeful. Whatever it was they had come to see was clearly about to happen.

"If we all go in," said Mr. Behrens, "the lady'll have a fit. Why don't you go, Inspector?"

The Inspector nodded, pushed the door open, and disappeared into the gloomy interior.

Five hot minutes trickled by. Mr. Behrens wiped the perspiration from his forehead. The crowd, he noticed, had grown.

The Inspector reappeared. He came up to the other two and said, very quietly, "I think it's our man. He's got a room on the top story. I got the old girl to go up and speak to him, but he's locked his door and he won't come out."

"He might come out for me," said Mr. Behrens. "He'll know my voice, anyway."

"Worth a try," said the Commander. "Where the hell did this crowd come from?" There were older people with the children now —dark faces, flashing teeth, bright eyes—all silent, expectant.

"I think it's the combination of the dog and the Inspector," said Mr. Behrens. "I'd better go up and see if I can't settle it quietly. We don't want to start a riot."

Inside the shop, which was so dark that Mr. Behrens was still unable to see exactly what it sold, he found a large lady, dressed in black.

She gestured upward. "Poor man. He is, I think, touched."

"I'm afraid he is," said Mr. Behrens. "We'll try to get him out with as little trouble as possible. Is this the way?"

There was a door at the back of the shop, leading to a flight of linoleum-covered stairs. Mr. Behrens trudged up. His heart was heavy. When he got to the top landing he saw that the door, directly opposite the head of the stairs, was ajar.

He called out, "It's me, Behrens. Are you in there, Calder?"

From inside the room a voice, which Mr. Behrens barely recognized, said, "Come no nearer, son of Jupiter. Prometheus stands at bay."

Mr. Behrens walked forward and slowly opened the door. Mr. Calder, his chin fringed with a three-day beard, was sitting, in his shirtsleeves, on the edge of the bed. The framed genealogy of Prometheus filled the two walls behind him.

But it was not this that caught and held Mr. Behrens' eye.

Mr. Calder had an automatic pistol in his hand. Before Mr. Behrens could say another word, Mr. Calder had raised it, and pointed it. As the gun went off with a deafening roar, Mr. Behrens went down. The bullet sang through the half-open doorway, exploded a pane of glass in the landing window, and whined out into the street.

The gun went off again.

Mr. Behrens, who had been crawling rapidly backward, found himself halfway down the top flight of stairs, his chin on a level with the landing floor. He turned his head, and saw Commander Harcourt and Inskip crouching below him.

Outside, the crowd was giving tongue.

"Damn and blast," said the Commander. "This is just exactly what we *didn't* want to happen."

"What sort of gun?" said Inskip.

"A Colt automatic. Eight shots, if the clip's full."

"Six to come then," said the Inspector gloomily. "Is he a good shot?"

"He's a marksman, with any sort of weapon."

"He missed you."

"I don't think he meant to hit me. It was meant as a sort of warning salvo."

"It's going to be impossible to rush him," said the Inspector. "We might call out the fire brigade, put up a ladder, and lob a couple of tear-gas bombs through the window."

The Commander said acidly, "Our instructions were to take him with a minimum of fuss. Not the maximum."

"Can you suggest any other way?"

"Yes," said the Commander. "I can." They saw he had a gun in his hand. "From the top of the stairs, I think I could hit him in the leg, before he could hit me."

"Hitting him in the leg won't stop him," said Mr. Behrens. "You'd have to hit him in the head to do that."

"That might be a solution," said the Commander softly. The two men were lying on the stairs, their faces a few inches from each other.

Mr. Behrens said, "I couldn't agree to that."

"Kinder, really," said the Commander. "In the long run."

Mr. Behrens hesitated.

At that moment something hit them in the back and there was a sudden flurry of movement. Rasselas had cleared their prostrate bodies, bounded along the short landing, and disappeared through the door. From inside came a crash.

"Come *on!*" said Mr. Behrens.

They found Mr. Calder flat on his back, with Rasselas on top of him, trying to lick his face off.

The months that followed were the saddest that Mr. Behrens could remember. The newspapers splashed the story, and then forgot about the siege of Surrey Street. Mr. Calder had been removed to an institution near Godalming. His condition had become steadily worse, and no one had been allowed to visit him. "He wouldn't know you," the doctor in charge had said to Mr. Behrens, when he made his third application. "And you wouldn't enjoy it."

Mr. Behrens had only seen Mr. Fortescue once. He gathered that Operation Prometheus was proceeding. Commander Harcourt was going in in place of Mr. Calder. Mr. Behrens was too well-trained to ask any further questions.

Eventually his low spirits attracted the attention of his aunt, who suggested that he take a holiday. She said she had heard that the west coast of Italy was very pleasant in the autumn.

"How can I possibly go?" said Mr. Behrens. "I can't leave Rasselas. And he'd be too much for you."

"Put him in a kennel."

"A kennel, indeed. What an idea!"

"Other people put their dogs in kennels when they go abroad."

"Rasselas isn't an ordinary dog."

Every time his name was mentioned, the great golden creature looked at the speakers. During all that time he had shown no signs of restlessness. He had merely been passive. It was as if he was waiting for some event, and content to wait patiently.

"If you won't go," said his aunt, "I will. You're no pleasure to live with at the moment." And she packed her bags the very next morning and departed for Rapallo.

Late the following afternoon Mr. Behrens was sitting in his study, contemplating an empty future, when the bell rang. There was a device in the front door through which Mr. Behrens could view his visitors before admitting them. Peering through it, he was astounded to find himself looking into the sagacious face of Mr. Fortescue.

In all the years he had known him, Mr. Behrens had never visualized Mr. Fortescue as leaving the square mile of streets between Victoria Station and the Admiralty Arch. It was as great a shock as if, making his way through one of the leafy lanes near his house, Mr. Behrens had come face to face with a London omnibus.

He hastened to open the door.

When they were comfortably seated, and a drink had been offered, and refused, Mr. Fortescue said, "I had business at Dover this morning, and when I saw that my return journey brought me almost through Lamperdown, I thought I would look you up. I had one or two things to tell you, which could not very easily have been said on the telephone."

Low though they were, Mr. Behrens' spirits sank still lower.

He said, "It was very good of you to take the trouble."

"I know that you have been interested in our—" Mr. Fortescue permitted himself a very slight smile —"in our Operation Prometheus. Calder was, of course, to have been our emissary to Mikalos. When it became perfectly clear that he could not undertake the assignment, we had to find a substitute. The only other available candidate was Commander Harcourt."

Mr. Behrens found himself thinking of the last occasion on which he had met the Commander. He had clearly intended, if no other solution had presented itself, to kill Mr. Calder; and thinking matters over afterward, Mr. Behrens could not find it in his heart to criticize the decision. It is true that the Commander had not been thinking of Mr. Calder as a man. He had been thinking of him as an abstract problem in security. But on any grounds, would not Calder have been better dead than in a padded cell?

Mr. Behrens became aware that

some comment was expected of him, and said, "Yes. I imagine Commander Harcourt will do the job excellently. He was obviously the man for the job."

"Unfortunately," said Mr. Fortescue, "it was just as obvious to the other side."

Mr. Behrens looked up sharply.

"Has something gone wrong?" he said.

"They must have reasoned that we would surely send Harcourt—we have so few people who know the area and can speak the language. They were obviously on the lookout for him, and picked him up soon after he landed. Unfortunately, before he could talk to Mikalos."

"Is he dead?"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Fortescue. "His body was found. His throat had been cut. It was put down as the work of brigands—Harcourt was traveling as a Greek businessman. No one has officially connected him with us. And we shall, of course, deny all knowledge of him."

"Of course," said Mr. Behrens. "You'll have to find someone else to do the job now, I suppose."

"Yes—we'll find a substitute."

Outside, the autumn afternoon was turning into evening. A group of boys were kicking a soccer ball on the green, being careful to keep off the mown cricket square. A little red mail truck flashed past in a cloud of dust. Mr. Behrens sighed. Six months ago it had seemed to him that the Old Rectory, the village of Lamperdown, and the County of Kent were all that he needed to keep him happy for the rest of his life.

But now something had happened. A subtle piece of scene changing had been worked. There was a different backdrop, a couple of flats had been whisked away, a change had been made in the lighting, and Arcady had become a prison cell.

Rasselas seemed to feel it, too. Ever since Mr. Fortescue had arrived, the big dog had been restless. Now he was lying in a corner of the room, regarding Mr. Fortescue open-mouthed, as if he were the embodiment of the successive disasters which had befallen them.

"In all the time I've worked for you," said Mr. Behrens, "I've never yet asked you a favor."

"True," said Mr. Fortescue.

"I'm going to ask one now. I want to take over this mission. I have a good working knowledge of Greek and Italian—not enough to pass as a native, but enough, I think, to get over to Mikalos whatever you want him to know."

"I'm afraid—" said Mr. Fortescue.

"Before you turn it down, bear in mind that if you say 'No' you're probably going to have two mental cases on your hands, instead of one. If I have to sit here much longer doing nothing, I shall go mad."

"I can certainly find you a job—"

"I want this particular job."

"It's impossible."

"Why is it impossible?"

"It's impossible," said Mr. Fortescue, "because the job no longer exists. It's been finished."

Mr. Behrens stared at him. Rasselas was on his feet, hackles back, amber eyes gleaming.

"What do you mean?—Quiet, Rasselas. Lie down. I thought you said that you needed a substitute."

"We already have a substitute—we had him ready at the same time as Commander Harcourt. It's better to double back on these important jobs. The substitute actually left England the day before Harcourt. I picked up his report at Dover this morning. It crossed a few hours ahead of him. But he'll be in England now." Mr. Fortescue looked at his watch. "Indeed, he'll be on his way to London. I don't know a lot about dogs, but it seems to me that if you don't open either the door or the window, Rasselas will attempt to break out of his own accord."

"Rasselas!" said Mr. Behrens in his sternest voice, but the dog took not the slightest notice. The deerhound turned on Mr. Fortescue, exactly as if he were appealing to someone with more sense.

Mr. Fortescue raised the latch of the window, swung it open, and Rasselas went through it in one straight golden arc, raced down the front drive like a driven duststorm, and threw himself at the stocky figure standing in the gateway.

"It would appear," said Mr. Fortescue, "that our substitute has got here a little quicker than I thought he would. I hope the dog doesn't kill him in his enthusiasm. A written report is one thing. A verbal report will be even more enlightening."

It was some hours later, after Mr. Fortescue had departed for London, that Mr. Behrens got round to saying, "But why?"

Mr. Calder, looking a little thinner, but remarkably brown and fit, leaned back in his chair, scratched the dome of Rasselas' head, and said, "It was very difficult—very difficult, indeed. We found out—but a lot too late—that Harcourt had sold out."

"Commander Harcourt?" Mr. Behrens thought of the dark, clever, determined face. It seemed impossible, though not so impossible as some of the things that had happened in the past twenty years. Then as Mr. Behrens thought about it, a lot of facts fell into place.

"They got at him through his Greek relatives. He's been their man since the war. God knows what damage he did before we got on to him."

"And he was in Operation Prometheus from the start!"

"From the start. He knew it all—every detail. So we had only two options. Either drop the whole thing or try a sort of triple bluff. If I were groomed for the job, you see,

and then went off my head, Harcourt became the obvious and natural substitute. Of course, he had to say yes, meaning to make contact with his own friends just as soon as he got ashore in Albania. But Mikalos has plenty of friends, too. They got him first. Meanwhile, I'd landed fifty miles down the coast. I suppose I was about the last person the opposition expected to see, so I had quite an easy run. And a very interesting talk with Mikalos. Prometheus is more than a little tired of having his liver pecked out by the eagle. We may be seeing some action in that part of the world quite soon."

"I wish you'd told me!" said Mr. Behrens.

"I wanted to. Fortescue wouldn't hear of it. And I'm afraid he was right."

"What do you mean?"

"Think back to that time in Surrey Street. If Rasselas hadn't intervened, Harcourt was going to take a shot at me, wasn't he? If you had known what you know now, would you have behaved exactly as you did?"

"I suppose that's right," said Mr. Behrens. "So you and Fortescue were the only people in the know."

"Certainly not," said Mr. Calder. "Rasselas knew *all* about it."

a complete detective *SHORT NOVEL* by

HUGH PENTECOST

Leslie Kramer was a controversial figure—with a deep, perhaps unfathomable, mystery in his past. When Kramer was murdered, his employer, Edgar Milton, publisher of "Tomorrow's News," spoke movingly about "a great man passing"—a great American who had once been adviser to kings and presidents.

The reaction to Leslie Kramer's murder was nevertheless as paradoxical as the victim himself: some thought that millions of people would mourn the dead man; others thought that millions of people would dance in the streets when they heard the news . . . What was the truth behind the man known as one of America's "elder statesmen"? Indeed, who was Leslie Kramer? What manner of man was he? . . .

"Tomorrow Is Yesterday" is another of Lieutenant Pascal's absorbing homicide investigations—and one of the toughest in his career. Actually, the murder of Leslie Kramer was only the beginning of two days of terror in the publishing offices of a national news weekly and in the radio station from which the magazine's news program was broadcast . . . a fascinating detective short novel—complete in this issue.

TOMORROW IS YESTERDAY

by HUGH PENTECOST

I HUNG ONTO THE EDGE OF THE long conference table in the Board Room, trying to concentrate on the solemn faces around me and on Edgar Milton's voice; but all I could think of, or see in front of my eyes, were the twelve martinis, each in its own glass, arranged like soldiers in the refrigerator—those, and the handle of the ice pick protruding from Leslie Kramer's left temple.

Edgar Milton is a master of the cliché and the meaningless statement. Maybe that's how you get to be publisher of a great national weekly like *Tomorrow's News*—by never saying anything that can't be

acceptable to both sides of an argument. He sounded now as though he was trying for an Academy Award in elocution.

"That great American," he was saying, "adviser to kings and presidents, genius in his own right—"

All I could think of was the tired old face and the faded blue eyes, closed forever, and the ice pick and the trickle of blood down a lined cheek. Milton's words faded away and I went back an hour in time. I could hear once more the casual voice of the Homicide man, Lieutenant Pascal, as he looked at the martinis in the open refrigerator in Leslie Kramer's office.

"Office party coming up?" he'd asked.

Bob Sands, the public-relations man, was answering the questions in his dry, New England twang. "They were a daily routine, Lieutenant," Bob said. "He drank them all himself, unless someone happened to drop in for a chat."

"Which would be fairly often, I'd imagine," Pascal said. "I see on the office door that he was Senior Editor."

"A sinecure," Bob said. "He never did anything but sit here and brood about his past, and drink that embalming fluid!"

"Didn't he draw a salary?"

"A large one," Bob said. "But he didn't write and he didn't edit."

"A big outfit like *Tomorrow's News* isn't usually so altruistic," Pascal said.

Bob shrugged. "His name represented prestige for us. He was supposed to be our expert on foreign news. The bright young men downstairs never ask for his opinion, but he's here to give it just in case. Or *was* here!"

I had found Leslie Kramer in death. It's the kind of thing that doesn't happen to people you know, only to strange-looking characters in the newspapers.

But it had happened to me. I'd knocked on the door, and when he didn't answer I'd walked in, and there he was on the floor.

It was only the second time I'd ever seen him. I write the regular weekly radio show for *Tomorrow's News* and I spend a good part of three days a week around their offices; but I'd never run into Kramer in the halls or the washrooms or the elevators.

Of course, I knew about him. He'd been a big steel tycoon in the early years of the century. In the first World War he'd been some sort of production coordinator at a dollar a year. After that he grew into what is called, for want of a better title, an "elder statesman." People said he was the real power behind our foreign policy.

Then something went wrong. Kramer had some kind of row with the bigwigs in the government. In an election year he wrote a series of articles blasting the President, the State Department, and the big bankers on the Administration side

of the fence. It was a head-on collision for power, and Leslie Kramer lost.

The Administration was re-elected. The same State Department and bankers remained in power. Kramer disappeared from public view. Some five years later he turned up on the masthead of *Tomorrow's News* as a senior editor.

The one time I'd seen him alive was about six months ago. Our radio show is a dramatized version of events in the week's news. A story had come up on General Franco. He'd made some anti-Communist pronouncements, and at the same time some senator had been demanding that Spain be included in the Marshall Plan.

We were doing a show on government activities that week, and the Franco spot was indicated. I didn't have any color stuff on Franco, and the material in the magazine morgue was all pretty cut and dried.

It was then that Bob Sands remembered that Kramer had spent some time in Spain as Franco's guest. "He could give you all the stuff you want." Bob said.

So I went up to his office on the top floor. "I'm Bill Rawls," I told the white-haired man behind the desk.

"Oh, yes, you write the radio show," he said.

I was surprised, because I didn't suppose Kramer had ever heard of me. I was surprised by the office. There was no evidence that he had a secretary. The desk top in front of him was bare, except for the typewritten copy for this week's magazine, neatly folded, apparently unread. There wasn't a pen or ink or pencils—nothing but the white circular stains left on the mahogany by his cocktail glasses. Kramer's faded blue eyes were sad, remote, but not unfriendly.

"Have a martini," he suggested. "There in the ice chest. And you might bring me one while you're about it."

I opened the ice chest and saw the array of glasses. And half of them were empty that day. I brought him one.

"I don't drink on the day we're getting the show together," I said. "Things get a little too hectic."

He took the martini, saluted me gravely, and drained the glass in one long gulp. "What can I do for you, son?" he asked.

"We're doing a spot on General Franco," I said. "Bob Sands thought you might be able to help."

"What do you want to say about him, Mr. Rawls?"

"Some kind of personal touches," I said. "The truth."

"My dear Mr. Rawls!" He shook his head wearily. "What is the truth about anything?"

I tried to keep it light. "What I want is stuff like whether he wears his pajama pants in bed," I said.

"Let's see," Kramer said, his eyes twinkling. "I believe the modern

hero wears neither pants nor jacket. Say that—since he is to be a hero this week."

"But is it true?"

"What does it matter?" he said. "Once a few million people hear you say so on the air it will be true. *Tomorrow's News,* we call our magazine, and we take great pride in our ability to foretell coming events in world history."

He turned his chair and stared out the window at the Manhattan skyline. "But any fool can foretell the future, Mr. Rawls. Tomorrow is yesterday. I am what I am tomorrow because of what I did yesterday."

I wondered if he was recalling the lost battle for power. I wondered if perhaps that wasn't all he did in this useless office with its ice chest full of martinis.

"The individual sometimes fools you, but the nation never does," he said. He wasn't really talking to me. "Sometimes the individual gets cured of his illness before it becomes malignant. With a nation, the disease always has to run its course."

Then he turned to me with a faint smile. "I never got to know about the General's pajamas," he said.

• • •

Gripping the table in the Board Room, I brought myself back to the present. But I was remembering the first meeting, and I could feel the hair rising on the back of my neck. He hadn't just been sitting in that office for years, brooding over defeat. He had been able to foretell the future.

His "Tomorrow is yesterday" thesis had made it clear to him that some day someone would kill him, and he had just been sitting there in his office waiting for it to happen!

Edgar Milton, the publisher of *Tomorrow's News,* is short and plump, and he wears horn-rimmed pince-nez. He has a nervous habit of polishing them with a handkerchief when he talks.

When he'd finished his eulogy of Leslie Kramer, Milton dissolved the meeting after saying he wanted me, and Sands, and Barry Roberts to wait for him. Barry is another guy whose job is a little hard to describe. I believe he's called an "Executive Editor," and this seemed to add up to being a yes-man and courier for the "Old Man," as Milton was called.

Milton found it difficult to deal with such hard-boiled, very direct guys as Tim Corcoran, the Managing Editor, and George Morse, the head of the foreign department. So Barry Roberts worked around the outskirts, with hands full of office memos, expressing weighty opinions to which no one paid the slightest attention.

He was my particular cross, however, because, to give him something to do, he'd been made a sort of supervisor of the radio script each week.

When the others were gone, Milton faced the three of us, polishing

his glasses and looking embarrassed.

"I haven't been supplied with all the details," he said, giving Barry Roberts a reproachful glance, "so I don't know how it happened that you discovered the—uh—tragedy, Mr. Rawls."

I tried to bring myself solidly back to earth. On Monday mornings I came in early and picked up the flimsies of the magazine, the typewritten copies of the stuff that was going into the book that week. I went over those, trying to pick out material for the show, ready to present it to Roberts for approval before I started to work.

Once I had Roberts' okay on a subject I went to my office, where the radio producer, the director, and the musical director were waiting for me. We'd discuss how to handle the particular subject, and then I'd go to work on the script. I'd do it in one sitting, maybe in seven or eight hours. Then the director could cast, the musical director could write his introduction, his bridges, and his close.

Roberts got it the next day, red-penciled it, argued with me, and finally okayed it. That night we went on the air—the night before the magazine appeared on the stands.

"This morning I thought there might be a show on Yugoslavia," I explained to Milton. "I wanted to get certain attitudes straight, and I thought Mr. Kramer might be able to help. I'd been to him before. So I went up to his office and—and found him."

"Quite," Milton said. "Oh, quite." He rubbed his glasses some more. "You understand, Mr. Rawls, we're tearing the magazine apart. Kramer will be the lead story. But about the radio show—"

"We can't do anything but Kramer," Sands said.

"Quite," Milton said. "But I should like to avoid sensationalism. The murder is a police matter, which will be handled by the daily press, when and if it is solved. Except in your opening narration, Mr. Rawls, where you will refer to 'the death of Leslie Kramer—shock to the nation, et cetera—' I don't want the murder played up. I don't want the discovery of the body. I want a dignified, unsensational account of Leslie Kramer's career. A great man passing—that sort of thing."

"I suppose there's a lot of stuff on Kramer in the morgue," I said.

"Very little," Bob Sands said. "I've already looked. Just the barest kind of outline. We'll need some colorful incidents for the show."

"No sensationalism," Milton said.

"But he was a sensational figure in his day." Sands said. "Our Washington Bureau should be able to dig up stuff for us quickly. I'll call Broderick. After he's collected material I can stick you on an open wire with him, Bill, and he can talk to you."

Milton cleared his throat. "I pre-

fer it be a dignified appraisal of the man's accomplishments. No old scandals."

"What scandals?" Sands asked.

"What accomplishments?" I asked in the same breath.

"Everybody knows what the man did!" Barry Roberts said.

"What, concretely, did he do," I asked, "besides red-pencil an okay on the foreign news section each week?"

Milton stood up abruptly, polishing his glasses. "I think I've made my wishes clear, gentlemen. On this occasion, Mr. Rawls, I should like to see the radio script myself when it is ready."

Milton left us.

Sands immediately put his feet on the directors' table and tilted his chair back.

"Okay, sonny boy," he said to Roberts. "What's eating the Old Man? Here we have the hottest story of the year, and he sounds like he wants us to do a tone poem instead of a dramatic show."

"As a matter of fact," Roberts said uncomfortably, "Mrs. Milton is going to do an In Memoriam poem for the magazine. Mr. Milton did suggest—"

"Oh, no!" Sands said.

"Well, it could be done," Roberts said. "We could get some big-name actor to read it. . . ."

"Yeah, I know," Sands said dryly. "Well, I'm getting on the phone to Washington. Meanwhile, you see what you can use in the morgue, Bill. It'll probably be an hour or two before Broderick can assemble the beginnings of material for you. It'll be an all-day and all-night job this time."

"Sally'll kill me," I said. "I was supposed to go look at an apartment with her today, during lunch hour."

The magazine's morgue was not like a newspaper morgue, where obituaries of famous people are prepared in advance. It was really just a mammoth file of back issues with a running cross index on all conceivable subjects, countries, personalities. It was presided over by a girl named Joan Wales who had just about turned my life upside down.

Joan had come to work for the magazine about a year ago, and the first day I saw her I knew she was trouble for me. I can't explain it too lucidly. She wasn't beautiful in the sense of classic beauty or cover-girl beauty. She was just my type, my own personal type of excitement, I guess. I remember her handing me some material across her desk one of those early days, and it was like my knocking against a high-voltage wire.

I'm not being vain when I say she felt the same thing. I invited her out to dinner, and she accepted. It was one of those things. We told each other all about ourselves from the beginning until today. I was completely honest with her. If I'd just been a wolf I wouldn't have told her everything, because it worked

against me. You see, there was Sally.

Sally and I grew up together. We were raised across the street from each other. Our parents were close friends. She was my first girl. I took her to prep school dances and college proms. Everybody took it for granted we'd be married some day.

Sally is a good egg, a solid, practical, feet-squarely-on-the-ground character. She'd make a wonderful wife, everyone said. She would run a home like clockwork. There would be lists and schedules, everything planned efficiently. But there would be no high-voltage electrical shocks. It was typical of our relationship that we'd decided we'd be married only when we found an apartment we liked.

I told Joan all that the first night we went out together. She just listened—a little sadly, I thought. When I took her home I kissed her good night. She didn't resist. She kissed me back—and it was something special. Almost nothing in this world lives up to the anticipation. Joan did. And then she pushed me firmly away.

"I guess that's that for us, Bill," she said. "Perhaps we shouldn't have had this much, because nothing else will ever—"

"Joan!"

"Good night, Bill."

And that was that. I never expected to go anywhere with her again—not even to lunch with her.

I knew the answer: Break with Sally, and Joan was mine. But Sally'd never done anything to hurt me. She'd always played it on the level. She built her life toward our marriage.

So I didn't break with her and I stayed away from the morgue as much as I could.

Now I had to go there. Even as I walked toward Joan's desk I could feel my heart starting to beat, and there was a noise in my ears like a train in a tunnel.

"Hi," I said. My voice was husky.

"Hello, Bill." She raised her eyes, and then lowered them, quickly.

"I need the files on Leslie Kramer," I said.

"They're out," she said. She nodded toward the reading space at the back of the room.

The Homicide man was there with a stack of back issues on the table in front of him. Lieutenant Pascal was a squarely built, swarthy man, his face lined in good-natured grooves. He wore a soft hat pushed back on thick curly hair.

"You looking for these?" he asked.

"The radio show," I said. "Neither storm, nor sleet—or however it goes. I figured you'd be looking for me. The man who found the body, you know."

"I checked on you," Pascal said. "I guess you just found the body."

"Do you have any idea when it happened?" I asked him.

"From five to fifteen minutes

before you found him," Pascal said.

That jolted me. I must have come pretty close to walking in on the actual killing.

"How do you know that?" I asked. "I thought it was only in books that the medical examiner could tell the time of death so closely."

"I haven't had the medical examiner's report." Pascal said. "But I talked to the martini man."

"Who?"

"Bartender across the street," he said. "He comes up here every morning at five minutes to nine with a bucketful of martinis which he pours into those glasses for Kramer. He came this morning and did his job. Kramer hadn't arrived. You stuck your nose into things about twenty minutes later."

"Maybe the bartender killed him. Anyone who had to make martinis at nine in the morning—"

"Maybe," Pascal said. "but I've crossed him off. It would be too easy. They never come easy for me."

I gestured toward the magazines on the table. "What do you hope to find here?"

"Who was Leslie Kramer? What kind of person was he? Why would someone want to kill him? Why was he paid a salary for doing nothing? Any one of a dozen anti-administration newspapers would have paid him handsomely for a daily column. *Tomorrow's News,* it would seem, falls into that group. But they paid him for advice they didn't want. Who is so kind-hearted around here?"

"You've got me there," I said. "But I have a theory." As I told Pascal about my one session with Kramer I realized that the palms of my hands were damp. "I think he was a kind of fatalist," I said. "It's as though he was just sitting here waiting for it to happen. And it finally did."

"But who was he waiting for?"

"The answer to that is your job," I said.

"So it is," Pascal said. "By the way, where can I get another copy of this magazine?" He had a leather-bound collection of the magazines for the year 1939 in front of him. "The index says there's a story in the September 19th issue on Kramer—pages 12 to 14. But they're torn out."

"Somebody'll catch hell for that," I said.

"Yes," Pascal said, slowly. "Maybe by way of the electric chair. Call the gal over and let's ask her."

Joan Wales looked at the mutilated magazine. No one was allowed to take these files out of the morgue without her permission and it was her responsibility to see that they were undamaged. This one being ten years old, I figured it could have happened before her time. I said so.

She shook her head slowly. "I've checked every volume of the back issues since I've been here," she said.

"Which is how long?" Pascal asked.

"A year last month." Joan stared at the book. "I have a record of who has taken out every volume during that time."

She went back to her desk and returned with a card out of an index. "It's been out twice before today," she said. She gave me an odd look. "The first week I was here I didn't know everyone's name. I wrote on the card, 'For the Radio Show.' "

"That's you?" Pascal asked me.

"Not necessarily me," I said. "It could have been Reeder, the director, or Lanny Moore, our producer. Or my secretary. Let me see the book. We never did anything on Kramer."

I was trying to remember when we'd done a show that might have dealt with the year 1939. Dozens of them, of course, because that was the year the war had broken out. I remembered a job we'd done on the Nazi War Crime Trials. That was probably it. Of course Goering's suicide—and I found a piece on Goering we'd used.

"That's what we had it for," I told Pascal. "Nothing to do with Kramer."

"And who else had this volume out?" Pascal asked Joan.

She looked at the card, and I thought it shook slightly in her hand. "Leslie Kramer," she said.

"When?"

"Just six months ago."

"He asked for this specific volume?"

"Yes. He said he was looking for a story about himself. I had an idea he was doing his memoirs or something."

"You checked the book when he returned it?"

"I—I think so," Joan said, hesitating. "I always do."

"And today I was your first customer?"

"Bob Sands had everything out for a few minutes before you, Lieutenant."

"He was looking for material for the show," I said. "He undoubtedly gave it a very quick run-through."

"Can you get me an unmutilated copy of that issue, Miss Wales?" Pascal asked.

"There's another file in Mr. Milton's office," Joan said. "I'll get it for you."

When Joan left, I turned to Pascal. "There's one thing that doesn't make sense to me."

Pascal grinned. "Only one?" he asked.

"The refrigerator in Mr. Kramer's office is electric, isn't it?"

"Sure."

"The ice pick," I said. "I mean—with an electric icebox you don't usually—"

"A nice point," Pascal said. "I had wondered about it myself."

I had to go all over it again when I got into the radio conference-room. Max Reeder, with his Mes-

sianic beard, Lanny C. Moore, our producer, and Lou Sobotkin, the musical director, were waiting for me.

Lanny is a handsome, curly-headed guy right out of a collar ad, who'd started in radio as an actor but whose shrewd business sense and genial manner had carried him up the ladder to the producing end. He owned half a dozen topflight shows, including ours. Lanny was the common-sense member of our somewhat temperamental team.

I told them about finding the body, getting the receptionist to call the police, my conversation with Pascal, and Edgar Milton's orders about the show.

Max Reeder, who looks like an Old Testament prophet, tugged at his beard. "At last a malignant cancer on the body politic has been removed," he said. "Kramer was one of the great villians of the century."

I had better explain about Max. He talks like a Red, but if you were to ask him what Karl Marx's economic theories were he couldn't tell you. He was really a soft-hearted guy who was always championing the causes of underdogs. He was always talking about "the monopolies" and "the trusts" and "the international bankers," but he played the stock market like mad, and could afford it.

Max is probably the best director of documentaries in the business, if you can get someone like Lanny to sit on his head. If you let him alone he'll load a show. You had to watch him so that things didn't get out of balance.

"Nonsense!" Lou Sobotkin said.

Lou has a heavy guttural accent, a shock of black hair, laughing eyes, and wears rainbow-colored sport shirts winter and summer. He's a character, and a wonderful musician.

"An old man, sitting alone in an office," Lou said, "powerless to hurt anyone. A shriveled-up cancer, no longer dangerous. Look!" His eyes brightened. "The Twilight of the God's! We use it as a theme under the show. But we begin with the funeral march under the opening narration." He began to direct an imaginary orchestra, singing horribly off key.

"I think it stinks!" Max exploded. "The man was a villain, no good! You've got to handle this to show the chicanery, the scheming, the plotting, the—"

"You've got to handle it as the passing of a 'great American,'" I said. "Orders from the Old Man."

"I won't do it!" Max shouted. "I refuse to make a hero out of a man who—who—"

"Who what?" Lanny asked, grinning. "We're doing a radio show for *Tomorrow's News*. We do what they want. That's what we're paid for."

"A million people will be dancing in the streets when they hear the news!" Max said.

"And a million people will mourn him," Lanny said.

I leaned forward. "That brings me to an idea I've been playing with," I said. "How about handling it that way? Incidents pro and con. The people who loved him, the people who hated him, the mystery that has always surrounded him. We begin with the narrator asking the simple question: 'Who was Leslie Kramer?' and we carry it through on that line, showing both sides and leaving it to the audience, in the end, to decide—like a jury."

"Not bad," Lanny said.

"I like it!" Lou said. "It will give us a chance for real musical variety!"

"The only thing the audience will really be interested in is who killed him," Lanny said.

"And that we leave untouched," I said. "We don't even mention the word *murder*. As far as *Tomorrow's News* is concerned there's been no murder."

"Look, if they're going to do the death of Little Eva, with angels carrying Kramer to heaven, I quit!" Max said.

At that moment the door opened and Bob Sands came in.

"There's no use sweating about it, fellows," he said. "You've got no place to go till Broderick calls me back from Washington, and that may be a couple of hours. You're going to have to improvise around a script that isn't written."

"How can I cast if I don't see a script or even know what it's about?" Max demanded.

"Put in a call for all the actors you know are good at doubling," Lanny said. "And we'd better figure on an extra couple of hours' rehearsal, so Lou can fit his music in."

"You'll have to hire someone to do Kramer," Bob said. "And listen, Max—no comedy heavy! Did you ever hear Kramer talk?"

"I never even laid eyes on him," Max said.

"I called Globe News," Bob said. "They've got some old shots of Kramer in the newsreels. They'll play them for you, and you can get an actor who sounds right. And don't mess it up, Max, or the Old Man will throw the show out the window on you at air time if you pull one of your fast ones."

Just then the phone rang in the corner, and Bob answered it. "Hello, sweetie pie," he said, after a moment. He glanced at me. "Your heart-throb," he said.

"Sally?"

"Are you leading a double life?" Bob asked.

I went over to the phone.

"Listen, Bill; what time are you getting off for lunch?" Sally asked me.

"I'm not," I said. "Hell's popping over here. There's been a murder."

"Fine," she said. "That should make for a dramatic show. But what time are you getting off for lunch? It's the only time we can see the apartment."

"Listen," I said. "Leslie Kramer's been murdered right here in the building, and nobody's going out to lunch."

"But we've got to decide about the apartment today!" Sally wailed. "You have to eat! You have to take some time for that."

"A sandwich right off the typewriter," I said. "You'll have to decide about the apartment yourself."

"But, Bill—!"

"I've got to go now, darling. Sorry, but this is an emergency!"

"I suppose our future isn't important! I suppose I don't matter to you as much as some old corpse! I suppose—"

"Goodbye, darling," I said, and hung up.

I turned away from the phone, and saw Joan Wales standing in the doorway. I knew she'd heard. She came over to the table.

"I got the publisher's file for Lieutenant Pascal," she said.

"What was the article about?" I asked her.

"I don't know," she said. "The same pages have been torn out of his copy. Don't any of you remember what it was about?" She looked around at the others.

"That's ten years ago!" Lanny said. "We weren't doing a show then. How could we be expected to—?"

I explained to him we had used the issue for a piece on Goering.

Bob Sands stood where he was at the head of the table, scowling. "I remember that," he said. "I remember looking at the magazine when it was in here. There was a piece on Kramer—and a picture."

We all waited a moment for him to go on. Finally I asked him what kind of picture.

"Oh, some European big shot," Bob said. "I don't remember what the piece was about. I didn't read it. I just remember seeing it and the picture."

"Have you any suggestions as to where I could get the Lieutenant a copy of the magazine, a whole one?" Joan asked.

"The Old Man has a private file at home," Bob said. "I'll have Barry Roberts ask him."

"The Lieutenant seems in a hurry," Joan said. She turned to me. "If you'll tell me what kind of sandwich you want—?"

"Thanks," I said stiffly. "I'll manage by myself."

When she had gone, Lou Sobotkin turned to me, grinning. "How stupid can you be, Chumkin?" he said.

"What do you mean—'stupid'?"

"This girl has a yen for you," he said. "I wish it was me."

"I'm engaged to be married," I said.

"Where I come from we do not allow marriage to interfere with pleasure," he said.

"Where do you come from Lou?" Bob asked. "I'm prepared to move at once."

"I am a citizen of the world,"

Sobotkin said, laughing. Then, like a shade being drawn over a sunlit window, his face was suddenly dark and somber. "As you know, I was a Czech," he said. "My country was murdered. Then, just as it was being born again, it was once more murdered. I come from nowhere that is any longer my own."

Lanny and Max and Lou went out for a cup of coffee. That was our usual routine. We'd get the show settled, and then we'd go out and talk it over.

I didn't go with them this time. I phoned Joan in the morgue and asked her to have one of the office boys bring in the whole file on Kramer. We were already about an hour behind schedule; it was ten thirty.

Bob had arranged with the Washington Bureau to call back at twelve sharp. I couldn't do anything with the script till I'd talked to the Washington man, but I could steep myself in the Kramer myth as much as possible.

Two kids brought in a couple of armsful of back issues. Joan followed them. She had on a hat and was pulling on a pair of gloves. She instructed the boys to put the copies down on the big center table, which they did, and left.

"I'm going up town to the Miltons' apartment to get his personal file copy of that '39 issue. Is there anything I can do for you?" Joan asked.

"Yes," I said. "About Sally and that apartment—"

"Please, Bill!"

"Look; suppose I go to her," I said. "Suppose I tell her I'm hopelessly, totally in love with you? If I do that, Joan, will you marry me?"

"My poor darling," she said gently. "Don't you see? You can't decide it that way. Your problem with Sally is a separate thing all by itself. You have to decide it on its own merits. You can't have everything in this world, Bill. It's one thing or the other. You can't hang on to both."

"But, Joan—?"

"Would you go to her and ask her, if I turned you down, whether she'd still marry you?"

"That's different!"

"Is it? Maybe some day you'll know which of us you really want. I hope that happens before it's too late for you."

I felt my throat dry up. "Joan! Is there someone else?"

"You're sure there isn't anything I can do for you while I'm out of the office?"

"Joan, please listen to me!"

"See you later," she said, and was gone.

I sat there for a long time, not thinking about Kramer at all. Finally I managed to drag myself back to the job. I'd just started going through the index when Bob Sands came in. He looked harassed. I could imagine what was going on

out in the Editorial Department. They had to be through with their changes in a hurry. The book went to press at two.

"Bill, they need this stuff badly outside," he said, waving at the magazines.

"Okay," I said, "take it away."

"Look," Bob said; "you haven't got any place to go till we hear from Washington. Lieutenant Pascal just made a suggestion: He's going over to the hotel where Kramer lived. He thought you might want to go along. Local color."

"That sounds swell," I said. "Where is he?"

"We fixed him up with an office down the hall," Bob said. "He's being very decent. A lot of people in his business wouldn't understand that the magazine has to go to press, no matter what. But remember, Bill, Broderick will be on the phone at twelve sharp. Be back here."

I found Pascal in one of the extra cubbyholes down the corridor. He was sitting at the desk, hat pushed back on his head, smoking a cigarette.

There was a man in a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up, black pants, and patent-leather shoes, standing in front of him.

"Hi," Pascal said casually. "This is the martini man. Mr. Rawls—Vince O'Malley. Vince has cleared up one small point for us," Pascal said. "Tell Mr. Rawls, Vince."

Vince cleared his throat. "It's the ice pick," he said. "Every morning I make up the martinis for Mr. Kramer and put them in a glass jug. Then I put the jug in a pail and pack some cracked ice around it. Maybe I have to leave it stand for a few minutes, and the ice gets solid, so I always bring the ice pick over with me in the pail.

"I done that this morning. It was only a little while ago that I went to get it for something and I couldn't find it. I figured I must have left it over here. And then I thought maybe that was what was used on him!" He swallowed hard. "And it was! They just showed it to me, and it's mine, all right."

Pascal blew smoke toward the ceiling. "Vince figured he put it down on top of the refrigerator and just left it there."

There were little beads of sweat on Vince's forehead. "You don't think I—"

"Take it easy," Pascal said. "I don't think anything yet. Besides, Vince, the receptionist saw you leave a couple of minutes before Kramer came in. I checked. Whatever else I do I always check and check. You're in the clear, Vince, unless I can figure out how you got back in again."

"There's one thing I'd like to ask you, Vince," I said. "You're an expert on such things. How could a guy drink all those martinis every day and still stay on his feet?"

Vince shook his head. "He never showed it, except his face got a little red," he said. "He must of had

an asbestos gut!" And Vince went out, dabbing at his forehead.

"I suppose Vince could have come back up the fire stairs," I said, trying to think of something smart to say.

"How often have you used the fire stairs?"

"Personally, never," I said. "It's against the rules. I'm strictly a conformist."

"Huh," Pascal said. "You didn't know there was an alarm system that shows up on the superintendent's board whenever anyone uses the fire stairs?"

"Ain't science wonderful," I said.

"In this instance it is," Pascal said. "There's only one way to get into the offices. That's past the receptionist. To get to Kramer's office you use the inside stairway. There wasn't anybody here, Mr. Rawls, who wasn't supposed to be here. So we know it was someone connected with the magazine or your radio show.

"We also know, from Vince's testimony, and that it probably wasn't premeditated—at least, as to the exact moment. Someone walked in Kramer's office, saw the ice pick, and let him have it. There was hardly time to work up a good argument. Kramer arrived at 9:05. You found him at 9:23. Somebody must have really hated him to have reacted so quickly to the opportunity." He sighed. "Going over to the hotel with me?"

The hotel was about five blocks from the magazine office. It was an old-fashioned kind of place, one that still serves wonderful food, but is pretty well run down at the heel, otherwise. It wasn't exactly the place you'd expect an ex-steel tycoon to choose to live.

The hotel manager had been warned of our coming.

"It's unbelievable! It's just unbelievable!" he kept saying.

"Have you got the passkey to his suite?" Pascal asked.

"Suite! My dear man, he lived very simply. Just one of our ordinary single rooms with bath. He was extremely modest and reserved."

"Have you the passkey to his single room and bath?" Pascal asked patiently.

"Of course. I'll get it at once."

Possibly Pascal was more surprised by Kramer's room than I was. As the manager had told us, it was just an ordinary single room and bath. There was not one item in the room of a personal character—no pictures, no books. Just a bed, a bureau, a flat-topped desk, with hotel pen and stationery. Not a pipe, not a package of cigarettes—nothing. Except for four suits in the closet and shirts and linen in the bureau it might have been a vacant room.

Pascal stood looking around, rubbing his jaw with the tips of his fingers. Without a word he went over to the desk and opened the

drawer. No letters or papers. Only a checkbook.

Pascal opened the checkbook to the most recent page. Mr. Kramer had a bank balance of exactly $314 and some odd cents.

"What goes on here!" Pascal said, in a sudden burst of irritation. "No letters, no papers, no books! This guy had thousands of friends and acquaintances all over the world. Didn't he correspond with them? Didn't he keep any mementos of a life that actually was a part of our national history? What gives?"

"He drank martinis," I said, "and waited for someone to kill him."

"You know, I'm beginning to wonder if you're not right," Pascal said. "It's as though the man had cleaned up all his affairs, probably drawn his will, and was just sitting around waiting."

As Pascal said, whatever else he might not do, he always checked. He talked to the maid who took care of Kramer's room. She said it had always been the way it was and she'd often commented on it. He was the easiest man to clean up after she'd ever known. He didn't read newspapers, she said—or at least there was never anything in the wastebasket. The only thing she ever found in the room in the morning was an empty cocktail shaker and glass.

Whatever color or character there was in Leslie Kramer's past, he had erased it from his present existence. There wasn't a thing here that would give you the slightest clue to the man.

Pascal and I walked back to the magazine office. He went to his cubbyhole and I to the main editorial room.

I was standing there watching the tickers, when a boy tapped me on the shoulder. "You're wanted on the telephone in the radio room, Mr. Rawls."

I glanced at my watch. It was just noon. That would be Broderick in Washington, I told myself. I hurried down the hall to our office and picked up the phone. It stands on a little table by the windows looking down on Broadway. I picked up the receiver.

"Bill?" It was Joan Wales's voice.

"Hello, Joan," I said.

"Bill, are you alone?"

I recognized, with surprise, an anxious quality in her voice. "Sure."

"Listen, Bill; I got Mr. Milton's file. I have that story on Kramer."

"Nice going," I said.

"Bill, who knew that I was coming over here to get this?"

"Who knew?" I didn't get it. "I don't follow you," I said.

"Bill, listen to me!" Joan sounded so urgent that I felt a small sensation of shock. "I'm afraid to bring this thing back to the office."

"What are you talking about?" I said. "Afraid! What do you mean?"

"Bill, ask Lieutenant Pascal to send for me. I'm in a drug store on the corner of Lexington Avenue at

Eighty-sixth Street. It's a crowded place. I'll be safe here."

"Joan, stop that double talk!" I said. "What's the matter?"

"This article," she said. "Bill, I don't want to tell you over the phone, but this stuff is dynamite. If the murderer knows I've got it, it wouldn't be safe for me to bring it in alone. I—"

"Bill! For Pete's sake!" It was Bob Sands's voice behind me. He was standing in the doorway. "Broderick's on the phone, chewing his fingernails. The call's on my extension in my office. Get in there. I've set it up so the call will be recorded, and my secretary's ready to take notes."

"Joan's on here," I said. "It's something about the Old Man's file. She seems to think—"

"I'll take it," Bob said. "Get in there to Broderick. You haven't got all day."

"Bill!" Joan's voice came anxiously through the receiver.

"Long distance from Washington," I said. "I'm putting Bob on."

"Bill, wait—"

"Be seeing you, Joan," I said, and handed the phone to Bob.

I hurried into Bob's office, which was next door. His efficient secretary had a recorder hooked up to the phone and she was sitting by with her steno book. She'd put a pad and a half dozen sharpened pencils on the desk for me. I grabbed up the phone.

"Hello, Broderick?" I said. "Bill Rawls, here."

"About time!" Broderick's voice was staccato and sharp. "I haven't been able to put this stuff in any chronological sequence, but you can piece it together at your end. I've got stuff on his beginnings, stuff on the first World War, what little is known about his diplomatic work for our government. There are some old scandals which I understand you can't use—the big political blow-up that finished him. I'll just read 'em off as they come, and you can sort them out under those headings. Ready?"

"Shoot," I said. "We've got a recorder hooked up. I won't interrupt you unless there's something I don't understand. . . . Hold it."

Even up as high as we were, the street noises were distracting. I asked the gal to close the window. As she moved around toward it a sort of banshee wail filled the office for a moment.

"Too much racket," I said to Broderick. "Foul up the recorder. Okay, go ahead."

I leaned back in Bob's chair, listening. Broderick was a good reporter. He knew what was color and what wasn't. He began at random with an anecdote about Kramer and President Wilson.

As I sat listening, an apparition appeared in the doorway of Bob's office. It was Lou Sobotkin, his face so green it looked as though he was standing in a sickly spotlight. He

was weaving unsteadily on his feet. He opened his mouth several times as though he was trying to speak, but no sound came. Then, suddenly, his voice came bursting out, sounding as if he were calling from a hollow cave.

"Sands!" he cried. "Bob Sands! He just fell out the window in the next office—sixteen stories to—to the street!"

It was a fantastic coincidence, but the secretary jumped to her feet, and in so doing knocked the recorder needle back on the record. I heard the playback, tiny in volume, of that despairing banshee wail.

• • •

It is difficult for me to describe with any accuracy what went on during the next hour, because, for the first time in my life, I went into a complete hysterical crack-up.

Bob was my friend. He's held my hand and smoothed over the rough spots for nearly two years of writing the show. He'd steered me around the danger spots in the magazine office, the hidden shoals of temperament and unspoken policy. We'd sweated out a dozen difficult scripts together; we'd eaten together; we'd shared our personal problems. I'd gotten to know Bob Sands better than any other human being in the world.

I forgot all about Broderick's report and ran out of the office and into the radio conference-room, where I'd left Bob talking to Joan Wales. I also, believe it or not, forgot all about Joan and her anxious plea for help. It was as though, somehow, by getting there in a hurry I could pull Bob back from the sixteen-story fall to annihilation.

There were people in the room, standing around like dolls in a puppet show. And there was the open window. I didn't notice it at the time, but there were the ripped-out wires of the telephone. Bob had fallen with the phone in his hands, clinging to it like the proverbial straw in an absurd attempt to save himself.

Lanny was there, leaning against the wall, his handsome face dead-white. Max Reeder was there, looking loose and flabby and disjointed, his mouth opening and closing, gasping for air. There were some familiar faces from the office force to which I couldn't attach names.

I ran to the window. There was a covered radiator in front of it, and outside there was an eighteen-inch ledge. I actually had to kneel on the radiator top to look out and down.

I saw the pygmies on the street swarming around a sprawled black blotch on the pavement. I heard the siren of a police car. Bob! Bob Sands —he was down there alone, with strangers staring at him. I wanted to get down there.

I pulled back from the window with that intention, but somebody grabbed me around the neck and hung onto me. It was Bob's secre-

tary. The girl clung to me, weeping hysterically.

"How could he fall? How could he fall?" she kept saying.

"He didn't," a calm voice said at my elbow. It was Pascal. "He couldn't. He was apparently talking on the phone. If he'd had a dizzy spell, or a heart attack, he *couldn't* have fallen out the window. There's the radiator and the ledge."

I really didn't hear him. I still wanted to get down there to Bob. I didn't want him left there alone with all those strangers staring at him.

Then the thing happened that set me off like a rocket.

Barry Roberts came into the room. "Listen, everybody; this is a terrible thing, but we've got a magazine to get out and a radio show to get on the air. Everybody please get back to their posts."

I think I screamed at him. I know I called him every evil name I could think of. I told him what to do with his radio show. The more I shouted at him, the more intense my fury at him grew, until suddenly I was swarming all over him, swinging punches. People pulled me away from him.

Fireworks exploded in front of my eyes. Somebody had struck me a stinging slap alongside the jaw. It snapped the tension cord and I felt tears welling up into my eyes, but I stopped yelling and struggling.

"Sorry, Rawls, but you can't go on that way," Pascal said. It was he who had slapped me.

"Thanks," I said in a shaky voice. "I guess I was kind of blowing my top. I—I'd like to go down there to Bob."

"Don't," Pascal said gently.

"I could stand by him," I said.

"Don't," Pascal said. "Have you ever seen anyone who's taken a sixteen-story drop? There are other ways you can stand by him. You can help us find out who pushed him."

I think it was then, for the first time, that it percolated within me that Bob had been murdered. And it was then that I began to think over and above my emotions.

Pascal spoke to everyone in the room. "I've got to go down to the street," he said. "Mr. Roberts, I want you to see to it that no one, no one *at all,* leaves the offices of this magazine. I'll hold you personally responsible. Did anyone here actually see anything? Did you see anyone leave or come into this room?"

No one answered. Then, for the first time, I realized that Lou Sobotkin hadn't come back with me from Bob's office.

"Look," I said to Pascal. "I left Bob about three or four minutes before he—he fell. We actually heard him scream in the next office. When I left him he was talking on the phone with Joan Wales."

I told him about Joan's strange conversation.

"I'll have a prowl car pick her up

at the drug store right away," he said. He walked out of the room.

Barry Roberts came over to me. "I won't take any of the things you said personally, Rawls," he said. "I know you were upset."

"Don't kid yourself," I said. "I meant every word of it."

He moistened his lips. "I'm sorry," he said. "I'm only doing my job."

"Which is what?" I asked him.

"Come on, Bill," Lanny said, pulling at my arm. "We've got to get organized. You've got a show to write."

"TOMORROW'S NEWS

"MUSIC: . . . (THEME UP AND UNDER)

"NARRATOR: This week, in the twilight of his life, death came to Leslie Kramer, one of America's elder statesmen."

That was about as far as I could get with the radio script. Somehow, I had dragged myself to a telephone and reestablished contact with Broderick in Washington. When he had recovered from the shock of the news about Bob he had given me the stuff he'd collected.

I had it all on a record and I had my own notes—but I couldn't shake off the sound of Bob's scream in my ears, nor the sight of people swarming like ants around that black splotch on the sidewalk. I couldn't seem to get my material organized. I couldn't get the feel of it. I couldn't force it. I just sat there, staring at the paper in my typewriter.

When the phone on the table beside me rang I jumped a foot. It was Sally, and she sounded angry.

"I've arranged to borrow a key from the building superintendent," she said, "so that we can see the apartment when you knock off for supper."

I felt that crazy, hysterical laughter rising up in me and I fought it back. "Look, Sally," I said. "Bob Sands is dead. Someone shoved him out of a window an hour ago. He's *dead*. Do you understand that?"

"Oh, Bill! I'm terribly sorry. I know how you feel about him." She hesitated. "But you will have to take a break for supper. The apartment's only a short distance away, Bill, and we've *got* to decide today, or they won't hold it."

"Sally, don't you realize?"

"Life has to go on, Bill, in spite of tragedies. I mean, we have to think of our own futures."

Very quietly I put the receiver back on the hook.

Pascal was coming into the room, and I thought, "He's brought Joan back, and now we'll know what that piece was all about." And I wasn't thinking about Sally or the apartment, but only that it would be a relief to see Joan safe and sound.

"You found her, all right?" I asked Pascal.

He shook his head, slowly. "She wasn't in the drug store where you said she'd be."

"Where is she then?"

"That would seem to be the jackpot question," Pascal said. He sat down in the chair across the table from me and lit a cigarette. "Am I interrupting you?"

"Interrupting!" I said. "Do you think I can work with all this going on?"

"I've seen the piece in the magazine," he said. "I went to the Public Library. Of course they have files."

"Then you know what had Joan worried," I said eagerly.

"No," he said slowly, "I don't." But—"

"Let me tell you about it," he said, inhaling on his cigarette and letting the smoke out in a long sigh. "The piece is dated from Poland in September, 1939. Hitler had started his invasion. It seems Kramer was in Warsaw on one of his 'secret missions.' There were a lot of other Americans there who hadn't followed our State Department's advice to leave.

"Kramer made something of a hero of himself. He managed to commandeer a train, sheer power of persuasion and good old-fashioned individual initiative. He got himself and his fellow Americans out of the city and to safety only a very few hours before Hitler's mechanized boys came in. That's all there is to the story—with one exception. There's a photograph with it."

"I remember Bob mentioned that," I said. "Some foreign big shot, he said."

"It wasn't a *foreign* big shot," Pascal said. "It was one of the Americans he got out with him. A *local* big shot by the name of Cyrus Van Cleek."

My eyes opened wide. "Van Cleek is one of the chief stockholders in *Tomorrow's News!*" I said.

"Precisely," Pascal said. "The story implied that Kramer had saved about a hundred American lives, including Van Cleek's. Which probably explains one of our minor mysteries—namely, why Kramer was paid a large salary for doing practically nothing here at the magazine. Van Cleek was indebted."

"But what is there in that to make Joan think she was in danger?" I asked.

"Van Cleek is in California. I just talked to him on the phone. He was shocked to hear of Kramer's death. He owed Kramer his life, he said."

"But Joan," I said, "sounded terrified. She said she was afraid to bring the file copy back to the office. She said the article was dynamite and that if the murderer knew she was bringing it back to the office she wouldn't be safe."

"I've told you what's in the article," Pascal said.

"Then what's Joan scared of and why hasn't she come back?"

Pascal squinted at me through cigarette smoke. "Why do you suppose Sands was pushed out the window, Rawls? She told him! She'd have told you if you'd hung on a little longer. He must have been

talking to her about it when the murderer walked into the room, heard him, and gave him a violent shove through the open window from behind. She had a right to be scared, and still has, unless we can find her or the murderer before they get together!"

"Well, what are we doing just sitting here?" I said. "We've got to find her."

"That's my job," Pascal said, without moving. "Your job is to write a radio show before tomorrow morning—and to remember."

"What do you mean, remember?"

"Anything you can about this girl that might help us guess where she might have gone to hide."

"But I scarcely know her!"

"Faces you saw in the hall when you left Sands talking to her on the phone—"

His voice faded away from me. "I scarcely know her!" Yet I could remember that one sweet kiss.

"She's just an office acquaintance," I said aloud. "But—but I'm deeply concerned about her safety."

"You haven't heard a thing I've been saying," he said. "Deep concern isn't exactly how I'd describe your trouble, Rawls. However, you're the man who makes his living with words."

He looked up at me, and the humor faded from his eyes. "And, incidentally, have you heard from your friend, Sobotkin? It seems he took a powder before I had the place sealed up."

I had forgotten about Lou. "He was the one who told me," I said. "You mean you haven't seen him since?"

"Mr. Sobotkin is among the missing."

"Well, what are you doing sitting around here?" I said, suddenly angry.

"The human ego is an extraordinary thing," Pascal said. "You probably think I'm sitting around here talking to you because I think you're so charming! Let me disillusion you. Rawls. Here's how it really is. At the end of this corridor are the news tickers. Next to them is the conference room—the room from which Sands took his dive. Next to that is Sands' office, where you and his secretary were when Sands was pushed. At the end of the corridor is the morgue, presided over by our missing girl friend."

"She's not my—"

"Pardon me if I finish this," Pascal said. "I am talking to you, Rawls, not because of your charm, but, first, because you and Sands' secretary are in the clear. I know that neither of you pushed Sands. I assume, therefore, that neither of you stabbed Kramer. I like to make it simple for myself and assume that there's only one murderer. The second reason I'm talking to you is involved. There are no physical clues in this case that point anywhere. There were no fingerprints on the ice pick clear enough to bring out. They are beautifully and hope-

lessly smudged. Sands' body showed us nothing. No one has come forward who claims to have seen anything.

"Therefore, my friend, I am talking to you because I know you are innocent, because I must find a motive for Kramer's murder, and all the material is passing through your hands and you know most of the people around here. And finally I am talking to you because I think you will help if you can. You know your girl friend is in danger."

"Sorry," I said. "I'm properly chastised."

"This place has been a madhouse today," Pascal said. "Everybody is so busy that nobody has actually kept tabs on where anyone was at any kind of crucial moment. The only people I can come close to locating at the time of Sands' death are you and the secretary—mutually alibied.

"Then there are your three friends: Moore, Reeder, and Sobotkin. They had just come back from their coffee *klatch*. Moore says they stopped to look at the news tickers. He got absorbed in one of the dispatches, and the next thing he heard Sobotkin shouting that Sands had fallen out the window. Reeder says he went to the phone booth in the lobby and first heard the commotion from there. Sobotkin doesn't say anything, because Sobotkin isn't around.

"But, so far, what it adds up to is that not one of the three has an alibi. It took only a minute to look into this room, hear Sands' conversation with Joan Wales, and give him a violent shove into eternity. Nobody is alibied within such an exact space of time excepting you and the secretary. You heard his scream, and the recorder proves you were talking to Broderick when it happened."

"And there was the entire staff," I said. "Nobody was barred from this corridor. Any one of a hundred people might have had business with Sands. He was a key figure in an emergency shakeup of the magazine."

"Let's not make it harder than we have to," Pascal said. "How much do you know about your friend Sobotkin?"

"He's the best musical director in the business," I said, "and a wonderfully amusing guy."

Pascal dropped his cigarette on the floor and heeled it out. "Well, I can tell you some other things about him," he said. "During the war he was a member of a sort of underground railroad for displaced persons in Europe, trying to get them away from Hitler to places of safety. Your wonderfully funny little man was a hard-bitten fighter who would kill just as quickly as eat his breakfast."

"Lou?" It was all I could say. I was dumfounded. He'd never mentioned any war experiences.

Pascal nodded. "Now, to make things a little easier, let's try this for

size: Sobotkin had some motive for killing Kramer which is still a mystery to us. He thought he'd gotten away with it, but somehow Joan Wales got wise. That, incidentally, is my biggest puzzle—what she saw in that article."

Sobotkin walked in here and heard Sands talking to her. He must have realized she was wise and that she'd told Sands. He must also have heard Sands mention the drug store where she was waiting. Sobotkin was trained to make snap decisions, remember. He gave Sands a violent shove out the window. He tried to alibi himself by announcing the fall, and then, before we could get organized, he hotfooted it uptown to that drug store and picked up Joan Wales."

"Then you think—"

"I think when we find one of them we'll find the other," Pascal said, "*if*—if Sobotkin hasn't disposed of the girl with the same dispatch he used in getting rid of Kramer and Sands."

"I just can't believe it," I said.

"Some murderers are the nicest people," Pascal said.

As Lanny would have said, "Let's face it!" There still was a radio show to write. So the writer was sweating out the death of his closest friend and the sinister disappearance of the girl he loved, and the musical director was first choice for about as brutal and cold-blooded a murderer as you could hope to dream up. But the show must go on.

By midafternoon the magazine had been "put to bed" once more and the editorial rooms had emptied. I still sat frozen in front of my typewriter, staring at my corny opening, and trying to start once more.

About 6:30 Lanny and Max appeared, carrying several brown-paper bags between them, containing hot coffee and sandwiches. Lanny looked a little distracted and Max's face was pale with fatigue under his dark beard.

"How you doing, Bill?" Lanny asked.

"I'm not doing," I said. "Look; we can't get a show on. I mean—let's face it. What about music?"

"Baldwin, the first violinist, is getting some stuff ready for us in case Lou doesn't show," Lanny said.

"Lou won't show," I said glumly. I told them Pascal's theory.

Lanny nodded slowly. "I knew about Lou's past," he said. "He told me one night. He had a pretty rugged time. I suppose there are weak spots that develop under such pressure that give when you least expect it. But we've got to have a script, Bill."

"I've put in my calls for a cast," Max said. "I've hired Sloan Murdock to play Kramer."

"He's as good as they come," Lanny said.

"Murdock's gone over to listen to those old newsreels," Max said. "He'll have Kramer down pat.

That should satisfy Barry Roberts and the boss."

Somehow, with their help, it began to come. For all his threats about not whitewashing Kramer, Max was, after all, a professional. He'd spoken his piece, but he'd do what he had to do.

The show began to take shape. We began with Kramer as a kid, working in the Pennsylvania steel mills. We had a scene showing a small invention of his being taken to one of the big shots. We showed his rapid climb—easier in those days—to one of the powers in the industry.

We showed the first World War and his accepting a highly important job from President Wilson. We showed him later being rewarded with an ambassador's post to a South American country. We showed him being called in crisis to make a special secret trip to Europe.

We invented dialogue and scenes. We showed him in a final valiant attempt, just before Munich, to avoid the catastrophe.

"I'd like to use that railroad scene in Poland," Lanny said.

"How did you know about that?" I asked him.

"Pascal told us," Lanny said.

"It's a good climax," Max said. "After that, Kramer went into oblivion. We have the sounds of German planes overhead and the railroad noises, and Kramer getting those hundred Americans to safety."

"But we don't know how he did it," I said.

"Are we getting squeamish about a little invention at this late date?" Max asked dryly.

"It's easy," Lanny said. "We show frightened, hysterical railroad officials. Kramer demanding a train, checking the dispatcher's charts, overriding objections, maybe talking to the engineer."

"Okay, okay," I said.

And so we went on and on, consuming a gallon of coffee and endless cigarettes until, about midnight, it was done. We had an all-night mimeograph outfit that got the scripts ready for us by morning.

Lanny went off with the script. Max and I walked out into the glare of Times Square together.

"This has been pretty rough for you," Max said. "If you like I'll go over the script with Barry Roberts in the morning and you can get a little extra sleep."

"Sleep!" I had to laugh. With Joan missing, maybe dead. . . .

But, surprisingly enough, I slept. I got to my apartment about 1:30. There was a note in my mailbox from Sally, acid and angry. She wrote:

My dear Bill:

Perhaps you will find the time in the distant future to get in touch with me. Your thoughtfulness is overwhelming.

Sally

P.S. We lost the apartment.

I was too tired to deal with it then. I took off my coat and tie and lay down on my bed to try to think what there was I could do about Joan—and I went out like a light. It was 8:30 in the morning when I woke up.

I had had a glimmer of an idea just before I passed out. I would go to the Public Library and have a look at that back issue of *Tomorrow's News* myself.

I shaved and showered and got into some clean clothes. I was at the library about ten minutes after the doors opened. After some shuttling around I got to the right place and put in a slip for the September, 1939, files of *Tomorrow's News*.

When it was handed to me, in a neat leather-bound volume, I went over to one of the reading tables. I started thumbing through it, looking for the proper issue. I had just found it, and started to turn to page 12, when a soft voice interrupted me.

"So you've seen it, Bill."

My heart jammed against my ribs and I looked up into the somber dark eyes of Lou Sobotkin.

This is the point in stories where the hero sends a short, sharp punch, loaded with dynamite, to the villain's jaw, catches his arm in an excruciating jujitsu hold and turns to the bewildered policeman with some such phrase as, "Well, well, Lieutenant, fancy meeting you here!"

I write that kind of stuff, but I'll have to admit that putting it into action is another matter. I'm not a hero, I don't know any jujitsu holds, and there wasn't any policeman around, bewildered or otherwise.

"Hi!" I said to Lou, sounding like an adolescent whose voice is changing.

"Take back the book, Bill, and we'll walk out together."

He sounded quite calm, quite like himself in a serious vein. But there was a quiet, commanding quality in his voice.

"Come," Lou said.

I got up, tucking the book under my arm. My legs felt like synthetic rubber. I opened my mouth to say something to Lou. I *hadn't* seen "it," whatever "it" was. I hadn't even located the story before he'd materialized in front of me. I didn't know anything that made me dangerous to him.

Lou's hand was on my arm, and I could feel his firm hard fingers pressing gently. "Just put it down on the desk and follow me out that far entrance," he said.

I put the book down on the desk. The librarian smiled at me. "Find what you want?"

Lou's fingers tightened on my arm.

"Yes," I said, giving her a sickly grin.

We walked out of there, down a flight of stairs and out the front door onto the library steps. Thou-

sands of people were passing up and down Fifth Avenue. There was probably a hundred cops within a mashie shot of me.

"If you came to destroy that copy of the magazine you were too late," I said. "Pascal saw it yesterday."

Lou smiled in an odd way. "He saw it—but he didn't see it," he said. "But I knew you would catch on at once. That was why I was waiting for you."

"Waiting for me?"

"I had a feeling you'd come here the first minute you had some spare time," he said.

He had stopped his descent of the stairs and leaned against the base of one of the stone lions. He reached in his pocket and brought out a paper bag. There were bread crumbs in it!

He tossed a handful of them on the steps and we were suddenly surrounded by pigeons. No one could have got close enough through the flock of birds to overhear our conversation.

"Where is Joan?" I said. "What have you done with her?"

"She is safe and she will remain safe," Lou said, "provided—"

"Provided what?"

"Provided you do not mention what you know to anyone—and that you do not tell anyone that you've seen me."

"Look," I said. "I don't know anything. You didn't give me time."

"Thank you for telling me," he said gravely. "I had hoped I was in time. Now, please, Bill, listen to me attentively. You are in love with Joan Wales, and she is in love with you."

"This is a fine time to be talking about that," I said. "Where is she? What have you done with her?"

"It would be a great pity," he said, tossing some more crumbs to the pigeons, "if you were not allowed to realize that love, to marry, to have babies. So I tell you this for your own good, Chumkin. Do not go back to the library. Do not mention to anyone that you have seen me, or it might cost your Joan her life."

"Lou, you wouldn't—"

"Bob Sands was a fine fellow. He is dead. He just happened to get in the way," Lou said gravely.

"But, Lou—"

"As it is, Joan is safe and all right. That I promise you. But I can promise you nothing if you do not do exactly as I say." He smiled faintly. "The important thing is the safety of your woman," he said.

"But—"

"Till after the show tonight," Lou said. "After that you may do what you please."

"And Joan—?"

"After that I think Joan will be safe."

"You *think!*"

"Yes, I think so," Lou said. He put the brown-paper bag back in his pocket. "Follow my advice, Chumkin. It is important—if you care."

With that he walked calmly away from me. I stood there watching him. He passed within two feet of a uniformed policeman! I opened my mouth to shout—but no sound came.

The *Tomorrow's News* show is done in Studio 17 at the United Broadcasting Company. The studio is on the main floor of the building. You walk in from the street and turn off into a reception room. Along a corridor are two small studios, and at the end of it is Studio 17.

There is a glass-topped door opening into a little foyer, another glass-topped door opening into the control booth, and a third one into the studio proper. The control booth is up a couple of steps, and from it you can see through the foyer and down the length of the corridor. Of course, there is the wide glass panel running the width of the studio and making everything in it visible from the booth.

We don't do the show in front of an audience. It was Max's theory, seconded by all of us, that a dramatic show loses something if it is seen. It's hard to maintain the illusion when you see actors, script in hand, filing back and forth to the microphones, and the sound man at work behind his table. During a show we sometimes had one or two personal guests in the control booth, but no regular audience.

I mention these facts here because they are all important to what was to come. The location of the studio itself, with no escape from it except along that long, narrow corridor was the most important of those facts.

I have never spent any time comparable with the few hours between the time Lou Sobotkin left me on the library steps and my arrival at Studio 17 about a quarter to three. My mind was operating like a squirrel in a cage. It kept going round and round at high speed, never stopping, never getting anywhere.

I knew I ought to go to Pascal, and yet something in Lou's manner had been frighteningly convincing. What difference could a few hours make to Pascal? It might mean the difference between life and death to Joan. But those few hours might give Lou a chance to perfect a getaway!

Well, that was Pascal's business. All that mattered to me was Joan's safety.

I sat in my apartment with the whole problem.

Round and round—and suddenly it was time to go to the studio. When I arrived, only the engineer was in the control booth, sitting in front of his instrument panel. Max was out in the studio sitting at a long table with the cast.

The first step in rehearsal was to read the script through and give it a rough timing. Then Max would come back in the booth and the actors would begin rehearsing each

scene on the mike. The orchestra didn't appear until a couple of hours later. Then they rehearsed their cues—with the actors reading the tag lines and the lead-ins on each scene.

My job was to wait for Max to come in with the script after the first reading, get his estimate on the amount of cutting necessary, and then hang around for spot rewrites of lines which didn't come off as well as we'd hoped when the actors actually did them.

After a while Max came in from the studio. He tossed the script down in front of me.

"Anything new?" he asked. He always begins to get tense as rehearsals start. You can hear it in his voice and see it in his eyes. It's that nervous energy which makes him such a good director.

"I haven't heard anything or seen anyone," I said.

"You got some sleep?"

"Yes," I said.

He pointed to the script. "We're about on the nose," he said. "Make a couple of minutes of provisional cuts, just in case." He pressed down the talk-back button so his voice could be hear in the studio. "All right. Let's go from the beginning, right after the opening narration."

I listened with one ear while I looked through the script. Sloan Murdock, the actor who was to do Kramer, sounded perfect to me. Certainly he had dignity. Roberts and the Old Man couldn't complain about that.

The long tedious business went on and on. Lanny came in to pass the time of day, and then disappeared into a nearby bar. Barry Roberts came bustling in to say that the Old Man wanted two words changed.

I prepared my cuts and made Barry's changes for him. Then I went out for coffee. When I got back to the studio they were rehearsing the railroad train scene. It was pretty exciting. The sound men had rigged up a set of records that were excellent.

You could hear the distant thunder of guns, the whine of bombs, the roar of the German Stukas, all in the background. You could also hear the engine, an occasional train bell, escaping steam. Max had the cast mumbling in the background for crowd noises. Sloan Murdock was on mike, talking with a frightened train dispatcher.

It was a good scene, building to the rush of Americans onto the train, and the engine starting out of the yards to safety. The background voices rose, there would be a musical bridge, and the narrator would come under with a speech about the Americans getting to safety in time.

I went out again. Then I came back. I couldn't sit still. I couldn't stay put. The actors broke for supper, but Max took that time to rehearse the orchestra. At 8:30 there

was a dress rehearsal, then a half hour break, then the show at 9:30.

By time for dress rehearsal, the uninterrupted run-through, I was exhausted from doing nothing. Ordinarily, I like to watch Max work. He stood, directing actors and orchestra, cuing them with a long stabbing finger, his face showing pleasure or anger as things went well or badly.

Lanny and Barry Roberts were there for the dress rehearsal. Roberts was grudgingly pleased when it was over. Max went out into the studio to make a few points with the cast and with Baldwin, who'd done a pretty good job in Lou Sobotkin's absence. In less than an hour I could go to Lieutenant Pascal—if I could find him.

Finally the time for the air show grew close. I always get a tight little knot in my stomach as the hands of the studio clock get nearer the appointed hour. Roberts disappeared. He always had to listen to the show with the Old Man in the Old Man's private office at the magazine.

Lanny, who was usually on deck, had also disappeared. I saw him out in the studio for a moment, talking to Sloan Murdock and Chuck Lewis, another actor. Then he was gone. He didn't come back to the control booth.

"One minute," the engineer said quietly.

Max pressed down the talk-back button. "One minute," he informed the cast and orchestra.

The red second hand moved around the clock. The engineer switched on a button and we could hear the end commercial of the show that preceded us. Ten seconds —five seconds—then a little red bulb flashed on the panel in front of the engineer.

"You're on," he said, throwing a switch.

Max had been standing, facing out through the glass to the studio, arms raised. Now his right forefinger jabbed forward, and Baldwin, standing in front of the orchestra with earphones on his ears, brought down his baton, and the orchestra crashed into its theme.

The process of immortalizing Leslie Kramer had begun. In half an hour I could go to Pascal—and maybe Joan would be safe.

The show went well. The actors seemed particularly on the ball. I was a little puzzled by Sloan Murdock. He was an old campaigner. He was doing a wonderful job with his part, but he was deathly pale, and I could see his script shaking in his hands each time he stepped up to the mike.

The scenes unfolded: the steel mills, the business climb, the First World War, a warm and dramatic little scene with President Wilson, the secret missions, the last heroic attempt to prevent the collapse at Munich, and then Poland.

I had a sudden sensation of panic as that scene began. I thought Sloan Murdock wasn't going to make it.

Chuck Lewis, who does high-strung young men to perfection, came forward to the mike with Murdock. I was puzzled, because Lewis wasn't supposed to be in the scene.

I saw Max make a violent gesture to Lewis to get away from the mike. But Lewis just stood there, and I saw sweat was streaming off his face. I figured that Sloan Murdock must be violently ill. I figured Lewis was planning one of those theatrical heroics. If Murdock collapsed, Lewis would step into the breach and try to carry on for Murdock, mimicking his voice as best he could.

"What's going on here!" Max shouted. No one could hear him but the engineer and me. "I hire the best actor in town and he looks like he is going to die on me."

The scene began—Murdock, as Kramer, talking to the train dispatcher. However sick Murdock looked, he was still playing it to the hilt, with nothing showing in his voice. Then, suddenly, everything went haywire.

Chuck Lewis broke in on the scene. "You can't do this!" His voice was shrill and clear.

My head jerked around toward Max. So did the engineer's.

"Who are you?" That was Murdock, as Kramer.

I'll put it down here now as it was suddenly, and mysteriously, played. Lewis spoke again.

VOICE: Never mind who I am! You can't take over this train. It is loaded with refugees.

KRAMER: My dear young man, I have already arranged with the authorities to take over this train. I have paid for it. The matter is settled.

DISPATCHER (*Polish accent*): That is true.

VOICE (*Rising hysteria*): The people on this train are political refugees. If they leave the train here and are caught by the German army they'll be slaughtered like rats.

KRAMER: We are in danger, too.

VOICE: You are Americans. Germany isn't at war with America. You'll be inconvenienced. Maybe some of you will be hurt. But you'll be freed. The people on this train will be shot down in their tracks.

KRAMER (*Coldly*): I'm afraid they've made their own difficulties. It is no concern of mine. I've arranged to take over this train. That's final. Officer!

POLICEMAN (*Fading in*): Yes, sir. What is it?

KRAMER: Take this man away and get his friends off the train.

VOICE (*On mike*): Let go of me! We've got to stop him! He's going to let these people be slaughtered.

POLICEMAN: Quiet down, you. I've got no time to trouble with you. Come along quietly, or I'll have to use this gun.

VOICE: You use that gun and you'll wish you were dead. I have broken no law!

POLICEMAN: Give us more trouble

and you will find out! Where are your papers? What is your name?

VOICE: My name is Max Reeder. If you allow this to happen to my friends . . .

I sat there, frozen, unable to move. I heard the engineer's croaking voice. "We're off the air. They cut us off at master control."

The music suddenly came in, faltering. The actors in the studio were looking up into the control booth. The engineer made a throat-cutting gesture, indicating that we were off the air. The music died like a record running down.

Then, very slowly, Max Reeder turned to me. "You changed that scene!" he said, his eyes very bright.

I lowered my eyes, unable to speak, and found myself staring into the muzzle of a small automatic. Out of the tail of my eye I saw the engineer dive for the floor and safety.

"I've got nothing against you, Bill," Max said in a flat voice, "but I'm getting out of here. You understand?"

Then another voice filled the booth. It came through the speaker from the studio. "Whatever you are thinking of doing, Chumkin, you had better give it up."

I looked out into the studio. Lou Sobotkin was there, standing by the microphone, talking into it. I glanced toward the control-booth door. There was Pascal, coming up the two steps to the booth level. There was a police revolver in his hand.

Max didn't see Pascal. He reached with his left hand to the talk-back button. "Lou, listen," he said. "I don't want to hurt anyone, but I'm going to settle this in my own way. I'm coming out of here with Bill, and there'll be a gun at Bill's back. If you don't let us out the corridor and into the clear, so help me, I'll kill him. I've got nothing to lose."

"And nothing to gain," Lou said.

I heard him, but I'd been watching Pascal. He'd come across the carpeted floor of the booth, silent as a cat. Now his arm rose, and the butt of his gun came down over Max's wrist, knocking the automatic out of his hand.

"I'm afraid the show is over, Mr. Reeder," Pascal said, almost gently.

The studio was suddenly swarming with excited people, including half a dozen of Pascal's men. Somebody who turned out to be Lanny had me by the arm and led me out of the control booth into the main studio. A uniformed cop was herding the orchestra and the actors out of the place. Lanny plopped me down in a chair by the actors' table.

"It was a dirty trick, leaving you in there with Max without telling you what was coming, Bill," Lanny said. "But we were afraid to. You had to spend the whole afternoon with him, and we'd seen how you blew your top after Bob was killed, and we know how you felt about

Joan. It was safer not to have you know, so that there'd be no risk of your tipping Max off to what was coming."

"Joan?" I said. "What about her?"

Lanny nodded toward the door. She was just coming into the studio with one of the cops. I struggled up to my feet, but the terrible restraint that existed between us kept me from going to her.

"She's all right," Lanny said. "But you'd better get the story from Lou and Pascal. It was their show."

"But what was there in that magazine piece that tipped her off?" I asked.

"It was the picture," Lanny said.

"Of Cyrus Van Cleek?"

"Of Cyrus Van Cleek on the platform of the Warsaw station," Lanny said. "But it was the background detail that was important. In the background the camera caught a man being dragged away by a couple of gendarmes. The man was Max, but Max *beardless.*"

"I don't get it."

"Pascal, who'd met Max only yesterday, didn't recognize him, but Joan, who'd seen him around for months, did."

I turned, and saw Pascal coming into the studio. Max was behind him, handcuffs on his wrists, a cop on either side of him. Lou had stopped to speak to Joan and now he brought her over to the table. She was so close—and yet so far. She kept her eyes lowered, so that nothing passed between us.

Lou came over to me. "You okay, Chumkin?" His smile was a little forced, I thought. "Sorry I gave you a bad time yesterday, and again today. It seemed best. We had to get him to show his hand. Pascal had no real evidence."

"Quiet!" Pascal's voice rose above ours and we were all instantly silent. I glanced at Max. He sat with his handcuffed hands hidden under the edge of the table, his head sunk forward. His face, around and under the beard, was gray as parchment.

"Mr. Reeder, you're not required to make a statement," Pascal said. "I've held you here because I thought it might be easier among your friends than at headquarters. But understand, there's a police stenographer here, and anything you do say can be used against you."

"It doesn't matter now," Max said in a low voice. "It began ten years ago. You see, I am Polish-born. I came to this country as a small boy and spent my early life here, but then my parents went back to Poland and took me with them. I went to the University of Warsaw. I had friends there. There was a girl."

The corner of Max's mouth twitched. "I loved her." He said it very simply but I could tell it was his whole heart. "She and her family were part of a political group

trying to fight the Nazi influence in Poland. When the blitz came they had to get out—or face the firing squad. They were at the station, on a train ready to leave. Then something went wrong. They were herded off the train.

"I was half crazy, because I knew what it meant if they were caught there by the German army. It seemed some Americans had managed to commandeer the train. I tried to stop it. I spoke English. I tried to get to them. But I was dragged away by the police. My friends—the girl I loved among them—were caught and machine-gunned to death."

Max drew a deep, shuddering breath. "I never knew who was behind it. I saw the man responsible—saw him at a distance—but I never knew who he was. I suppose you could say I was lucky. I was not killed. But I spent four years in a concentration camp. Maybe in that time I went a little crazy, dreaming of some day revenging my friends.

"When I was released I got a visa to come back to America to visit relatives here, and I became a citizen. I tried to find who the man was who'd gotten my friends killed. There were no records in Poland. I couldn't seem to trace the story here. It was an unimportant incident in the mass horror of the war."

"Then it didn't happen the way it was written in the script tonight," I said. "You didn't talk to Kramer at the time?"

"No," Max said. "I never talked to Kramer or Van Cleek. I never knew their names. Then yesterday morning—imagine that, after more than a year here—yesterday morning I saw Kramer in the lobby of the magazine building. He was just getting on the private elevator for the editorial floor.

"I rushed after him, but I was too late. I had no plan. But it was like a festering sore exploding inside me. I took the next elevator. I started going from office to office looking for him. Then, finally, I found him.

"He—he looked up when I barged into his office. To my surprise I saw that he knew me. He gave me a kind of sour smile. 'Well, Mr. Reeder, it's taken you long enough,' he said.

"I went all to pieces inside. I had just one idea—to destroy him! I looked around for something to hit him with, and I saw the ice pick."

No one spoke. No one moved.

"I didn't expect to get away with it," Max said finally. "At the time I didn't care. I just walked out and left him there. But things worked my way. Nobody saw me. Nobody suspected me. Suddenly I wanted to live. I felt I was justified.

"As the hours went by I knew I had to see it through. Then I walked into the conference room and I heard Bob talking to Joan. He mentioned my name—the pic-

ture—he knew! It wasn't thought out, I swear it. It was an automatic reflex. I—I just rushed at him. He—he toppled out the window—hung to the edge of the coping for a moment, screaming—and then he—he fell."

He let it rest there, and after a moment Lou spoke up. "I was in the washroom," he said. "I heard the scream. I looked out the window and got a fleeting glimpse of Bob, clinging to the ledge. I rushed out, with some idea that I could help him, but of course I was too late. Then, after I'd told Bill here, I was sick. I went back to the washroom. When I came back, Bill was telling Pascal about Joan's call—and where she was."

"That," Pascal said grimly, "is where Mr. Sobotkin began violating the law!"

Lou shrugged. "I had a strange feeling about Max. I don't quite know why. Maybe I was trained in those things once. I got out of there and went uptown to the drug store where Joan was waiting. She showed me the picture. I had the answers then."

"Why didn't you turn him in?" I said. "He might have—"

"I had a feeling for him," Lou said in a hard voice. "Even after Bob. I have seen massacres and pogroms myself, brought through greed and callousness. At first I thought, give him time; he will confess. I persuaded Joan to stay under cover and give him the chance. Then, when I saw he wasn't going to do it, I got in touch with Pascal and told him everything. There was no concrete evidence against Max, so—"

"So," Pascal said, "I got Mr. Sobotkin to help me set a trap for him. I wanted him to show his hand."

"How did you like the scene I wrote, Chumkin?" Lou asked me.

"I ought to have recognized your touch," I said. "It was the corniest dialogue I ever heard."

"We took Mr. Moore into our confidence," Pascal said, "and he distributed the new scene to the actors just before air time." I remembered seeing Lanny out in the studio.

I had two questions to ask. "Why didn't you try to get away, Max?"

He raised haggard eyes to mine. "It seemed safer to sit tight. I didn't understand what was going on with Lou and Joan. Maybe—maybe I knew it was no use."

"Why did you tear the pages out of the back files?"

"I didn't!" Max said. "I never saw the magazine story. It must have been Kramer!"

Pascal lit a cigarette and drew on it. "Kramer remains a mystery," he said. "I've found out a few things. The man gave away all his money, most of his earnings, to aid refugees from Hitler's tyranny. He must have known what happened to those people he put off the train in Warsaw. He was trying to salve his conscience.

"Then I think he must have seen Reeder here in the building. In a panic he dug out all the back issues of the magazine and destroyed the story that would have given him away. He could have run then. He could have avoided Reeder. But he didn't try. I think he was tired of living with his sense of guilt.

"Mr. Rawls almost hit it when he described him as 'waiting to be killed.' What he said to Reeder: 'It's taken you long enough—' rather proves that. He was ready to die. He was tired of running away from his own conscience."

"But why did they have to put those people off the train in Warsaw? Kramer and Van Cleek and the others were Americans. We weren't at war with Germany. They would have been relatively safe."

It was Lou who answered. "Have you ever heard dive bombers in action, Bill? Or been in the range of artillery fire? You don't stop to think of the niceties of diplomatic protocol. You just get out, and never mind who you step on in the process."

After that they took Max away.

I went over to Joan and spoke directly to her for the first time. "Can I see you later?"

"You know the answer to that," she said.

"Yes, I do," I said.

Ten minutes later I was ringing the doorbell of Sally's apartment. She came to the door, wearing a housecoat I'd given her for Christmas.

"Well!" she said.

"Sally, if you were listening to the show tonight . . ." I began.

"I was listening," she said. "All I know is that while you were too busy to consider our future you wrote a show they cut off the air!"

"Sally, you don't understand. You see, it was Max Reeder who—"

"I'm not interested in Max Reeder," she said. "I'm interested in us, Bill. And I don't like what I see when I examine the situation."

"Do I have to stand here in the hall to talk about it?" I asked. "I came here because I felt obligated to—"

"You feel obligated?" she said acidly. "That's something new for you, isn't it, Bill? You didn't feel obligated when our future was hanging in the balance. You didn't feel obligated while I was trying to find us a home. You didn't feel obligated when—"

"Sally, listen to me," I said. "You've got to—"

"It's time that you listened to me," she said. "We've sort of taken this engagement of ours for granted for a long time, Bill. Well, it's been too long. I've come to see that the whole thing is a mistake. I want a reasonable, orderly existence. You have no sense of order, or regularity, or planning. I want to know where I'm at from one day to the next. That seems to be too much to ask of you."

"Sally, I came here to tell you—"

"I know," she said. "You came to tell me you're sorry. Well, that isn't good enough any more, Bill."

"I didn't come here to say I was sorry," I said. "I came to tell you that—"

"Whatever it is, I don't think I want to hear it, Bill. At least, not until I've told you that you and I are through. Let's just break it off quick and clean, Bill. Please."

Then, for the first time, I realized what she was saying. "Is that what you want, Sally? Are you sure?"

"I was never more sure of anything in my life. Let's not talk any more about it, and let's have no hard feelings. Just go, Bill."

I tore out of there to the corner drug store and called Joan's apartment. "Darling," I asked, "may I come over?"

"Bill, you know—"

"Yes, I know. And it's all right. *All right!* Do you understand?"

"Oh, Bill! Please hurry!"

I raced out of the drug store yelling at the top of my lungs, "Taxi! Taxi!"

THE BOTANY PATTERN

by VICTOR CANNING

NOT MANY PEOPLE, EVEN IN France, know about the Department of Patterns. It appears on no government list, never seeks publicity, and carries no sign outside its headquarters in an old house on the Quai d'Orsay—yet it is the most powerful and respected of all adjuncts to the French Police Service.

The Department of Patterns specializes in cases which it originates by its own research. This basic research is done by a dozen young men assigned to the Department for a two-year period from training institutions, security, and police departments. Day after day the young men sit—in what is known as the "stewpot"—sifting through masses of old criminal data, official records and photographs, newspaper reports and files, hoping that by arrangement and analysis some pattern of significance may emerge. In most people there is a strong, if subconscious, desire for order and logic in whatever they do—especially, surprising enough, in those people who step outside the law. (By the way, I must apologize if I sound rather like a lecturer in criminal psychology—but that, in fact, is what I am, at the University of Grenoble.)

At the time of this case I had been eighteen months in the Department of Patterns and had just been promoted from the "stewpot" to the position of a *chercher libre* man. In other words, I was free to roam anywhere in the Department, pursuing any trail that might interest me. My particular interest was "symbolism in murder."

All symbolism is, basically, part of an association pattern, and it is frequently met in crimes which are not committed for gain. Behind most symbolism lies a vanity which is close to mental derangement. As Papa Grand often said, more than three-quarters of unsolved cases are the work of obsessionalists who outwardly appear perfectly sane.

Anyway, after a week in the photographic gallery, I came across something which intrigued me enough to feel that I could go to Papa Grand and ask his permission for further research and for outside assistance from the Police.

Papa Grand is Monsieur Alphonse Grand, the head of the Department of Patterns. He can be jovial and he can be tough. If you get no more than two black marks

against you in the Department, you go out with the rating of *Assez Bien*—and that is a high rating for most. So far I had a clean sheet.

When I went in to see him he was sitting at his desk with his back to the little attic window that looked out over the Seine. He was a big, fleshy, white-haired man of about sixty; the back of his right hand was badly scarred and one finger was missing. Nobody knew just how this had occurred. As I stood in front of him, his blue eyes lit up with a mischievous smile.

"Ha, Viaur, as I expected, you walk now with the unbowed shoulders of a man released from the burdens of the 'stewpot.' You have in your eyes the glint of a *chercher libre* man. Just to depress you, may I say that most people making the transition often find that they have jumped from the stewpot into the fire."

"I hope not, Patron."

"Hope—" he grinned, "—was declared *persona non grata* in this Department twenty years ago. Proceed."

I laid before him a sheaf of photographs.

"These—" I began, but he cut me off with a raised hand. He looked at the photographs, studying each one, and then turned them over to read the reports on the back. They were photographs from various local police concerning six murders. These murders, all of men, had occurred over the last four years in the big triangle of country enclosed by Toulouse, Bordeaux, and Cahors, a territory watered by the rivers Garonne and Lot.

The first man had been killed by a spear thrust into his ribs—an old African assegai.

The second, though no weapon had been found, had died from vicious stab wounds around the heart.

The third had been strangled with a piece of tough whipcord.

The fourth had died from a dagger wound in the heart, the weapon having been left in him.

The fifth had had his skull brutally smashed with a hammer, and the weapon had been left lying alongside him.

And the sixth had been found hanging by a rope which had been fastened high up on a tree trunk by three large nails.

Although at first nothing seemed to connect the murders or the victims, each murder had one thing in common which showed up in the photographs. I waited for Papa Grand to finish his examination, knowing that he would spot it for himself.

Finally he looked up at me and pushed the photographs back. "I presume, Viaur," he said, "that it is your interest in botany that attracts you here?"

"It is, Patron. So far as I can tell at the moment, these six men are not connected. They come from different places within an area of,

say, one hundred square miles. They were all murdered differently—though it is possible that the sixth man hanged himself."

"Possible," said Papa Grand. "So?"

"But each murder was committed in the open, near a river or in a field not far from the road, and each man was found under a tree."

"A Judas tree in full bloom."

"Yes, Patron. A Judas tree—the symbol of betrayal. It could be—unconnected though they seem—that these six men had betrayed someone, and now a revenge pattern is being, or has been, worked out. I would like your permission to go down and make some inquiries."

"Why not? It is a pleasant part of the country. I have fished in the Lot. Maybe, if you turn up anything, I will come down with my rods for a day or two. I will phone Bardac at Cahors and tell him you are coming. But don't stay in Cahors, charming though it is. I would recommend the Chateau Mercues, a little west down the river Lot. The first murder, I see, was committed on the river bank not far from the Chateau. But Viaur—"

He paused and eyed me quizzically. It was the kind of look which no one who had spent any time in the Department of Patterns could afford to overlook.

"Yes, Patron?"

"You did well to spot the tree. But do not let your botanical interest stop there. I feel it could be developed."

"How, Patron?"

For a moment Papa Grand frowned and I knew that I had asked the wrong question. Then the frown vanished and the blue-eyed smile came back.

"Viaur, as a good Catholic that is a question which a little thought on your part would make unnecessary. But since you ask it I am too polite not to answer. Does it not strike you as odd that a man should be hanged from a tree and instead of looping and knotting the end of the rope round a branch, a fixing is made with heavy nails? Go, Viaur—and telephone me each evening."

So I went down to Cahors and stayed at the Chateau Mercues, which had been turned into a country hotel, a great turreted, romantic pile that stood high on a clifftop dominating the river Lot below. Curiously enough, there was an enormous Judas tree in the courtyard of the Chateau.

On the way down I had decided to start my investigations with the first murder. The man was a Felix Seret who had lived with his aged mother in a village near Luzech, not far from the Chateau. I got a dossier on him from Bardac at Cahors—a fat plum pudding of a man who beamed with pleasure at the thought that Papa Grand might soon be making a visit. The victim Seret had been a bachelor, forty-

eight years old, and had made a living as a master carpenter. His mother now lived alone in the cottage they had shared until his death.

She was a wrinkle-faced, dowdy old woman in black dress and shawl, rather like a dejected crow, who loved to sit in the sun outside her cottage and sleep. During our interview she dozed off two or three times. I asked her the usual questions and got nowhere. Her son had been a sober, industrious man, had had no enemies and no affairs with women. He had been a good son.

"And yet he was murdered?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur. But this happens to good people as well as bad. His conscience was clear. He was a good Catholic."

As she said this a bell rang in my mind. She had echoed a phrase of Papa Grand's.

I said, "Your son was murdered on his way back from working in Cahors. Do you know the exact place of the crime?"

"No—I would not like to see it." Her eyes closed briefly, then opened again. "You would like a glass of Armagnac?"

"No, thank you," I said. "Would it surprise you to know that his body was found under a Judas tree?"

She looked at me sharply, her tongue nervously wetting the edges of her lips, and I felt that something had stirred in her.

"He was a good man," she said defensively.

"Undoubtedly. But what man is there who lives his whole life without sin? It is not granted to any of us. We can gain absolution, but at some time we all sin."

"That is true, monsieur."

"Then what was your son's sin, madam?" I asked gently. "It may help to lead us to a man who has taken his life."

She was silent for a long time, looking down at her gnarled old hands, and then slowly she began to talk—and I realized how often an investigation can go astray because the right question is not asked at the right moment, how often the truth is waiting, not to be dragged out, but merely to be invited into the open.

"He had one sin—one great sin among many smaller ones, monsieur. At first—after the war—he would not tell me about it, but I knew that it was there. He was a good son and the sin weighed heavily on him. In the end he told me about it.

"He had betrayed a man and caused his death. And it was I who told him what to do about it. He went to a priest and confessed. He was given his penances and he was absolved, and after that he was himself again—a happy, good son who never did anyone harm. Even the sin he committed was for the sake of others. Listen, monsieur, there

are moments in life when a terrible choice is laid on men . . ."

I listened to her, and as she spoke, the pattern began to clear. That night I telephoned Papa Grand and he promised to join me the following evening at the Chateau.

The next day, with Bardac, I traveled from Cahors to Toulouse and away to the west toward Bordeaux the two of us interviewed, among others, the widows and mothers of the five other dead men; and when Papa Grand arrived that evening and we all dined at the Chateau Mercues, the story was beginning to shape itself logically.

I must confess that I was quite pleased with myself. This was my first case as a *chercher libre* member of the Department and I liked the heady wine of success as much as any man. I was to learn that it is a very heady wine indeed.

It was not until after dinner, when we were sitting on the Chateau terrace overlooking the great cliff fall to the Lot, taking our coffee, that Papa Grand gave me permission to report.

"You are pleased with him, Bardac?" he asked.

"He has done well," said Bardac and then, with a sigh, added, "How lucky you are to have all the time in the world! With us, one case overlays another and the days are never long enough."

"That is what we are for," said Papa Grand. "A criminal can plan at leisure. The balance must be redressed somehow. Well, Viaur, proceed."

"Patron, it is like this. During the war Seret was a member of a Resistance Group that operated on the German lines of communication to the east of Bordeaux. They were a small but formidable group and Jacques Doubert who, apparently, was an outstanding character, brave, intelligent, loyal . . ."

Papa Grand sat listening to me, showing no flicker of emotion on his face, which was now grave with interest; his eyes never left me.

All six men who had been murdered were members of the Doubert Group. One day, after they had wrecked a German convoy at a small village called Pontmarde near Bordeaux, the Group had been captured. All except Doubert. The Germans, who wanted their hands on Doubert more than the others, had put a frightful proposition to the five captives. The villagers of Pontmarde had given them shelter and the Germans said that unless the Group told them where to find Doubert they intended to wipe out the village. But if they betrayed Doubert, the village would be spared, and they themselves would escape the firing squad and be given prison sentences.

It had been a fearful choice for them. Doubert was a legend, a symbol of French resistance, a great and good man—though no one knew much about him or where he had come from or even if Doubert

was his real name. What were they to do? Their own lives meant nothing and they would have gladly sacrificed themselves for Doubert—but there were the villagers.

"Mon Patron, can you imagine such a choice?"

Slowly Papa Grand nodded his head. "I can, Viaur. It occurs but I thank the *bon Dieu* that I have never met it personally. So they betrayed Doubert and he was shot?"

"Yes, Patron. And the villagers were saved."

Slowly Papa Grand lit a cigar and then, tossing the match over the parapet, he said, "And this Group? I presume there were ten of them, not counting Doubert?"

I looked at him in amazement. "Yes, there were, Patron. But how —"

"Never mind for the moment, Viaur. Let us see what we have. Ten men betray, under terrible duress, their leader. Six of them have been searched out and murdered. But I cannot imagine any of the men willingly revealing such a secret, except possibly to a wife or mother. Who then has decided to avenge Doubert's martyrdom? And how could he have known about it?"

Bardac said, "We can find no trace of the Doubert family around here. During the war—" he shrugged, "—men appeared from nowhere."

"Yet somebody knows. Somebody is avenging him. The Judas tree makes that plain. Where are the remaining four men?"

"They live, Patron," I said, "in a small village called Bauvezet twenty miles south of Cahors. We have spoken to them today and, in the strictest confidence, they have confirmed this story. They know about the other murders but until now each man has preferred to keep his secret rather than come to the police. They are men who live under a black shadow. One of them is the local doctor."

Papa Grand was silent, thinking. Below us the dusk began to gather above the river. Behind us the evening breeze sighed through the branches of the great Judas tree in the courtyard.

Finally Papa Grand spoke. "There are two things to be done. One—Bardac, I want from you as soon as possible a complete list of all the unfrocked priests within a hundred miles of this place."

"Unfrocked priests?" Bardac's face went owlish.

"Yes, Bardac. Unfrocked, or those who have voluntarily abandoned the Church. All the men in the Group had secrets. All were good Catholics. We know Seret gained absolution at the confessional. So would the others—I am sure of it. Their families would never have betrayed their secret. No practicing priest would betray the confessional. Therefore it must be an unfrocked priest. Find him for me, Bardac—and quickly.

"Secondly, Viaur, tomorrow we go to Bauvezet and see these four other men. From one of them maybe we shall find out something about Doubert which will help. Remember, it is his death which is being avenged. The person who it is—and it must be a man from the methods of the murders—must have had a great love for him. A brother? A comrade in arms? Anyway, a man of great patience who is prepared to wait for his opportunities."

A little later Bardac left us but Papa Grand and I sat on enjoying the warm night. At least, Papa Grand was enjoying it, but I was thinking hard. I'd lost no marks in the "stewpot" and I didn't want to lose any as a *chercher libre* man. But it was clear that Papa Grand knew more than I did, and equally clear—since one of the functions of the Department was to train people like myself—that I would get no help from him unless it became absolutely essential for my own or someone else's safety. Help given at this stage meant a black mark.

"Come now," said Papa Grand, eventually breaking the silence, "let me have your description of the man who has done these murders."

"Well, Patron, I agree now that he must be an unfrocked priest. All these men must at some time have confessed their secret sin. Among the many priests involved, one—let us say it was Doubert's brother, and that Doubert was not the real name of the Resistance leader—learns for the first time the true nature of Doubert's death. To avenge his brother and betray the confessional he must leave the Church. But he is still a religious man, if a little unhinged."

"Why?"

"Because, Patron, of the manner of the men's deaths. This priest is obsessed by martyrdom, by crucifixion . . . The spear that killed the first is symbolic of that other spear. The stab wounds of the second—and there were five I remember now—are the five stab wounds. The strangling whipcord of the third represents the scourging with whips. The dagger left in the heart of the next—I imagine the dagger represents the Cross. The fifth—well, the hammer is for the hammer that drove in the nails. And the three heavy nails that held the rope for the last are for the nails which . . ."

"Quite," said Papa Grand softly. "You have done well, Viaur."

"But how you could know there were ten men escapes me, Patron."

Papa Grand began to rise. "You were brought up in the town or the country, Viaur?"

"In the country, Patron."

"Then you should know the answer. The man we want is someone who knows his botany. Good night, Viaur."

The next morning we drove over to Bauvezet to see what more we could glean from the four men,

particularly the doctor, named Lunel. All the way over I puzzled at the botany enigma, but I got nowhere.

Doctor Lunel was not at his house, but a maid told us that he would be found at a cafe in the village square where he was waiting with his rods to go on a fishing trip to a nearby lake. She gave us directions to the lake in case we should miss him in the village.

We found the doctor taking coffee and cognac, sitting alone at a small table under a tree. He was a white-haired, fine-looking man of great dignity.

I introduced Papa Grand to him, and almost at once he said, a little resentfully, I thought, "There is nothing more I can tell you, messieurs. I and my three friends know the danger we live in—but we accept it. What we have done we have done. We betrayed Doubert to save others. It was a terrible decision. Given the situation again we would all do the same. Over a hundred villagers were saved. Please do not question us any more about it."

"As you wish," said Papa Grand. Then, with a look at the doctor's rods, "You are going fishing?"

"Yes, monsieur. After yesterday all four of us feel we want to get away from things for a while. We have hired the village bus. I wait for it now."

Papa Grand looked at me and shrugged. Then he stood up. "We must respect the doctor's wishes, Viaur. I am going to telephone Bardac to see if he has any information for us." He moved away into the cafe to find a telephone.

Doctor Lunel finished his coffee without another word to me. A few moments later a little country bus pulled up outside the cafe. The driver, a long-faced, bright-eyed man, leaned out of the driving window and called to the doctor.

"Come on, Doctor. We shall be late picking up the others at the crossroads. It is my fault, I wanted her bright and shining for you." He laughed and smacked the door panel of the gleaming blue and white bus.

"Coming, Caussade," said the doctor, and without a look at me he got up and went to the bus. The driver jumped down and helped him load his rods and gear aboard, and I noticed that the man was wearing a flower in his buttonhole.

The blue and white bus moved away up the village street and as it passed I could read its name on the tail panel—*La Couronne. Prop.: Caussade.*

And it was that that did it for me—the name of the bus and the fact that it was painted blue and white, and the sudden recognition of the kind of flower which Caussade was wearing in his buttonhole.

I jumped to my feet and turned to get Papa Grand, but he was already coming out of the cafe. As he

came up to me, he said, "What is it, Viaur?"

"Patron—" I had him by the arm and was urging him toward our car, "I think I have found him, our unfrocked priest."

"You have," he said, "if his name is Caussade. Bardac has just given me that name. He's the only unfrocked priest within fifty miles. He changed his name from Bartois to Caussade after he left the Church."

"It is he. He has just driven off with the doctor and he's picking up the other three at the crossroads." I let in the gears and accelerated up the village street. "We must hurry, Patron, if we are going to save them. Listen, Patron, he owns a bus called La Couronne, and it's painted blue and white, and in his buttonhole he wears a flower that I should have recognized before I ever let the doctor—"

"Hurry, no talk!" snapped Papa Grand, suddenly grim.

As we roared up the village street I was thinking of that flower. I realized now why Papa Grand had known there were ten men involved. The flower was a Passion Flower, the flower that according to country legend displays ten symbols of the Passion: its leaf—the spear; the five anthers, the five wounds; the tendrils, the cords or whips; the column of the ovary, the pillar of the cross; the stamens, the hammers; the three styles, the three nails; the fleshy threads within the flowers, the crown of thorns; the white color, purity; the blue color, heaven; and the calyx, the glory or nimbus.

Of the last four the bus represented three. It was called La Couronne—the crown—and it was painted blue and white. It was, however, the thought of the nimbus, the blaze of light, which made me drive furiously.

At the crossroads there was no sign of them, but I knew the road to the lake and took that. After five minutes of fast driving we saw the blue and white bus ahead of us. I put my foot down hard and overhauled it. We swept ahead of it and then stopped at the roadside.

Papa Grand, fast for so big a man, was out of the car and in the middle of the road, holding up the bus. It drew up and the driver's lean face looked down at us inquiringly.

Papa Grand jerked the door open and shouted to the four men inside, "Get out of this bus quickly. Quickly—if you wish to live!"

For a moment they looked at him blankly. Then he reached for the doctor and grabbed his arm. "Out!" Papa Grand cried.

They came out then quickly, alarmed by the urgency in his voice. As the last one jumped to the road, Papa Grand turned to the driver, Caussade, and I saw that my Patron had an automatic in his hand. "You, too, Caussade."

For a moment Caussade looked at him and his lean face was sud-

denly taut, angry, and his bright eyes gleamed with a ferocious glare. Then he suddenly jerked a gear home and his foot went down. The bus leaped forward, the open door catching Papa Grand and throwing him to the ground.

The bus sped down the road as I ran and picked Papa Grand up. We stood there, the six of us, and watched it racing down the road.

"Do we follow him?" I asked Papa Grand.

He shook his head. "No, Viaur. And you know why. It would be useless."

And I knew why. We all stood there and waited—waited for the glory, the nimbus, the great blaze, the last of the ten symbols . . . for the moment which would have destroyed the four shaken men around us.

It came when the bus was about a quarter of a mile away. There was a shattering explosion, then a great sheet of flame blazing upward as Caussade set off some homemade explosive charge which he had concealed in the vehicle—the great, sheeting glory of flame which he had designed to end the lives of the four men and his own—his revenge for a loved brother completed.

When I left the Department of Patterns at the end of my time it was with the grade of Excellent—one of the only twenty ever given. Before I left Papa Grand called me in and said, "Viaur, you go now to lecture students. Remember one thing—the vanity that comes from knowledge. When a man asks a question there are some moments when it is wise to give the answer rather than to urge him to seek for the answer himself. Sometimes the answer could come too late."

It was, I knew, his way of giving himself a black mark.

In her third story for EQMM (after "Miracle on Fifth Avenue," June 1963, and "Last Day in Paris," May 1964) Olga Marx proves again that she has something "special"—particularly in the style of her tale-telling . . .

"Something Rare and Beautiful" has an authentically academic flavor —a story about the staff of a university library—their work, their loves, their hates—the little world of their own in which routine, simple everyday living can reveal itself as something "rare and beautiful" . . .

We've all read stories of mycological murder—but this, we think you will agree, is one with a "difference" . . .

SOMETHING RARE AND BEAUTIFUL

by OLGA MARX

WHEN A LIBRARIAN OF CLARKE University died, it was customary to give his fellow workers an hour off to attend funeral services—so that only a skeleton staff remained, as Drew Walters (head of the Manuscript Department) remarked aptly on one such occasion.

This time the attendance was unusually large because of the mysterious suddenness of the death. Rare Books, Reference, Manuscripts—indeed, all the library departments were well represented. The girl bibliographers who lent the British Museum Catalogue a feline character by calling it the *Brit Mew* and had reduced the Bibliotheque Nationale to *Bib Nat* couldn't keep the spring out of their step—not on an October day that dyed the gingko leaves a pure flat yellow.

The older members walked more soberly, and Laurie Dingle (Reference Department) climbed the chapel staircase as if it were a mountain. She looked defiant, as if she hadn't wanted to come at all, and her face was so white that Nick Ballantine (Rare Books) cupped his hand solicitously round her elbow. Only then did a hint of color come to her cheeks. Her dark-gray eyes gave him a sidelong glance of more than gratitude, and this was avidly noted by the others.

For several weeks now an air of pleasurable anticipation had animated the library's daily routine. Was it going to happen? Were those two . . . ? It was! They were! Everyone was sure of it now. It would be one of those marriages that stand up as sturdily as houses planned in later life when experience gives a first-rate heating system

and sound banisters precedence over built-in bars and a picture window which frames merely a greater length of a neighbor's clothesline.

Shortly after his 50th birthday Nick Ballantine had confided to Drew Walters that, in his shaving mirror, he had seen Death peering over his shoulder—exactly as in the famous picture by Albrecht Durer.

"Nonsense," Drew had said briskly. "He's much too busy, what with famines in China and India, and goings-on in Vietnam and the Congo—to mention only a few of his current hangouts. Fifty! Why fifty's nothing!" he added generously from the vantage point of his own 43. "You don't look *old!* Merely distinguished. The girls say you're 'cute.' Of course, they have no vocabulary."

This morale booster had an unintended effect: Nick became increasingly aware of the female members of the staff. It was all very well so long as he kept to the young things and admired their hairdo's, or to Mabel Oliver (Descriptive Cataloguing) who adored every man in sight and found an outlet for her emotions by sewing on buttons and bringing cookies to coffee break.

But when Laurie Dingle came under Nick's sharpened scrutiny Drew became concerned. For Laurie, who looked 25 and had the good sense of her 33 years, had found favor in his own eyes. An absent-minded, dawdling man, he had put off, or forgotten to tell her about it, though time and again he had discovered that, while dealing with a professional snag, he had written her name over and over on one of his slips—like any teen-ager who scrawls his emotions on defenseless walls and billboards.

In the solitude of his bachelor apartment Drew had indulged in fantasies of the future: Laurie's delightful laugh, her equally delightful cookery, her admirable tidiness. No more would he reach for a dish towel, presumably on its proper hook, only to find his beret there instead; or when his electricity was shut off, to discover that, instead of paying the bill, he had noted a bibliographical memorandum on its back and filed it under a bookseller's name.

And now Nick had not only forestalled him but was evidently making serious headway. Drew began to brood. He thought about death in general—and in particular.

The subject was not unfamiliar to him. One of his duties as head of the Manuscript Department was to run through obituaries and other relevant material, note items on the demise of authors, and when enough slips had accumulated, send them to Mabel Oliver so that the year could be filled in after the inconclusive dash on a catalogue card, reading, for instance: William Faulkner, 1897-1962.

When he was first chosen for this

work, Drew found himself the butt of facetious comment.

"What's the scoop today?" he'd be asked, or someone in his small special group at coffee break would raise a cup of the unexpectedly excellent brew concocted by Laurie Dingle and chant the old toast which ends, "Down among the dead men/ Down among the dead men/ Down among the dead men let him lie." When he protested rather huffily that he found the obituary work interesting, remarks dwindled and ceased. But behind his back they called him "The Ghoul."

No one realized how much he enjoyed his researches. They took the place of the hobby he had never acquired. Mabel Oliver collected miniature volumes, especially of the *Rubaiyat*. Nick was a mycologist and spent his week-ends stalking mushrooms. Laurie was very proud of her shelf of old and rare cook books. Drew who had tried American glass and birding, found collecting corpses on paper far more congenial than the former, and certainly less strenuous than the latter.

He became so fond of his macabre hobby that if, running through catalogues, he happened on someone born in, say, 1885, he caught himself thinking disapprovingly: Well, it's about time the old fellow . . . Then he would relax in the beautiful finality of Voltaire, 1694-1778, and other cards belonging to that large and illustrious company whose life was now represented by a dash between two dates.

One Monday morning, when Laurie exuded the radiance of a woman who has had a most satisfying week-end, and when Drew was further annoyed at some idiot's having mislaid the *Corriere della Sera,* and his ballpoint pen had begun to sputter exhaustedly, it occurred to him that he need not stand passively by and see matters run to a finish which would be so painful to him. He could do something about it. After he had unscrewed his pen and inserted a new cartridge, he doodled until the strokes came black and firm. Fascinated, he stared at the sheet, tore it from the pad, shredded it, dropped the bits in his ashtray, and set match to them.

What he had doodled was: *Now is the time . . . Now is the time for all good . . . Now is the time to finish off Nick.*

The how was so simple and appropriate that he smiled.

From his last summer's trip to Europe, a nightmare of constantly groping for his passport, struggling with foreign currencies, and doing his own laundry, he had returned with souvenirs for his closer associates. But in the end he had retained what he had purchased for Nick and substituted a very handsome tie he had bought for himself on the Boul Mich, in the *Maison de Cent Mille Chemises.* Nick's intended present seemed too

rare and precious to surrender. Now it might reach its original recipient after all, he thought with grisly humor, though by an unforeseen route.

There were a number of practical details to consider, and he had all but decided that the difficulties were virtually insuperable when Laurie surprised him by inviting him to her cabin for the following week-end. She and Nick had gone there three Fridays running, and she thought it wise, at this stage, to introduce a third person for the benefit of curious neighbors.

"Is it going to be a party?" Drew inquired cautiously.

"Only Nick and you. Unless you count poor old Brownie. Remember how he used to race across the golf course? All he does now is lie in a patch of sun."

Drew's smile of sympathy with the aging dog concealed a rush of satisfaction. Like a landscape emerging from mist, his blurred plan suddenly shaped to clarity and coherence.

The locale was perfect: the golf course with its teeming fungi always roused Nick to mycological raptures. Nick would gather them for supper. Laurie's allergy to mushrooms was common knowledge. Drew himself would feign a slight gastric disturbance which would limit his food intake to tea and toast. Sad to deprive himself of Laurie's superb dishes—but there would be years and years to savor them—afterward.

Nick would, of course, pluck only edible mushrooms, but Drew was in a position to supply what was wanted. For had he not the souvenir originally intended for Nick?

It was for Nick's sake that Drew had gone to the fungi exhibit in Locarno. The local paper had publicized it with many *bellissimos* and *interessabtissimos* stressing that such exhibits were usually made up of painted wax models, while in this the specimens would be real. Owing to their perishable nature, the show would be only a two-day affair to be held in the open, in the stone court of the Visconti Castle which now functioned as a regional museum.

It proved an artless display—varieties of mushrooms laid out on crudely knocked-together tables. There were signs with the Latin names, the legends *edible* or *poisonous*, and an occasional mention of unusual characteristics—for example, that a certain *Boletus edulis*, found by Dr. Italo Cataneo of Lugano, weighed 3.3 kg. and measured 40 cm. across.

Drew's interest was esthetic rather than mycological. He had wandered from table to table, admiring dull reds, dark purples, silvery beiges, and crinkled blacks. Most of the volunteers, supposed to be on hand to give information, had left their posts to greet friends. He

smiled indulgently at the gay *Ciaos* which punctuated the chatter of the crowd, and stopped to test his ability to understand spoken Italian during the tirade of a fat indignant woman who had slapped her little girl's hand for reaching out to touch a pale-green fungus bedded in a spongy cushion.

"It can kill you!" she shrilled with Latin intensity. "Somebody ought to be in charge here! Letting things like that just lie around! *E vergognoso, vergognoso!*" With that lightning shift from punishment to caress which Drew had previously observed in southern peoples, she bestowed loud smacking kisses on her endangered offspring.

He read the sign: *"Amanita Phalloides:* a single specimen, mixed in food, is sufficient to kill 200 people," then reached out on impulse, filched one of the unguarded fungi, later strung and dried it in his sunny window, and finally purchased an Italian mosaic pillbox to keep it in—all a present for his good friend Nick.

For the purpose of his week-end he transferred the dry grayish bits to an envelope. The mosaic box was too conspicuous.

"You and Laurie driving up together?" The query was rhetorical. "I'll get there by six or so."

Restlessly he prowled his way to the Catalogue Room and gravitated toward the B's. Nick had written an excellent study of *False Attributions of Anonymous Articles in the Observer from 1890-1910,* which had won him the three-by-six immortality of a card. Drew found it, and held it separate from the rest. "Nicholas Merritt Ballantine," he silently read, "1911- ."

Absently he took his pencil and fell into a daydream. Laurie came toward him, her gray eyes tender and welcoming. Again he noticed how white the skin was between her fingers where the sun had not struck. As white as the card . . .

Drew came to with a start, saw what he first regarded as an optical delusion, and then, to his horror, decided it was really there. Faint but distinct the figures 1965 appeared to the right side of the dash. Sweat beaded his forehead. Cautiously he peered around. No one, absolutely no one was in the room. He erased the date. It left no mark.

Deeply disturbed at this new manifestation of his absent-mindedness, he returned to his office where a student assistant was working with Friday afternoon haste.

"I wish you'd learn to close the drawers of the filing cabinet properly," Drew growled, and banged a drawer shut. "And see to it that my slips for Descriptive Cataloguing don't lie around here till Monday."

The boy looked at him with silent dislike, and Drew, uncomfortable in the sulky atmosphere he

himself had generated, cleared his desk, doodled, wrote a few last slips, doodled some more, then forced himself to a curt goodbye, and left.

When he arrived at the cabin he found Nick stretched out on a reclining chair with Brownie close by. The dog wagged. Nick waved.

"Sit down," he said. "This late sun brings out all the laziness in one's bones. Laurie'll be back soon. She went to a neighbor's to get you some fresh eggs. Says a boiled egg along with the tea and the toast can't possibly hurt you."

"Thoughtful of her." Drew set his bag on the porch.

"Yes, she's wonderful! Always thinks of everything!"

"Nick!" Drew said with the mechanical urgency of a policeman warning the man he has just arrested that anything he may say can be used against him. "Nick, I know you're fond of Laurie. But isn't it a bit belated? All this . . . At your age. As if Brownie here, so shaky on his legs that he didn't even get up to say hello to me, were suddenly to leap with amorous impulses."

At the mention of his name Brownie pricked up his ears, one of which flopped with unthoroughbred laxness. He sniffed the air, lifted his head from between his paws. He sat. He stood, alert, nose quivering. Then, with a bound no one would have thought him capable of, he dashed across the lawn and disappeared.

Nick smiled at Brownie's antics.

Drew forced his features to follow suit.

"Never say I didn't warn you," he managed to say facetiously as he picked up his bag and went into the cabin.

That night it rained. Drew found himself muttering "Damn, damn" in time to the beat of drops against his window. Then he altered it to a fervent "Stop, stop." Laurie would never let Nick fare forth in such a downpour. "Stop!" Drew pleaded in anguish. And it did.

Soon after breakfast Nick set out in a world gilded with sun.

"You might retrieve Brownie for me," Laurie suggested. "You'll probably find him outside that enclosure the Atwoods have for their dog. Eating his heart out—and eating nothing else." Then she added, "And he's much too old to fast."

"I'll bring him back." Nick's hand brushed Laurie's as he took the basket she proffered.

When he returned it was filled with mushrooms that smelled of earth and morning.

In the afternoon they capped them together, while Brownie rolled over on his side to sleep off the strain of his previous night's expedition.

"Too tired even to eat, poor darling," Laurie lamented.

"This notion that not eating is a

disaster," Drew teased. "Why, you're almost as bad as Mabel. Utterly feminine."

"Heaven be thanked," Nick said and regarded Laurie with fervent amazement that his love-object could be so absolutely engaging in every possible way. Under his gaze she bent a little lower over the mycological specimen she was holding and said tenderly, "This one's superb."

Bleakly Drew left the climate of love. He stood on the porch and groped frantically in two wrong pockets before he found the envelope containing *Amanita Phalloides*.

A cloud should have passed over the sun, a cold breath should have invaded the air. But the day remained gentle and bright, as luminous as the blue on a Ming vase. He seemed to himself the only dark disfiguring speck on the landscape.

With Laurie washing lettuce and Nick out picking the last tomatoes, Drew found it absurdly easy to add a lethal ingredient to the mushrooms, already browning in butter. Laurie herself paved the way.

"Add about half a cup of water, will you," she told him. "Then put on the lid and turn the gas low. He likes his mushrooms stewed. They're juicier that way."

There was no need to search for an antecedent; for Laurie the world of men had already narrowed to a single "he."

"Gosh, it smells good!" Nick said on his return. "Even Brownie's taking notice. Just watch his nose."

Warning thuds sounded from the pot.

"You forgot to turn down the gas," Laurie cried reproachfully. She flew to the stove. The mushrooms were boiling over. In her haste she knocked over the pot.

"What a mess," she exclaimed ruefully. "All those beautiful mushrooms. Gone! I'm terribly sorry, Nick."

"Plenty more where they came from," he comforted her, getting to work with a mop. "I'll have your linoleum clean in a jiffy."

Drew had rallied from his first dismay. This was only Saturday. Nick was sure to gather more mushrooms for tomorrow. No more than a pinch of the lethal contents of his envelope had gone into the pot. Though the first attempt has failed, Drew told himself sententiously, the modus operandi and opportunity—and motive—remained the same.

"Come on and help," Laurie said briskly. "Get the pail from the back porch. Don't just stand there, Drew, as if the world had come to an end. Look, even Brownie's doing his bit."

"Oh, no!" Drew exclaimed, and dragged the dog away by the collar.

"Leave him alone," Laurie objected. "What's the matter with you? Brownie adores butter."

Drew let go. It was too late anyway. The dog was licking his nozzle clean of a brown rim.

Drew watched the animal all evening. Supper came and went. Brownie seemed all right. They sat under the stars. They did a double-crostic which gave Drew a chance to display his encyclopedic knowledge. Nick admired. Laurie smiled. They had chosen the double-crostic just to be kind to him. Kindness! Kindness is to love what ginger ale is to champagne, Drew formulated wryly.

He retired early—and lay awake waiting.

He heard Laurie's low laugh, and Nick's voice, deep and gentle. He heard them talking to Brownie as they took him to his enclosure. He heard their silence. A tap ran briefly. A shoe thudded to the floor. A window was raised or lowered. Then there was only the rustle of leaves, and a cricket having his small say.

When? When? What if it did not work at all? Then he could put the whole ugly business out of his mind. Everything would be as before. Suddenly this "everything" seemed very rare and wonderful: the feel of his cashmere muffler, the smell of coffee, a phrase from Montaigne—falling on the dial of his day like sun that points the true time . . .

A strangled yelp came from the kennel which was under his window. The others would not hear it. He sat up. It *had* worked. He snapped on his flashlight and looked at the time. A little after 3:00. It had taken eight hours.

By seven, when he heard Laurie's wail of discovery, he was dressed and fully prepared to be surprised and sympathetic. Nick and he, coming from different directions, converged on her as she knelt beside the dead animal.

"He was old," Drew offered. "His heart simply gave out."

Nick said nothing. He took Laurie's shaking hand in his large, quiet clasp.

"But he was all right yesterday," she said brokenly. "He ran. He was better than in a long time. Except he didn't eat anything."

She stopped abruptly. Her mobile face expressed sudden realization. "Yes, he did. He *did* eat. He ate the spilled mushrooms. There must have been a poisonous one among them."

A new idea dawned in her eyes. She jumped up and flung her arms round Nick.

"Darling," she cried. "Oh, darling, it might have been you! I'll never let you gather those beastly things again. Not to eat. We'll buy them, all nice and safe in little square baskets."

Nick did not argue. He held her in his arms and kissed her. Drew turned away. The sun shone on Brownie. His fur was stiff and dull.

"I'll tend to him," Drew said. He needed something to do . .

The Monday-morning coffee break was lively with the details of the grim incident.

"And we'll have to go over it all again for Mabel," Laurie sighed, as all except Nick and Drew left the table. "I don't like to hash over Brownie's death."

"Wherever *is* Mabel?" Drew asked crossly, for now that it was over, the smart of failure stung his pride. And just then Mabel trotted in, glanced round the room, spotted them, rushed up, and patted Nick's sleeve affectionately.

"Thank God you're all right!" she exclaimed fervently.

"How did you hear about it?" Laurie asked in surprise.

"Hear about what?"

"That Nick was almost poisoned."

"I didn't know."

"Then what did you mean?"

Awkwardly Mabel removed her hand from Nick's arm and became her old, timid, slightly flustered self.

"Because . . ." She turned to Drew. "May I speak to you for a moment?"

"Of course, but can't it wait till you've had your coffee?"

"No. This is important."

"What have I gone and done, Mabel? Something dreadful? A sin of omission, or what?"

"I'd rather talk to you about it alone."

"Oh, come, Mabel. I don't mind losing a little prestige among friends."

She gave him an odd look and said, "Very well." But her voice lacked its usual warmth of devotion.

"That boy of yours brought me your slips on Friday," she went on. "Only I didn't get round to them till just a short while ago. I had a visitor who wanted some Russian transliterated. I was on pins and needles. Then, when I really read them—the slips, I mean—I was upset, to say the least. You see, I'd been in my office and hadn't seen anybody, though I suppose someone would have told me if . . ."

"Told you what?" Drew asked impatiently. "Try and be coherent, Mabel."

"If Nick was—if Nick was still alive."

"And why shouldn't he be?" Drew persisted, but a queasy feeling stirred in his stomach.

"Because—because of this!" She did not look at Drew as she held out a slip—one of his slips, with some of his absent-minded doodling.

He saw his writing on it, his impersonal, yet wholly characteristic, wholly unmistakable doodling. He snatched the slip from her. His fingers clenched on the paper, and crumpled it.

"What on earth . . .?" Laurie

exclaimed. "Why, Mabel's crying!"

"What is it?" Nick asked. "Let me see that slip."

"No!" Drew, the courteous, the mannerly, was shouting.

"I want to see it, Drew," Laurie stated imperiously. Her gray eyes were very dark.

"No!"

She tried to pry open his hand. Her efforts were almost playful at first. Suddenly she scratched his knuckles. It was so unexpected that he let go.

"Why, it's only one of your obituary slips," she said. "Probably some perfectly silly mistake on it, like 1800 for 1900." She began to read: "Nicholas Merritt Ballantine, 1911-1965." Her voice faded, then came back in a rush.

"On Friday," she said. "He wrote it last *Friday*. Oh, darling, it wasn't your mushrooms after all. He wanted to kill you. He'd planned it. He must have put something in . . ."

Drew flinched before the horror in her eyes. The telltale slip fluttered from her hand.

"I don't understand," Mabel faltered. "I'm sure it's just his absentmindedness. Everybody knows the way he goes off into some dreamland of his own. I wish I hadn't brought it up."

"Nobody leave." Laurie's voice was hard. "This goes beyond our personal business. Mabel, I want you to call the police."

Drew put a hand on Mabel's shoulder.

"Wait," he said, suddenly calm, "It will be difficult to prove anything. There'd just be a library scandal. Let's keep this to ourselves."

He stooped to pick up the slip. Laurie started forward, but Nick restrained her while Drew shredded the paper, dropped the bits into an ashtray, and set a match to them.

There was still a little coffee in the well of his cup. He took an envelope from his pocket, shook the contents in, and drank up.

"Eight hours," he said pensively. "That's all I ask of you. If you don't mind, I'll spend them doing —just what I usually do."

He looked at the square of flawless sky framed in the window. An arc of doves unfurled and glinted in the sun.

"Sorry," he said formally, and left . . .

And that was how the library staff got an hour off on an October day that dyed the gingko leaves a pure flat yellow.

a *new* Dr. Coffee story by

LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

The Coroner said it was "Death by Drowning"—no question about it. But Lieutenant Max Ritter was worried. Is every body fished out of a river always drowned? So Ritter consulted Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee, chief pathologist at Pasteur Hospital in Northbank . . . a modern medical detective story, carrying on the great classical tradition of R. Austin Freeman's Dr. Thorndyke . . .

DEATH BY DROWNING?

by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

BERT WINKLER WAS A FREE-WHEELing, big-dealing labor boss with deadly enemies on both sides of the bargaining table. He was a maverick who ran roughshod over his Northbank locals. He tore up telegrams from national headquarters—and got away with it. He could usually be counted on to have wildcat strikes break out among the truckers serving the Midwest food processors at the peak of each harvest.

When the first days of hot weather started the cucumbers ripening, it was nip and tuck whether the trucks would roll the next day to the Peter Piper Pickling Works. And when the red tide of tomatoes reached its flood by midsummer, there was sure to be an epidemic of truck breakdowns and sick leaves among the drivers shuttling between the farms and the Barzac Canneries. Only Bert Winkler was able to smooth things over—but always at a price.

Alive, Bert Winkler was only five feet one. When he was fished out of the river at three A.M. one hot June night, he seemed even smaller. The bravado that enabled him to waggle his perennial cigar defiantly and impartially under the noses of farmers, processors, and his own national leadership, seemed to have dissolved in the water streaming from his purpled face.

His flashy $200 suit, his monogrammed shirt, his Italian tie and handmade shoes were a mess as he lay on the riverside dock in the glow of the police floodlights concentrated on the launch grappling for Bert's Jaguar. It was the splash of the sports car going into the river that had aroused a nightwatchman two blocks away.

"Open-and-shut case," said the Coroner, yawning his three chins into neat accordion folds. "Death by drowning. Won't need an inquest."

"What about that bloody welt on his forehead?" asked Lieutenant of Detectives Max Ritter. "Looks like somebody cracked him one."

"Probably banged his head on the windshield when he hit the water," said the Coroner. "He's drowned, that's for sure. Don't worry about it."

But Lieutenant Ritter did worry. After a few hours of sleep he called at the laboratory of his personal and private Medical Examiner, Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee, chief pathologist at Pasteur Hospital.

"Doc," he asked, "can you tell whether a guy fished out of the river last night was drowned or dead when he hit the water?"

"Certainly, Max. The Gettler test."

"Water in the lungs?"

"Not quite that simple. We take a sample of blood from each side of the heart. Normally the chloride level—the amount of salt in the blood—will be the same on both sides. But in the case of drowning, water gets into the venous circulation to dilute the blood in the left side of the heart. So if the man drowned, the blood from the right side of the heart will have the higher salt content."

"Look, Doc." Ritter hesitated. "I hate to ask this, because the Coroner says the guy was drowned, so he won't okay an autopsy fee. But do you suppose—?"

"Sure, send the body over, Max. Unless—don't tell me it's downstairs already!"

Ritter grinned sheepishly. "I thought you wouldn't say no, once you heard the story," he said.

The detective proceeded to paint a Picassoesque picture of Bert Winkler's very private enterprise. He said that a representative of the national secretary of the union—a man named Streich, and a three-times winner on murder charges—had made reservations at a Northbank hotel last night but had not yet appeared. He said that the cucumber growers were the probable victims of Winkler's current operations because the warm weather had just set in.

"They've got a regular timetable," Ritter said. "First the gherkins come in, then the medium and slicing pickles, and finally the dills. Any delay in shipping wrecks everything, because the gherkins get too big too fast. I'll give ten to one that Winkler was shaking down either the growers or the processors—either Paul Benjamin, counsel for the Associated Cucumber Growers, or Arthur Myron, president of Peter Piper, biggest of the picklers. And I don't think Winkler drove his car into the drink by accident. How long will this Gettler test take?"

"It's fairly complicated, Max.

Taking blood samples is just the start. There's a business with picric acid, potassium iodide, silver nitrate, sodium citrate, nitric acid—about ten different steps altogether. I can probably give an answer tomorrow morning."

"Okay, Doc. Then I'll—" Ritter stopped short. His Adam's apple vibrated alarmingly and his usually melancholy eyes bulged with surprise as he stared at the apparition in the doorway.

She was a small woman, but the blazing red hair piled on her head in a triple tiara was like the untidy aerie of some giant bird of prey and it gave her a formidable appearance. Her makeup seemed to have been applied with a palette knife. Her thin print dress, if intended for concealment, was barely adequate.

"Which one of you is Dr. Coffee?" asked the apparition. The pathologist nodded. "Is it true they brought Bert Winkler here late last night?"

"Are you Mrs. Winkler?" Dr. Coffee asked.

"Bert Winkler wasn't married. Who's got his clothes?"

"I have," said the detective. "My name's Ritter, Homicide Squad. What do you want with Winkler's clothes?"

"Look. I'm going to level with you. I'm in a jam. If you'll help me out, I may be able to do something for you. Winkler had a letter in his pocket that could make my husband very unhappy. It won't mean anything to you, but I want it back. I had dinner with Winkler last night—and that might mean something to you. Is it a deal?"

"I know you," said Ritter. "You're Nina Benjamin. Your husband is attorney for the Associated Cucumber Growers. Suppose you begin at the beginning."

Several months ago, said Nina Benjamin, climbing on a tall lab stool and crossing her bare legs, her husband had encouraged her to start dating Winkler. He wanted her to try to gain Winkler's confidence and find out what skulduggery he was cooking up for harvest time.

The plan had backfired, Nina said. She had fallen for Winkler. Instead of reporting his secrets to her husband she was stealing Benjamin's secrets for Winkler.

Last night at dinner she had brought Winkler a letter that Arthur Myron had written to her husband, suggesting that the cucumber growers and the pickle producers gang up on Winkler if he tried a shakedown again this year. Winkler left her at nine o'clock, she said, to have the letter photostated. He was coming back in an hour to return the letter so that she could slip it back into her husband's desk.

Nina waited for three hours. When Winkler didn't show up, she went home. She heard on a radio newscast what had happened to Winkler.

"So he's dead. Why can't I have

that letter back, Inspector? I mean why should I get my bosom caught in the wringer because of a dead man? What my husband doesn't know won't hurt him."

"Maybe he does know," said Ritter.

"What do you mean?"

"Where was your husband last night?"

"I—I don't know. He got home late and he was still asleep when I left the house this morning."

"And you don't know what Winkler did between the time he left you and three A.M. when his car hit the river?"

"I don't know where he went to get the photostats made. Maybe he went to the Northbank Hotel to see Streich from union headquarters."

"Streich didn't register last night. Okay, Mrs. Benjamin, if I come across the letter I'll let you know. It wasn't in Winkler's pockets. Maybe your husband found it."

Ritter was back in the lab when Dr. Coffee returned from the autopsy.

"That bump on Winkler's head was superficial," the pathologist said. "I don't think it killed him. There's no gross hemorrhage in the brain and I doubt if any will show under the microscope. I can't be sure yet about the drowning. Can you report any progress from your end?"

"I can fill in one hour," said Ritter, "but I've got four or five more to go. After he left Nina, Winkler drove out to Peter Piper to see Arthur Myron who was working late. Myron says Winkler tried to shake him down the same way he does every year to keep the trucks rolling, only this year he raised the ante to double.

"Myron says he turned him down flat, and Winkler got abusive and made all kinds of threats but that finally he left in about an hour. Myron's story checks. A prowl car saw Winkler's Jaguar parked in front of the plant at nine thirty, but it was gone an hour later. What happened from ten thirty and three in the morning—that I don't know yet."

"Have you questioned Mr. Benjamin?" Dr. Coffee asked.

"I think he's my boy. Nina was lying when she said he came home last night. He's supposed to be out in the field somewhere, but I can't locate him. For my money, he's on the lam."

"Good luck, Max. I hope you find him."

When Dr. Coffee got the results of the Gettler test the next morning, he telephoned Ritter immediately.

"I was just going to call you, Doc," said the detective. "I just got word they picked up Paul Benjamin in Cleveland. I'm on my way to the airport."

"Forget it, Max. I want you to drive me out to Arthur Myron's plant. Right away."

"Well, sure. But do you mean Winkler *wasn't* drowned?"

"He was drowned, all right. I'll be waiting for you downstairs."

The Peter Piper factory was a sprawling acre of brick buildings surrounding a loading area. Ritter stopped at the front entrance, but Dr. Coffee waved him on; he wanted to go in the back way.

A maze of catwalks ran between rows and rows of pickling vats, and the two men had to make their way through a hundred yards of pungent gloom before they reached Arthur Myron's office.

The president of the Peter Piper Pickling Works, a beefy giant of a man, rose to greet them. He frowned as he asked, "What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

"Mr. Myron," said the pathologist without any preliminaries, "was it an accident, or did you lose your temper and deliberately push Winkler off the catwalk when he showed you the letter you wrote to Mr. Benjamin?"

"I—I don't think I quite understand—" But the color had drained from Myron's face.

"I think you do," said Dr. Coffee. "Bert Winkler was drowned in one of your pickling vats between nine thirty and ten thirty the night before last. Since it wouldn't do to have the body found floating here, you drove his Jaguar from the front of your plant to the loading zone in the rear. Sometime after midnight you fished the body out of the vat and loaded it into his own car. At three a.m., when you were pretty sure not to be seen, you drove Winkler's car into the river, and then went home."

"That—that's pure supposition." The flush of self-confidence was returning to Myron's cheeks. "There's no proof, not an iota of evidence!"

"Oh, yes," said Dr. Coffee. "There's the Gettler test. When a man is drowned in fresh water, the salt content of his blood is higher in the right side of his heart than in the left. In Winkler's case, the salt level was much higher in the *left* side of his heart, indicating that he was *drowned in salt water*. And the only body of salt water within miles of Northbank, the only body of salt water big enough to drown a man, is the brine in your pickling vats."

'Q'

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **THOMAS B. DEWEY**

TITLE: ***The Prevalence of Monsters***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Special question to married women: Suppose you came home unexpectedly and found your husband wrapped in the arms of a gorgeous blonde: what would* you *do?*

ELLEN MACDONALD WAS ROUSED from a dream of midsummer madness to hear Robbie, her five-year-old son, screaming his head off. Her throat was dry and twisted with longing. Her dream in that short afternoon nap had centered on a mountain of ice cream (fresh peach) topped by a veritable lava flow of sauce (maple walnut), rigorously forbidden in reality, but now all hers just as soon as she could make her way to the table. The table had seemed at first to be in her own kitchen, and then, curiously, it had shifted to the farthest corner of the student union, on a campus she had not seen for eight years.

The screen door banged heavily and she whimpered at the shock. She managed to get her feet on the floor as Robbie hurled himself at her. She interpreted his gasped explanation to mean that her older son Dean, eight, had tried to force Robbie to go into the boathouse.

"—and there's—a—*monster* in there!"

"There's no such thing as a monster," she said sharply.

"There is so a monster in the boathouse!"

"Well, you don't have to go in the boathouse if you don't want to."

By the time he had quieted down, it was a quarter to five and she had to hurry her bath, as usual, then fly to get their dinners and something for the babysitter, who would be there at six. Then she would have to dress hastily, not

knowing for sure that everything was in place, properly hooked. All this in order to meet Betty Quillan and Patricia Dorn at the mailbox, so they could drive over to Nancy Caldwell's cottage for the weekly meeting of "The Castaways"—the wives of men who worked in the city and sent their families to the Lake for the summer.

Not that she really wanted to go, but the group had been formed to provide some solidarity for the city wives and she felt a certain loyalty. If only it weren't for Nancy Caldwell's annoying habit of posing her "hypothetical problems"— Some of those nasty, penetrating questions might be all right in the security of the full home, in winter; but how they were upsetting, even hair-raising, in the summer dog days.

Tonight, for instance, they were nearly finished with dessert and coffee when Nancy said, "Let's just face it, what would you do? Say you have to go into town unexpectedly; it's long after working hours, you let yourself into the apartment, and there he is, that great god guy of yours from Olympus to whom you've given the best years of your life, wrapped in the arms of some tantalizing bit of blonde fluff with nothing in the world to do but provide female companionship for lonely males. What would you do? Really and truly. Let's take turns."

One by one, according to their inclinations, they made shift to answer. Waiting for her turn, Ellen brooded. She was tired and she had an uncomfortable, stuffed feeling, mingled with guilt, from the rich, forbidden dessert.

Why do I let myself get trapped, she thought, into doing so many things I don't want to do? I hate these scratchy hen parties. I hate coming to the Lake, having to cope with children and dead fish, while Bill stays in the city in an air-conditioned office with his bright, unencumbered secretary—

"Ellen?" Nancy was saying. "It's your turn. What would *you* do?"

"I'd—I think I'd kill him," Ellen said.

A hush fell, deep and embarrassing.

Trapped again, she thought, and she wanted to slap at the sly smile on Nancy's face . . .

Ellen got back at 11:15 and heard Robbie whimpering in the bedroom.

"What's the matter with him?" she asked.

"I don't know," the babysitter said. "I read to him—but he keeps on talking about monsters."

When the babysitter had gone, Ellen fixed warm milk for Robbie and stayed with him till he fell asleep. Then she woke up Dean and marched him to the kitchen.

"Repeat after me," she said. "There is no such thing as a monster."

He rubbed his eyes, mumbling, "Therenoschthinsamonster."

"Say it again, and this time slowly, distinctly."

He stared at her.

"There is no such thing as a monster," he said.

"All right. Now go back to bed and don't let me hear you scaring Robbie again with that nonsense."

He lingered a moment, hurt and confused, and she turned away because she had begun to cry. By the time she got to bed it was 1:30 and her body felt like a knotted rope.

"It isn't fair!" she said through her teeth.

She groped for the telephone beside the bed, got the local operator, and put in a call to their city apartment. She let them ring at least twenty times before she finally hung up.

Almost two in the morning, she thought, and he's always in the office by nine. Where would he be at two in the morning? And what would he be doing?

The next day was hot, the Lake glassy calm. At four in the afternoon she called Betty Quillan, who had two children Robbie's and Dean's age.

"Sure, send them over," Betty said.

"I may be late, you know the trains—"

"I'll put them up in the bunks. Don't hurry, and have yourself a good time."

"Thanks, Betty. I'll do the same for you—"

She caught the 5:15, which got her to the city at 7:30. She took a taxi to the apartment and let herself in at five minutes after eight.

Everything seemed orderly enough, except for some debris on the coffee table—three cocktail glasses and some crumpled napkins. But one of the glasses bore lipstick stains, as did one of the napkins.

She carried the tray to the kitchen and was sick at her stomach in the sink. She washed her face, turned out the lights, and sat in the dark living room—waiting.

At ten she dragged herself out of a sour-smelling stupor and went to the bedroom. The bed was neatly made, and everything hung in place. She could see Nancy Caldwell's face smirking at her.

But he's *always* neat, she thought desperately.

In the bathroom she found a couple of discarded tissues, stained a bright pink. She wadded them into a ball and flushed them out of sight. She had begun to cry and her throat was pinched and dry. Braced on both hands over the lavatory, she forced out words as if spitting.

"You will not do this to me—!"

On tiptoe, stretching, she groped on the high closet shelf, dislodging shoe boxes and bundles of obsolete accessories. Finally she found the gun—a small .25 caliber pistol that Bill had taught her how to use—"just in case of possible prowlers." It was loaded and she carried it to

the bed, sat there with it in her lap, and tried to ignore the pain in her stomach, the buzzing in her ears.

The telephone rang four times before she realized what the sound was. There was a man's voice, briefly nonplused. Then—

"Oh—you would be Mrs. MacDonald. Sorry to call so late—this is George Reamer. Just wanted to tell Bill that I signed the contract with Mr. Devlin."

"I see—" Ellen said.

"Sorry you couldn't be with us—afraid we kept your husband up till all hours. The wife and I enjoyed ourselves very much. Great guy you've got there—glad he'll be on the account. If you'll tell him—"

Over the voice and the buzzing in her head she heard the front door of the apartment.

"Yes, I'll tell him," she said.

The gun slipped from her lap and she barely had time to pick it up and push it under the pillow before the bedroom door opened and Bill came in.

Thank you, Mr. Reamer, whoever you are—thank you for assuming that I'm Mrs. MacDonald—

"Baby, baby, baby!" Bill was saying, pulling her down beside him on the bed. "Am I glad to see you! How did you know to come home tonight? I got great news—a big new account—"

"Yes," she said, "Mr. Reamer just called—"

"What a couple, those Reamers! Cleaned us out of gin in thirty minutes. But listen, I've got some ice cream out there, your favorite, and some maple walnut sauce—"

"Yes—yes, darling."

Later, bathed and cool, the ache in her throat melted away with the ice cream, and she looked at the familiar ceiling while Bill got ready for bed.

"On account of the inflation," he said, "five cents for your thoughts."

Under the pillow she could feel the hard lump of the gun she hadn't yet had a chance to hide away.

"Not worth it," she said drowsily. "But if you want to be a spendthrift —I was just thinking—"

She let it trail off.

"Come on," Bill nudged, "you made a deal."

"—about the prevalence of monsters."

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 274th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Not the least interesting aspect of "The Impossible Murder of Dr. Satanus" is the fact that its author, William Krohn, was only 18 years old when he submitted this story. (Loyal readers of EQMM will undoubtedly recall James Yaffe's first story, originally titled "The Body in the Elevator," published in our July 1943 issue and written by Mr. Yaffe when he was only 15 years old; to prove once again that fact is stranger than fiction, Mr. Krohn's first story was actually started when he was 15, and both stories—Yaffe's and Krohn's—deal with elevators as "locked rooms.")

William Krohn definitely shows promise. The classical deductive tale, the so-called "pure" detective story, needs new blood these days of Freudian ferreting; so we cannot help wishing there were many young writers volunteering 'tec transfusions in the subspecies of the "impossible crime," the "miracle problem," the "murder as if by magic."

At the time he wrote "The Impossible Murder of Dr. Satanus," Mr. Krohn was a freshman at Yale (ye little fishes of coincidence! —James Yaffe also went to Yale). He is a native of Electra, Texas—what a wonderful name for a town! As a freshman, Mr. Krohn's extracurricular activities were reading detective stories and fencing. He started writing at the tender age of 10, but completed only one of his first 20 attempts. When he was 15 (oh, frabjous day!) he read his first detective novel; it was—can't you guess?—John Dickson Carr's THE THREE COFFINS.

How about another "impossible crime," Mr. Krohn—say, about fencing?

THE IMPOSSIBLE MURDER OF DR. SATANUS

by WILLIAM KROHN

THE POLICEMAN WAS THINKING about magic.

It was a strange thought for a policeman to have, but even his superiors might have forgiven him on an evening like this. It was late August, and a velvet-dark midsummer night had descended on the streets of the city. On this particular street, with its big comfortable homes and airy lawns turning from green to black in the smoky twilight, the darkness seemed to sing with a kind of summer magic that even a policeman can feel.

But Lieutenant-Detective Jerry Doran was thinking of another kind of magic—the kind which involves playing cards and white rabbits, bouquets of flowers that burst from nowhere and beautiful ladies who vanish at the wave of a silver wand. This kind of magic had somehow got loose from the safe confines of the stage and was causing Lieutenant Doran a severe occupational headache; and now he was ringing the doorbell of the one man who might help him—a man who did not believe in magic at all.

"Sometimes I think," said Richard Sheilan as he ushered his guest into the living room, "that it takes a murder to make you come visiting. Your soul is Machiavellian, Jerry. You should have been a politician."

"I should have been an astronaut," Doran said feelingly, "or a short-order cook. Anything but a policeman."

"Tch-tch," said Sheilan. He stepped over to the liquor cabinet and extracted a bottle and two glasses. "Those were sympathetic noises," he explained, "the kind I reserve for my un-retired friends. But I take it from what you said over the phone that you want more than commiseration." He handed Doran a glass. "What is it this time, Jerry? Murder, of course."

It had been a number of years since Sheilan had retired from police work and moved into his new home. He seemed quite at ease here in this large cream-colored room, as he hunched a little in his monstrous black armchair.

Sheilan was a very big man—not tall and wiry like Doran—but built on a huge scale. He stood well over six feet, on disproportionately long legs; he was big-boned and slender, with ropy-veined wrists and impressively broad shoulders. He had a ruddy complexion and what might be called ruddy hair—red-tinted where it had not already silvered with age. For all his quietness of manner he cut an imposing figure, and small people with loud voices rarely felt comfortable in his presence. He was quiet now, and the

hazel eyes watched his friend's face attentively.

"It's murder," Doran affirmed. "I'm surprised you haven't read about it in the papers. It's been getting front-page coverage ever since it broke this morning."

"I don't read the papers," Sheilan said simply. "What sort of case do you mean?"

"A screwy one. The kind," Doran said with a trace of malice, "that we save for our un-retired friends." Sheilan snorted as Doran went on, "Mr. Charles Kimball was killed early this morning in a downtown hotel. During the few seconds that the murder must have taken place, he was alone in an elevator car where no living soul could have come near him. And yet he was murdered."

Sheilan sighed. "You've hooked me, Jerry," he said. "Now I suggest that you begin at the beginning, omit the melodrama, and tell a straight story." Doran looked belligerent. "Suppose you begin with the victim—Mr. Kimball."

"All right," said Doran. "Mr. Charles Kimball. What do you think Mr. Charles Kimball was?"

Sheilan shut his eyes. "A sorcerer," he intoned. "A student of occult mysteries who tampered with forces beyond his control—"

"Bingo!" said Doran. "Got it the first guess. Charles Kimball was a professional magician, a stage illusionist—and a damn good one, from what I hear."

Settling back in his chair, the policeman began to tell the story . . .

Standing in the arctic glare of the blue spotlight, draped like a statue in the black robes of his profession, the magician looked for all the world like the lanky personification of some ancient plague. The skin of his hands was the color of snow, and a madman's shock of white hair, tied with a thin ribbon, crowned his skull; his mouth was like a black sore.

Earlier in the evening the stage had been crowded with gaudy apparatus—coffin-like boxes for sawing a woman in half and cabinets for making her vanish like a puff of smoke. Now the magician stood alone under the spotlight. With a creative gesture of his cupped hands he produced a single white dove which perched for a moment on his arm and then flew away. Then another appeared, and another and another— until it seemed as if there were a hundred of them fluttering around the weirdly lit stage.

The magician was billed as Dr. Satanus; he was, of course, none other than Mr. Charles Kimball, an entertainer whose checkered career had embraced everything from tightrope acrobatics to cardsharping, from juggling to escape artistry. Somewhere along the line he had married a chorus girl named Margaret Linden and incorporated her into the act as his assistant. Now, after more hard work and disap-

pointment than he cared to remember, Charles Kimball was at the peak of his career.

Backstage, the Dr. Satanus troupe was getting ready to go home—home tonight being three scattered rooms in the Hotel Bowman, a second-rate theatrical establishment just off Broadway. Leo Gurney, a wiry little man with a head of curly black hair and a monkey-ugly face, was leaning against a pile of flats and tinkering with an obscure bit of machinery; in addition to his duties as stage manager, Gurney was Kimball's right-hand man, the mechanical genius who designed and built all the illusions in the show.

There was also Dave Hooker, promotion manager and Jack-of-all-trades—presently off somewhere picking up coffee and sandwiches for a late-night snack. And, of course, there was Margaret Kimball, a still-young woman with a face and figure which could only be described in metaphors of fruit, flowers, and heavenly beings. Still dressed in her Satanic red costume, she stood in the wings and watched the finish of the dove illusion. The curtain came down to a good round of applause, and Charles Kimball swept past, gleamingly spectral in his stage trappings.

It had been a routine performance. However, one thing happened a little later that was out of the ordinary. A few minutes after the curtain dropped, Dave Hooker reappeared, a fair-haired, innocuous young man with an armful of paper bags from some nearby diner, which he quickly distributed. With one bag left over, he went to the door of Kimball's dressing room, rapped once, and stuck in his head.

Charles Kimball started up out of his chair, his hand darting instinctively for something hidden in the dressing-table drawer. Seeing Hooker, he seemed to collect himself; he said something pleasant in reply to a question only half heard, but his hand still hovered over the drawer.

When Hooker had gone, Kimball reached inside and took out a worn-looking .32 automatic. He gripped it tightly, seeming to draw comfort from it. But his hand still shook, and when he looked at his face in the mirror he saw fear as plainly as if the word had been written there in phosphorescent letters . . .

The lobby of a hotel is seldom an inspiring sight. The lobby of the Hotel Bowman at seven o'clock on this particular morning was no exception. It was small, and it was dirty; the fake marble linoleum wasn't fooling anybody.

There were never many people loitering about, especially this early in the morning. Now there were only two: the sandy-haired, shirt-sleeved desk clerk and a fat well-dressed man who looked like a hog. The latter, it appeared, was waiting for someone. He had strolled in and plumped himself down a few minutes before, and now he sat quietly

scanning his morning newspaper and eyeing the elevator.

As it happened, the desk clerk was also watching the elevator, which had gone up a few minutes before and was now presumably descending. He watched because he was curious about the hoggish gentleman, and because he had nothing else to do. This was important, because it meant that there were two witnesses to what happened next.

Both men heard the bump of the arriving car, and the hoggish gentleman rose from his seat, depositing the newspaper behind him like an egg. Then the elevator doors rolled open and they both saw that the only occupant of the car was lying down. Startled, the clerk moved around in front of his desk to get a closer look, and suddenly something turned over in his stomach. There was a ragged tear in the man's coat, and something dark staining the fabric.

The next thing he knew, the desk clerk was standing at the elevator doors watching dazedly as the hoggish gentleman lowered himself beside the body. He touched nothing, but he surveyed the scene as if fixing it in his mind. Then he rose with difficulty and turned to the white-faced clerk. His own face might have been stuffed with sawdust, for all the emotion it betrayed.

"My name is Bailey," the hoggish man said, flipping out some sort of identification. "I'm a private detective. I'll stay here while you call the police." The clerk's oyster eyes blinked. "Call the Homicide Squad," the fat man added ominously.

The body on the floor of the elevator was that of Charles Kimball, and—let it be said now—he was dead before the elevator doors opened . . .

"We'll begin," said Doran, "with the elevator." He leaned forward, folding his hands under his chin like a preacher meditating before a sermon.

"First, Mrs. Kimball's testimony. She says that her husband was up early this morning, around six-thirty, and that he woke her up at about the same time. He shaved and showered and dressed, talking at some length about a mysterious appointment, but refusing to answer any of her questions. She says he looked worried, that he'd been acting a little odd all week—nervous and scared. Just before he left he said something that frightened her. He said, quote: 'I'm going to see a man who knows secrets.'"

Sheilan said nothing. Doran went on, "Kimball's appointment was for seven o'clock. He was already late when he left —Mrs. K. glanced at his watch, when he asked her for it and she handed it to him, and saw that it was just after seven.

"The elevator was directly across from the Kimballs' room, which is on the eleventh floor. Mrs. Kimball followed her husband to the eleva-

tor door and stood there watching him as he pushed the button for the car, got in, and started down. Since she had her own reasons, which I'll get to in a minute, for being worried about this mysterious appointment, she watched the floor indicator over the door, and she swears that he went straight down to the lobby *without making any stops.*

"Fortunately for Mrs. K., we have a second witness, a celebrity-conscious maid who was in the hall at the time and recognized Kimball. We have her corroborative testimony that he was alive when he got into the car, and that he went straight down to the lobby without making any stops."

Doran's voice became grim. "In the lobby," he said, "there was a man named Bailey, a licensed investigator for the Powell Detective Agency. Now, the Powell Agency is one of the finest in the city, and Bailey is one of their best men. He was in the lobby because he was waiting for Kimball; he had an appointment to meet him there at seven and turn over evidence which Kimball had hired him to collect. The evidence was to be used in divorce proceedings against Kimball's wife."

Sheilan smiled, but still said nothing, "There was also a desk clerk," Doran said, "a man named Boyd. Both men were watching when the elevator reached the lobby with Kimball, dead of a knife wound in the back. They both saw it; there cannot be the slightest doubt. The inevitable conclusion—"

"—is that Kimball was killed between the time he got into the elevator on the eleventh floor and the time the car arrived in the lobby," said Sheilan. "I think you've established that. How long would it take the car to make the descent?"

"About forty-five seconds. The timing checks. Mrs. Kimball says it was a little after seven when her husband left their room. Bailey noted the time on the clock in the lobby when the car arrived; it was exactly 7:03.

"Now there were two ways for someone to get into that car while it was traveling between floors—through the inner car-doors or through the escape panel in the ceiling. But both ways have been definitely ruled out.

"The inner doors of the car are solid steel. As long as the car is in motion, those doors are automatically held locked in place: the car can move only so long as the inner doors remain closed. Since the car never stopped, no one could have gotten through them; for all practical purposes they were welded shut.

"The second means of entrance is also eliminated. The escape panel is a simple trap door installed at the top of most elevators as an emergency exit. Normally, it would have been possible for someone to drop through there, catch Kimball by surprise, and kill him before he had a chance to resist. But about a year

ago one of the hotel's younger guests went climbing up through this hatch and nearly got himself squashed in the elevator mechanism. The management decided on the lesser of two evils and had the trap door padlocked—from the inside.

"So you see where that leaves us. No one could have gotten through the trap door to kill Kimball; and even if he did, he couldn't have gotten out again and left the hatch as it was found, padlocked on the inside. Unless we postulate a kind of Dr. Fu Manchu elevator containing a secret passage, there was no way in and no way out. It's an absolutely impossible crime!"

"I suppose," said Sheilan, "that you've ruled out the possibility of suicide?"

"Unquestionably. For one thing, no weapon was found in the car. For another, the nature of the wounds was such that they could not have been self-inflicted. There were actually three wounds—two shallow gashes on the left arm and one deep stab wound under the left shoulder blade, penetrating straight to the heart. The blade that was used was over six inches long and about half an inch wide. Very sharp."

Reaching into his pocket, the policeman pulled out a gun, nickel-plated with a yellowed ivory grip. He said, "We found this gun lying on the floor by the body. It's a Colt .32 automatic, equipped with a hair-trigger and—" he produced a stubby black cylinder and clipped it on the muzzle. "—a Maxim silencer. Not the sort of thing I'd care to come up against in an enclosed space as small as an elevator car." He handed the gun over for Sheilan's inspection.

"I suppose," said Sheilan, "this is Kimball's own gun."

"It's his, all right—his wife identified it positively. She found it last week, hidden under a pile of underwear. He has a permit to own one, but he hasn't carried a gun in years. But from what we've heard from other members of the troupe, Kimball had been acting funny all week—nervous, as if he were afraid of his own shadow. And the gun, as I pointed out, was recently acquired. It all ties in with the theory that Kimball knew he was in danger and carried this to protect himself. And the gun was never fired—he didn't even have time to pull the trigger."

"Hmm," said Sheilan. "Did this notion of impending doom have anything to do with the assignment he gave to the private detective?"

"No. Kimball saw Bailey only once — three weeks ago when the magic show first came to town. He hired Bailey to do some unobtrusive prying into Mrs. Kimball's relations with Leo Gurney."

"Aha!" said Sheilan, twirling an imaginary mustache.

"Well, now," said Doran, "Margaret Kimball is no Lady Macbeth, but she's good-looking enough to stir up plenty of homicidal inten-

tions in a close-knit little theatrical family like this one. What's more, Gurney is a first-rate mechanic with a good working knowledge of abracadabra and Hop-o-my-Thumb—modern style. And just to round things out, Gurney's got a record. Before joining up with Kimball he served time for armed robbery. Would he commit murder to get a troublesome husband out of the way? He'd naturally be cautious, with his record, but I still wouldn't put it past him."

"Undeniable possibility," said Sheilan. "I wonder that he isn't locked up in a cell already."

"Two reasons," said Doran. "One: I'm not arresting anyone until I know how that elevator trick was worked. Two: I've been building a case against a straw dummy. Gurney had no more motive to kill Kimball than I do. Private eye Bailey dropped a bombshell—it seems that Kimball was barking up the wrong tree. His wife *was* playing around—but not with Gurney."

"Dave Hooker?"

"Correct. By process of elimination. It's not too surprising when you come to think about it. Hooker is good-looking, in a fuzzy sort of way. But he has a way of making himself—well, sort of invisible; it takes a real effort of concentration to pay attention to him when he talks. So it's really no wonder that Kimball picked the wrong man."

"Did Bailey communicate his discovery to his client?"

"No. Bailey's instructions were to avoid any contact until seven this morning, at which time he planned to present his evidence and watch Kimball's jaw drop. But somebody got to Kimball before he did."

Sheilan raised his eyebrows. "The question being—who? Whom do you favor, Jerry? The so-called Invisible Man, with his shining motive? Leo Gurney, with his sinister past? Or Margaret Kimball, with her ironclad alibi? How did they stand up under questioning?"

"A more nerveless bunch of suspects I never saw," said Doran, "I questioned them individually and collectively for three solid hours without extracting one useful piece of information. Hooker and his lady friend expressed no regrets about their activities; she remained calm the whole time, and he was even helpful. Suggested I look for some way the knife could have been fired like a bullet from a gun—" Doran made vague, harpoon-like gestures "—and reeled back on a string through one of the air vents in the car. I informed him that the air vents were covered with a fine wire mesh which showed no signs of tampering; he shrugged and grinned and looked *oh* so apologetic.

"Gurney grinned the whole time, like a damned orangutan. Volunteered nothing, swore he'd never had a thing to do with Kimball's wife, and didn't bat an eye when I brought up the little matter of his

record." Doran grimaced and took a pull at his drink. "Dead end," he said, "to an embarrassing afternoon. Bailey sat in on the whole interrogation, wooden-faced as a cigar-store Indian. I gather that his opinion of the abilities of the force have been confirmed in spades." But then Doran saw that his host wasn't listening.

Sheilan had moved from his chair and was standing in front of one of the big windows. Outside, the twilight had vanished and been replaced by blind darkness.

Doran was silent for a moment. Then he said, "Well, the force is asking for a second opinion. What do you make of it?"

Sheilan turned and looked at him speculatively. "I make a great deal of it," he said, "Before I can be sure, you'll have to answer three questions."

"Three questions," said Doran, settling back, "Fire away."

"One: can you tell me what floor of the hotel each of the three suspects was staying on?"

Silently Doran pulled out his notebook and consulted it. "The Kimballs had a room on the eleventh floor," he said. "Gurney and Hooker had single rooms on the ninth and fifth floors, respectively."

"Excellent," said Sheilan. "Question Number Two: can you tell me something more about the elevator? The outer doors—not what you called the inner doors, but the ones on the various floors—how can they be opened?"

"They open automatically, of course, when the elevator comes to rest at each floor. When the elevator is on some other floor, they can be opened from the outside with a key, and from the inside by exerting pressure on a lock-bar—"

"And Question Number Three," Sheilan interrupted, rubbing his palms together. "Is there a laundry chute?"

Doran blinked. "I'll have to use your phone," he said. And a few minutes later, in a brief conversation with the hotel manager, Doran established that there was no laundry chute in the Hotel Bowman.

Sheilan seemed satisfied. "Just a frill," he explained, "but a possibility that had to be considered. If there had been a laundry chute, it would have spoiled the logical symmetry of my deductions."

"I'm listening," said Doran.

"I should hope you would be," said Sheilan. "Now, to begin with, you will have noticed the imprint of a magician on this murder. A very special kind of legerdermain was required to bring off the elevator trick. Does that suggest anything to you?"

"Not much," said Doran. "Our suspects are really a trio of magicians. Leo Gurney knows every trick of the trade, so does Dave Hooker, and for that matter, so does Margaret Kimball, who was her husband's assistant for a num-

ber of years—although as you pointed out she *does* have an ironclad alibi."

"Now that you mention it," said Sheilan, "there's a very close resemblance between the Problem of the Hermetically Sealed Room and the Problem of the Ironclad Alibi. No, I'm not talking about Margaret Kimball—nor, for that matter, any of your trio of magician-suspects."

"Do you mean there's someone else? A fourth magician?"

"Precisely. A fourth magician who has played the Invisible Man much better than Dave Hooker and completely eluded your hawk-like instincts. Someone who had a better motive for murder than Margaret Kimball, Dave Hooker, and Leo Gurney all rolled into one. Someone who is apparently safe from suspicion—"

"Bailey!" breathed Doran. "The one person—"

"Bailey!" Sheilan let out a snort. "Let's not be fantastic! He and the desk clerk alibi each other. No, the person I am referring to is safe from suspicion for a very convincing reason—he happens to be dead. That's right, the person I'm talking about is Charles Kimball."

"I see," said Doran slowly.

"No, I'm afraid you don't," said Sheilan, "It's a complicated business. Charles Kimball is dead, but he is still the only murderer we have to deal with. Jerry, you've been holding this puzzle upside down.

"Suppose I take it from the beginning and reconstruct. Didn't it strike you as strange that Kimball should carry a gun with a *silencer?* If he were carrying a gun for protection against a person or persons unspecified, surely he'd *want* noise, wouldn't he? He'd have nothing to hide; on the contrary, he'd want people to hear the shots and come running to help him, wherever and whenever he was attacked. No, the silencer indicated a guiltier purpose."

"I see what you mean," said Doran. "You mean *Kimball* was going to commit a murder."

"Exactly," said Sheilan, "and all that abracadabra with the elevator was arranged *by* Kimball—to give himself an alibi. But that alibi backfired and presented you with an impossible situation.

"The person Kimball was planning to murder was obviously the man he suspected of being his wife's lover—Leo Gurney. He had no way of knowing, of course, that Dave Hooker was really the culprit, and that he was planning to kill the wrong man."

"But if that was the case," said Doran, "why didn't he wait for confirmation from Bailey?"

"Two reasons. First, because it would look better for Kimball if the murder took place *before* he received confirmation from Bailey. That was why he instructed Bailey to avoid making contact with him before the time set for the appoint-

ment. Who would suspect that a man would hire a detective to investigate his wife's infidelity and then murder the lover even before the investigator made his report? The second reason is more important: Bailey wasn't hired as a detective at all; he was hired as part of the murder plan—because Kimball needed an unsuspecting, unimpeachable witness for his alibi.

"Kimball knew he would be suspected immediately if Gurney were found murdered, so he set about creating a foolproof alibi. He did it the same way he would create an illusion for his show, making full use of his talents as an acrobat and escape artist.

"The crux of your impossible situation, you see, is that you were looking at it the wrong way. It was a closed circle with no way for a murderer to get *in,* but the circle could be broken if the 'victim' got *out.*

"The plan was probably suggested to him when he saw that the elevator door on the eleventh floor was directly across from his room. His first step was to hire Bailey and arrange for him to be waiting in the lobby on the morning of the murder. Then he acquired a gun and waited. The telltale symptoms of nervousness which were so widely misinterpreted were just that—the nervousness of a man about to engage in the most dangerous of enterprises—committing a murder.

"When he came back to the hotel last night, he did two things. First, he picked the padlock on the trap door and left it open, arranging the lock so that it would appear as usual to any ordinary inspection. Then, before he went to bed, he set his watch ahead about fifteen minutes.

"He got up early this morning and deliberately awakened his wife so that she would testify that she'd been with him from, say, 6:30 to 7:02. He asked her to hand him the watch so that the false time would be fixed in her mind. Kimball actually left the room a good ten minutes *before* seven, not a few minutes after.

"He was certain she would be sufficiently curious about his hints of 'secrets' to follow him to the elevator door and try to get some idea of where he was going. And so she watched the indicator and saw that he went straight down to the lobby.

"Or rather, the *car* traveled straight down. The escape panel was already open; all Kimball had to do was climb through and stay perched on top of the car. The car reached the lobby, but it seemed to arrive empty, and Bailey, the carefully planted witness, noticed nothing.

"In the meantime, Kimball stepped from the roof of the car up to the second floor—a short enough distance—forced the outer door in the manner you indicated was possible, and got out. Then he simply turned around, pushed the button for the elevator again, and rode

back up to the ninth floor to complete his plan. On the way up he erased any traces of the deception by setting his watch back and padlocking the trap door again.

"The rest was simple. He picked the lock of Gurney's door, stepped inside, intending to put a bullet through Gurney's head. It was still early in the morning and Kimball, expecting his victim would still be asleep, did not even consider the possibility of encountering resistance. By the time he'd get back to the elevator and ride down to meet Bailey, no more than ten minutes would have elapsed.

"Bailey would be waiting with the evidence which presumably would confirm his suspicions of Gurney. Kimball could then play the outraged husband and ask Bailey to accompany him to Gurney's room and stage a confrontation.

"And what would they find in Gurney's room? Gurney with a bullet in his head. To Bailey's professional eye it would be clear that Gurney had been killed only minutes before. And Kimball would have an indisputable alibi. From 6:30 to 7:02 he had been with his wife in their room. At 7:02 he had left his wife and ridden straight down to meet Bailey, who would then supply him with the rest of his alibi. In short, it would be an illusion—exactly the kind of production by which Kimball made his living and on which he would be perfectly willing to stake his life. If the illusion succeeded, he would have gotten away with murder.

"But, unfortunately for Kimball, the magician paid more attention to the mechanics of the illusion than to the mechanics of the murder itself. What must have happened when Kimball got to Leo Gurney's room seems clear enough. Kimball went there to kill Gurney, but because of stupidity, jitters, or just plain bad luck the attempt backfired and Kimball died instead.

"We can infer that, for some reason or other, Leo Gurney was not asleep when Kimball got to his room; if he had been, he would be dead now, not Kimball. And it certainly seems likely, judging from his record, that Gurney was a man who knew how to protect himself, that he would be able to get the gun away from his attacker before he had a chance to fire. Then again, it would be very much in character for a man like Gurney to carry some sort of weapon—a switchblade knife, say, that could cause a wound like the one which killed Kimball.

"So Kimball is disarmed, but he is still determined. He attacks with his bare hands, overcomes Gurney—a much smaller man—and begins to choke the life out of him. Gurney manages to pull out his knife, and using his right hand he hacks twice at Kimball's left arm in an attempt to dislodge his grip. Then, in desperation, and as they are struggling, Gurney aims to kill, burying the

blade in his opponent's back. Kimball died instantly.

"All speculation, of course, but soundly based on the known facts. The next part, however, is a logical certainty. Gurney has a choice to make: he can plead self-defense or he can try to conceal the crime. Since he has remained silent, we know that he must have panicked and chosen the more dangerous second course. Once he had made his decision, he was faced with one inescapable necessity—to get rid of the body, as soon as possible.

"If the body were found, not just in his room but anywhere on the ninth floor of the hotel, where he alone of the Satanus troupe was staying, it would be extremely dangerous for him. But how was he to get rid of it? Carry it up two flights of stairs to Kimball's floor, or down four flights to Hooker's floor? Any trip up or down the stairway, carrying a bulky corpse, would be much too risky. A laundry chute in the hall would have been safer—but there was no such chute.

"There was only one other possibility, and that was, as luck would have it, the easiest of all: the self-service elevator. Gurney acted quickly. He made sure the coast was clear, lugged the corpse to the elevator, pressed the button for the car, dumped the body in, and sent the car down to the lobby.

"Bear in mind that Gurney knew nothing of Kimball's planned alibi for himself, or of the witness waiting in the lobby; he was simply disposing of the body as quickly and as safely as he could. But the result turned into a perfect illusion. A little over ten minutes had elapsed since Kimball said goodbye to his wife, his first witness, and stepped into the elevator on the eleventh floor. Now it was two or three minutes past seven, and the elevator was on its way to the lobby and its rendezvous with Bailey, the second witness, who would assume the car had just come from the eleventh floor. The closed circle was complete; the incontrovertible alibi was forged. The only discrepancy was that Gurney, the intended victim, was alive, while Kimball, the murderer, was dead."

"Well," Doran exploded, "I'll be a double-dyed prestidigitator!"

Sheilan shrugged modestly. "It's not really so amazing. Once you tumble to the significance of the silencer on the gun, the rest follows inevitably from the logic of the so-called 'impossible situation'."

Doran grinned. "I suppose, in keeping with hoary tradition, the wise old detective will now insist that it was all the work of a celestial Fifth Magician who stood back in the shadows, invisible and omniscient, pulling the strings—"

"Oh, yes," said Sheilan, "I believe in that, most definitely. Fate does work startling tricks at times. In fact," he said, smiling, "that's the only kind of magic I do believe in."

About two Parisian restaurants, on opposite sides of the Place Dauphine, which catered especially to Inspectors, detectives, and policemen from the Quai des Orfevres (to say nothing of judges from the Palais de Justice), and about the two owner-chefs who, each year, engaged in a public duel of their culinary skills . . . Another charmingly written story by Vincent McConnor, this one with the sight, the sound, the smell, the very feel of Paris—and especially with the taste . . . Bon appétit!

SOUFFLÉ SURPRISE

by VINCENT McCONNOR

LAVOISIER STUDIED THE SHADOWY faces of the mourners in attendance at the mass for the dead man. Through a blue haze of incense he glimpsed three bearded judges from the Palais de Justice, two Chief Inspectors from the Police Judiciaire, five Inspectors and at least half a dozen run-of-the-mill detectives. There was even a scattering of policemen, some in uniform, their gleaming buttons conspicuous among the dark suits of the others.

These representatives of the law from the Quai des Orfevres were old customers of the deceased. They had eaten countless meals, during the last fourteen years, in the two restaurants, the Maison Lavoisier and the Auberge Camille, which faced each other across the Place Dauphine.

After the mass, as the impressive casket was eased into the glass-sided hearse in front of Notre Dame, Lavoisier noticed the uniformed policemen saluting and slipping off, discreetly, back to their morning duties.

He also saw his own second-chef, Jean-Paul, lift his hat to the hearse and turn away, with old Georges the waiter shuffling at his heels. Georges' weary feet were too painful for him to walk in the procession of mourners. He and Jean-Paul would have lunch waiting for the staff of the Maison Lavoisier when they returned from the cemetery.

There were at least fifty people moving into line, three abreast, behind the hearse with its black-plumed horses. Among them were the complete staffs of the two restaurants and many of their regular customers, including several minor executives from the Samaritaine department store across the river. Both restaurants were closed, their curtains drawn, in tribute to the

dead man. The Maison Lavoisier would reopen for dinner, but the future of the Auberge Camille was still a mystery.

Chief Inspector Damiot paused to shake Lavoisier's hand before taking his place near the front of the procession. He was one of the many customers who patronized both restaurants, on alternate days, showing no favoritism. Each owner-chef had his *spécialité de maison* which he personally prepared for Chief Inspector Damiot at least twice every month.

Lavoisier hesitated, in the butter-yellow April sunshine, trying to decide where he should walk in the line of mourners. As the dead man's chief business rival, he was entitled to a position of importance, just behind the sable-draped hearse. On the other hand, perhaps it would be more discreet to lose himself among the others. *Eh bien!* He stepped into line next to a guard from the Conciergerie who was looking uncomfortable in his black suit and black hat instead of his customary uniform and cap.

The small brass band, in front of the hearse, struck up a muffled dirge and the silent procession moved away from the cathedral toward the d'Arcole bridge.

As Lavoisier walked, trying to keep step with the music, he remembered his first encounter with the dead man. It had occurred during the summer of the second year after he opened the Maison Lavoisier. Little did he suspect on that pleasant June day when Camille Martin appeared in his restaurant that, within the month, they would be neighbors with rival restaurants. He had no way of knowing that the corpulent, sharp-eyed stranger, as he ate his lunch, was checking on the Maison Lavoisier—the quality of food, the skill of staff, and above all, the obvious fact that business was so good on the Place Dauphine that at least a dozen customers were turned away . . .

For twenty years, with the help of his dear wife Nicole, Lavoisier had saved for the day when he could open a restaurant of his own. That had been his dream since his first job, at sixteen, preparing vegetables in a hotel kitchen on the Riviera. He had learned his profession with some of the finest chefs in France, each more celebrated than the last, eventually working under a master chef who had been a pupil of the great Escoffier.

During the Occupation of Paris, to avoid serving the greedy Nazis, Lavoisier had, single-handed, managed the kitchen of a neighborhood bistro hidden away on a side street near the Parc Monceau. After the Liberation he had been hired, as head chef once more, by one of the deluxe restaurants in the Madeleine district. Then, one memorable night in 1948, his dear wife announced that they had saved

enough money to open a small restaurant of their own.

For several months they spent all their free time looking for the best possible location. Early in their search Lavoisier had decided that the Place Dauphine on the Ile de la Cité, with its rows of chestnut trees, was the ideal spot for his dream restaurant. The small square, named for the son of Henri IV, still retained a certain elegance from the Seventeenth Century. It had been his first choice because it reminded him of other tree-shaded squares from his childhood in Provence and, more practically, because of the neighboring buildings with their hundreds of tenants.

There was the vast Palais de Justice which housed the crowded law courts, the spreading Préfecture de Police and the Conciergerie, that ancient prison where Marie Antoinette and thousands of other unfortunates had waited for an appointment with Doctor Guillotine. A new restaurant would be assured an immediate clientele of judges, lawyers, detectives, and, especially during the summer months, a daily stream of tourists.

Unfortunately, month after month, the Lavoisiers found no vacancy sign in the Place Dauphine. The bookstores, art galleries, and shops were passed on from generation to generation in the same family. They crossed the Seine and continued their search, street by street through Montparnasse, without finding anything that met even their most basic requirements.

Lavoisier had been supervising a new sauce-chef in the noisy lunchtime kitchen of the restaurant near the Madeleine when he was told that his wife wished to speak with him on the telephone. Nicole never phoned him at the restaurant, so he knew that this call must be urgent. His hand trembled as he lifted the receiver to his ear. *"C'est vous?"*

"I walked through the Place Dauphine as usual this morning." Nicole was never one for small talk. "You remember that art gallery near the Palais de Justice corner?"

"But of course! Gallery of the Vert Gallant."

"There was a For Rent sign in the window. Not only the shop. The entire building. We can live upstairs."

They paid a deposit on the building that same afternoon. Two weeks later the lease was signed.

From the first day it opened, the Maison Lavoisier was a complete success. Nicole, in black silk, sat on a high stool behind the shiny new cash register from which she surveyed the customers and supervised the waiters. Lavoisier's domain was the kitchen with its hand-picked staff. But he came into the dining room, personally, to take the order of every customer, making suggestions, pointing out the special qualities of the *plat du jour,*

discussing the personal tastes of each diner.

He soon knew the preferences of all his regular customers—especially the bearded judges, whispering over grilled entrecotes, and the harried detectives with their furtive looks, as though they were stealing the time to eat from more urgent duties. Lavoisier always begged them to go elsewhere when they were in a hurry. They never did until after the Auberge Camille opened across the square . . .

The funeral procession slowly circled the Place de la Bastille. Late morning traffic snarled around the marchers, horns shrilling and brakes screeching. Lavoisier smiled to himself. Those drivers would be more careful if they knew how many important representatives of the law were walking behind this hearse.

Camille Martin was dead because he had dared to open a restaurant in competition with the Maison Lavoisier. Because he had challenged Lavoisier to an annual public duel of culinary skill. Because, this year, he had been unable to name the final ingredient. And because, last year, he had killed Nicole.

She had suffered her first attack as a result of the intruder's second appearance. *Bien sur!* No question about it. Camille Martin had been the direct cause of his dear Nicole's death . . .

Lavoisier had been changing into a fresh white uniform, in their high-ceilinged bedroom overlooking the Place Dauphine, before descending to supervise his staff in the preparation of lunch. Nicole was seated at one of the open windows, darning socks, keeping an eye on the bustle of activity in the sunny square. After two years she knew everything there was to be known about all their neighbors.

"Something is happening across the way," she announced. "In Monsieur Clotier's bookshop."

He joined her at the window and squinted through the leafy branches of the chestnut tree to see old Clotier shaking hands with a stranger. The bookseller's attitude was that of a man who had just completed a profitable business transaction.

Nicole frowned. "I have seen this person before. But I do not remember where."

That afternoon every resident of the Place Dauphine heard the news. Monsieur Clotier had sold his shop to a chef who planned to open a restaurant in competition with the Maison Lavoisier. That was when Nicole suffered her first attack of nerves.

Later they learned that their competitor's name was Camille Martin. He was a bachelor, originally from Perigord, and his restaurant was to be called the Auberge Camille.

Nicole observed the intruder

from their bedroom windows from the moment she arose every morning, and during the rest of each day she watched him through the half-curtained street windows of the dining room. His very presence became an obsession with her, but it was several days before she remembered where she had previously seen him—that he had actually dared to eat lunch in the Maison Lavoisier! That was when she had her second attack.

Monsieur Martin had even crossed the Place Dauphine one afternoon, after lunch, to pay his respect to the Lavoisiers. They drank a cognac with him but the meeting was awkward, conversation difficult—like a conference of opposing generals on the eve of battle.

After his departure Nicole suffered another crisis of nerves. Her most serious attack took place the day when the Auberge Camille opened its doors for business. When she saw how many of their regular customers were going into the new restaurant for lunch, Nicole took to her bed and sent for Doctor Furneaux. Dinner at the Maison Lavoisier, that evening, was a nightmare: the service was a shambles, the smell of burnt food fouled the air, and the sound of hysterical voices filled the kitchen.

Like the Maison Lavoisier, the Auberge Camille was a success from the start. Nicole claimed that Americans favored it because they thought the Lady of the Camellias had once eaten there. Whatever the reason, the new restaurant seemed to get most of the tourist trade. In spite of this, the Maison Lavoisier still turned away customers at nearly every meal. There was, obviously, more than enough business for both.

Lavoisier kept assuring his wife that he hoped all the tourists would go to the other restaurant. He spoke no German and little English and deplored the tourists' peculiar tastes in food. But Nicole continued to worry and to have her seizures . . .

As he followed the hearse through the entrance to Pere Lachaise, his legs tired from the long walk, Lavoisier was reminded that the last time he had visited a cemetery was to bury his dear wife on a rain-drenched hill above Montmartre. She had died shortly after the previous year's culinary competition.

Doctor Furneaux said that it was the excitement—when Lavoisier seemed unable to recognize the last ingredient—that had been too much for her poor heart. But Nicole had never suffered from the heart before Camille Martin opened his restaurant.

Lavoisier had sworn to himself, at the head of his wife's funeral cortege, that he would have his revenge. He had been furious because his rival, without permission,

had dared to walk beside him in the procession that wound up the sloping streets, slippery in the rain, to Montmartre.

Eh bien! Camille Martin was not walking today. He was riding . . .

In spite of Nicole's dislike for their new neighbor the two chefs had become increasingly friendly—at least, on the surface—as both restaurants prospered. It was unavoidable. The two men met every morning when they went, before dawn, to shop in Les Halles. They even got into the habit of walking together, empty wicker baskets over their arms, heading across the Pont Neuf through the pearl-gray river mist, cutting through side streets toward the blazing lights and roaring noise of the sprawling markets.

After they finished their buying, they would meet again for cups of steaming coffee laced with cognac. Then they would return to the Place Dauphine followed by a small parade of porters carrying the wicker baskets which were now overflowing with the day's supply of food for the two restaurants. Madame Lavoisier complained about this growing friendship but there was nothing she could do to prevent it.

"Why should I show my dislike for Camille in public?" Lavoisier would ask his wife. "He is not a bad chef. If you like truffles."

"He takes business away from us!" Nicole would moan. "Money out of our pockets!"

"How is that possible? We turn customers away."

Both restaurants continued to thrive, but they did not become famous until the annual culinary competition of the two owner-chefs was witnessed, by chance, by a reporter from a morning paper who had lingered over an after-lunch cognac. His story was the first to be printed. After that the annual duel was reported by every newspaper in Paris, and in recent years even the newsreel and television cameras covered the event.

Nicole deplored the vulgarity of such a spectacle. Two chefs dueling in public, using food as their weapons! But even she acknowledged that it was not bad for business. Except, she warned her husband, he must never lose or they would become bankrupt. No one would patronize a restaurant where the chef had been defeated in such a competition. If anyone lost it must be Camille Martin.

But year after year the contest was a draw. Each chef easily named every ingredient in the other's culinary masterpiece. Until last year. That was when Lavoisier had found it difficult to identify the final ingredient. And that was when the idea first entered his head —the deadly plan for a last ingredient which Camille Martin would never be able to identify, or even to guess . . .

Lavoisier watched his rival's ornate casket sink into the damp earth. There would never be another annual competition. Camille Martin had lost his first and his last. The plan had worked. If only Nicole were alive to witness Camille's downfall . . .

Spectators crowding the Maison Lavoisier, that Tuesday afternoon, had watched Camille cross the Place Dauphine, walking unsteadily, back to his own restaurant, a defeated man. He had climbed the steps to his lonely bedroom where he died. One of the waiters went upstairs later and found the body —when Camille did not make his customary appearance in the kitchen to supervise preparations for dinner.

Fortunately Chief Inspector Damiot and several other old customers from the Prefecture de Police had been present during the contest. Everyone knew that Camille's heart had failed as a result of his public humiliation.

His death certificate had been signed without any questions or reservations . . .

The heavy scent of roses, from the display of funeral wreaths, was overwhelming. Lavoisier felt faint as he turned away from the grave the moment the ceremony ended, and hurried down the walk to the boulevard where he signaled a passing taxi.

He noticed a half dozen police cars parked at the curb. Sight of them made his heart pound until he realized that they were there to bring back the more important representatives of the law to their offices on the Quai des Orfevres. Chief Inspector Damiot and the other detectives crowded into the waiting cars.

Lavoisier invited several of the older members of his staff to join him for the ride back to the restaurant but there was little conversation as their taxi headed toward the Seine. They seemed preoccupied, each with his own thoughts of death, no doubt . . .

He could not remember just when it had all started. The competition, the yearly duel. Was it six years ago? Seven? Eight?

Camille Martin had boasted that he could taste any dish, no matter how elaborate, and name every ingredient it contained.

Lavoisier had answered by declaring that any first-class chef worth his salt could do the same thing, could name the most subtle seasoning or most unusual ingredient simply by tasting the completed dish.

Several afternoons later, after the final lunch customer had departed, Camille Martin came hurrying across the Place Dauphine to invite Lavoisier over to the Auberge Camille. He would have an opportunity to prove whether or not he

could really taste a dish and name all its ingredients.

Nicole glared but Lavoisier dared not refuse such a challenge. He crossed the square with his rival, both in their white uniforms and tall starched hats, followed by the full staff of the Maison Lavoisier.

Half the neighborhood quickly assembled on the sidewalk to see what was happening.

Lavoisier found the entire staff of the Auberge Camille waiting in the main dining room, gathered around a table set for one. Camille Martin courteously ushered Lavoisier to the table, waving his head waiter off to the kitchen. He poured a glass of white wine, suggesting that Lavoisier freshen his palate. It was an excellent Marsalet, clean and dry.

The head waiter returned in a few moments bearing a covered casserole which he carefully deposited in front of Lavoisier.

Camille Martin himself removed the lid with a flourish and the restaurant filled with an aroma which caressed all taste buds. "I will not even tell you the name of this dish." Camille was serving his masterpiece as he talked. "I will only say that there are fourteen ingredients. You must name all of them. *Voila*!" He stepped back from the table, bowed, and waited.

Lavoisier picked up a fork, speared a gobbet of meat, and raised it to his mouth. It was rabbit, as he already knew, pink-fleshed in a dark sauce fragrant with herbs. He knew that every eye was on him. "First of all, since you are from Perigord, there are truffles."

Camille shrugged as the others laughed.

"It is, of course, rabbit. *Lapin en gibelotte.*" Lavoisier ate as he talked. "Ingredient Number Three is the bacon fat in which you browned the rabbit. Number Four is flour which has thickened an excellent stock."

He proceeded to name ingredient after ingredient, with precision, as Camille's face became solemn. "The sauce has been strained. Then you have added the fourteenth and last ingredient. *Oui*? A little heavy cream. *C'est tout!*" He put down his fork.

His challenger bowed, defeated. The staff of the Maison Lavoisier cheered and the others on the sidewalk applauded.

The following Tuesday, immediately after lunch, Lavoisier played the same game on his rival. He invited Camille Martin across the square, unexpectedly, and before the assembled staffs of both restaurants, Lavoisier offered him a classic dish from his own native Provence—*canard aux olives*, in which Camille must name fifteen ingredients.

Nicole would have no part in what she called "this battle of the kitchens," and disappeared upstairs. But she was crouched, listen-

ing, at the top of the steps while Camille, with virtually no hesitation, named all fifteen ingredients. Nicole took to her bed with an immediate attack of nerves . . .

As Lavoisier paid his driver, several other taxis turned the corner from the Quai and deposited staff members of both restaurants on the sidewalk. His own employees gathered at the entrance to the Maison Lavoisier waiting for him to unlock the front door with its discreet *FERMÉ* sign. As he inserted his key into the lock he glanced across to the other restaurant with its curtained windows.

The head waiter of the Auberge Camille had already unlocked the front door. Chefs and waiters were filing into the restaurant across the way, their faces stricken. Perhaps there was to be a meeting with Camille's attorney and they would learn what was to happen to the restaurant. Obviously it would not survive the death of its owner. Lavoisier smiled as he opened his own front door and went inside.

The Maison Lavoisier was filled with a rich aroma composed of many appetizing ingredients. Lavoisier had gone to Les Halles before dawn, as usual, buying enough for an after-funeral lunch for his staff and everything that would be needed later when they reopened to their customers for dinner. It had seemed strange, these last two mornings, to walk alone through the gray streets. He had missed his daily arguing with Camille.

A table at the back of the restaurant, near the kitchen, was set for one person. Lavoisier sat down and unfolded the heavy napkin.

If only Nicole had lived to see Camille Martin's defeat! She would never have attended his funeral, of course, but over lunch she would have urged him to repeat every detail of the morning's ceremonies. Lavoisier wondered, briefly, if Nicole might have guessed the truth. No, it was not likely.

There was a hum of voices and a clatter of dishes from the kitchen. His staff was eating lunch at the long work table. Soon everything would be back to normal—everyone joking and laughing, Camille Martin forgotten.

Old Georges appeared from the bar with a bottle of Lavoisier's favorite Chateauneuf-du-Pape. The waiter bowed and carefully poured the wine. *"Bon appetit, M'sieu!"*

Lavoisier suddenly realized he was hungry. He took out his handkerchief and blew into it to clear his head. And, just as suddenly, he was breathing the suffocating perfume of the funeral roses. His hand trembled, holding the handkerchief, as he blew his nose again. The scent vanished instantly. Had he imagined it? Or had the scent of the roses got into his handkerchief when he pulled it from his pocket

at the grave? He drank the wine down and refilled his glass.

The old waiter rolled the hors-d'oeuvres cart into place beside the table and, without having to be told, selected what he knew his employer preferred. Lavoisier noticed that Jean-Paul had even prepared his favorite *paté en croute.* Lavoisier ate everything on his plate. The long walk to the cemetery had given him a sharp appetite . . .

Only three days ago, on the first Tuesday in April as usual, Lavoisier had cooked the dish which ended their competition forever. They took turns, from year to year, alternating who cooked first. Since the contest had been widely publicized and there were now so many people in attendance, the recipes had become more and more complex, their ingredients increasingly subtle. Last year Camille had cooked the first dish. This was Lavoisier's year.

The Maison Lavoisier bustled with activity, that Tuesday afternoon, after the last luncheon customer departed. Tables were cleared and spread with fresh linen. A single table, in the center of the main dining room, was set with silver and one wine glass. The staff was not allowed in the kitchen, except Jean-Paul, the second-chef, who assisted Lavoisier with his final preparations but took no part in the actual cooking.

Newsreel and television crews appeared with their cameras at three o'clock and filled most of the empty space around the center table. Reporters began to arrive, each newspaper and magazine assigned to its own table. Smoking was forbidden. But there were free drinks, as always, and the waiters were kept busy refilling glasses. A group of detectives, regular customers, were seated together at one side. The entire kitchen staff of both restaurants were standing around the room, pressed against the walls.

Finally, at precisely 3:30, Camille Martin came striding across the Place Dauphine in a fresh white uniform and chef's hat. There was a storm of applause as he entered and, arrogantly, he paused inside the entrance door to survey the crowded room. Flashlight bulbs glared. Cameras clicked. Old Georges bowed in welcome as Camille walked to the center table and sat down. The waiter opened an iced *blanc de blanc,* silently, and deftly poured a swallow for the guest to taste. Camille did so, nodding, smiling in anticipation. Georges then filled the glass.

Lavoisier, at that moment, came from the kitchen followed by Jean-Paul bearing a magnificent soufflé on a silver tray. The television announcer whispered a description of the dramatic scene into his hand microphone. All the cameras followed the soufflé as it was carried across the dining room. Jean-Paul set the silver tray down, gently, on

a serving table. The crown of the soufflé was high and golden.

Camille raised his glass in a toast as Lavoisier cut a large portion of soufflé and lifted it onto the warm plate which Georges had cradled in a napkin. The old waiter placed the dish, like an offering, in front of Camille Martin who promptly sniffed its aroma, his eyes closed, already analyzing its contents.

"There are nine ingredients to be named," Lavoisier announced.

"Only nine? That is too easy." Camille opened his eyes and picked up a fork. "It is a *Soufflé Surprise*. Principal ingredient, of course—eggs!"

Lavoisier could not refrain from shivering as Camille swallowed his first mouthful . . .

The noise from the kitchen increased as the staff began to forget the funeral they had just attended.

Lavoisier wondered what they would do if they suspected the truth. But no one had and, now, no one ever would . . .

As Camille ate the soufflé, Chief Inspector Damiot came forward to stand near the front, beside a television camera, his eyes missing nothing.

There was absolute silence as Camille continued to eat and analyze the soufflé. He called out the ingredients, one by one, demanding another helping when he reached the seventh.

Lavoisier served him a second portion as old Georges refilled the wine glass.

"Number Seven—sliced almonds." Camille attacked his second portion of soufflé with as much relish as he had eaten the first. "Number Eight . . ." He hesitated. "Number Eight? *Mais certainement!* The sponge cake!" Applause from several members of the Auberge Camille staff. "Number Nine—the last ingredient. Now it becomes difficult, *mon ami.*"

Camille took another forkful of soufflé. *"Tres difficile!"* He frowned. "It is very subtle. Almost completely hidden by the flavor of the Cointreau and the almonds . . ." Everyone waited.

Last year it had taken Lavoisier more than ten minutes to guess the last ingredient in the *Suprèmes de Dinde* which Camille had set before him. That was the longest time it had ever taken either of them. Nicole, faced with the possibility of her husband's defeat, had been under such tension that, later, she had suffered her fatal heart attack—even though Lavoisier had finally guessed that a teaspoon of Vielle Cure was the final ingredient, barely discernible in a sauce which contained white wine and Madeira . . .

"Jean-Paul has prepared something special for your lunch, M'sieu." The old waiter set a plate before him. *"Truite aux amandes!"*

Lavoisier saw that the trout was already boned, surrounded by a ring of tiny new potatoes and young carrots. There was a sprinkling of shredded almonds over the crisp brown skin of the fish. Its white flesh was tender under his fork . . .

Camille Martin knew that he had lost, knew that he was defeated. In all the years they had held their annual duel he would be the first to lose. Defeated and disgraced before all these people and, through the cameras, before all of France! Perspiration appeared on Camille's forehead as he looked around the restaurant.

The reporters, cameramen, and staffs of the two restaurants were whispering among themselves. Several waiters from the Auberge Camille called out words of encouragement to their employer. Only the detectives remained silent, watching the desperate man.

"The ninth and last ingredient?" Lavoisier leaned forward to taunt his enemy.

The doomed man turned his head to stare at Lavoisier.

There was a long moment of tension in which no one spoke.

Then Camille placed both hands on the table and raised himself to his feet. "You win," he whispered to Lavoisier. "You win."

He turned, white-faced, and lurched out through the open door. Everyone watched as he lunged into the sunlight and stumbled toward his own restaurant. They saw him paw at the door and then disappear into the dark interior . . .

Lavoisier smiled grimly. He had avenged the death of his dear wife. He had got rid of his rival. And no one would ever know.

"The last ingredient, *mon ami?* What was it?"

He looked up from the trout to see Chief Inspector Damiot standing at his side, with Jean-Paul next to him.

"The trout, M'sieu?" The young second-chef beamed, anticipating a compliment. "Does it meet with your approval?"

"I could not have prepared it better myself."

"We have been taking bets at the Police Judiciaire." The detective sat facing him across the table. "In the excitement of M'sieu Camille's unfortunate death you never told us what it was—the ingredient he could not name."

Lavoisier nearly choked on the fish he was trying to swallow.

"Some say it was vanilla bean," Damiot continued. "I say it was some sort of seasoning."

"Oui! A seasoning!" Jean-Paul quivered with importance. "I saw you sprinkle it into those eggs, M'sieu. Watched you hide the small box in the pocket of your apron. The last ingredient! The one M'sieu Camille could not even guess."

The detective raised his eyes to study Jean-Paul's eager face.

"I looked for the little box this morning," the young second-chef continued, "and found it still hidden in the pocket of your apron, in a closet in your room. I used it to season your trout, M'sieu."

Lavoisier felt an icy breath touch the back of his neck.

"Then I was right!" Chief Inspector Damiot turned to look at Lavoisier. "It was some sort of seasoning."

Already Lavoisier felt the first wave of pain starting to flow through his body.

The agony was beginning.

He wondered how long it had taken Camille Martin to die.

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDBOUNDS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Butler, Gwendoline	COFFIN WAITING	Walker & Co.	$3.50	3/11
Fitzgerald, Nigel	ECHO ANSWERS MURDER	The Macmillan Co.	$3.95	3/1
Francis, Dick	FOR KICKS	Harper & Row	$3.95	3/10
Harvester, Simon	FLIGHT IN DARKNESS	Walker & Company	$3.50	3/9
Hitchens, Dolores	THE BANK WITH THE BAMBOO DOOR	Simon & Schuster	$3.50	3/19
Hopkins, Kenneth	BODY BLOW	Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc.	$3.50	4/29
Jones, Philip	THE MONTH OF THE PEARL	Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc.	$3.50	3/29
Ellery Queen	QUEENS FULL	Random House	$3.95	4/1
Lyall, Gavin	MIDNIGHT PLUS ONE	Chas. Scribner's Sons	$4.50	3/16
MacKinnon, Allan	MAN OVERBOARD	Doubleday & Co. Inc.	$3.50	3/19
O'Malley, Patrick	THE AFFAIR OF THE BUMBLING BRITON	Mill	$3.50	3/17
Orgill, Douglas	MAN IN THE DARK	Wm. Morrow & Co.	$3.95	3/31
Porter, Joyce	DOVER TWO	Chas. Scribner's Sons	$3.50	3/24
Summerton, Margaret	QUIN'S HIDE	E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc.	$3.95	3/11
Waugh, Hillary	END OF A PARTY	Doubleday & Co. Inc.	$3.50	3/19
Westlake, Donald E.	THE FUGITIVE PIGEON	Random House, Inc.	$3.95	3/2
Whitten, Leslie H.	PROGENY OF THE ADDER	Doubleday & Co. Inc.	$3.50	3/5

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Bruce, Jean	THE LAST QUARTER HOUR	Crest	$ .40	3/11
Ford, Leslie	THREE BRIGHT PEBBLES	Popular Library, Inc.	$ .50	3/4
Marlowe, Stephen	DRUM BEAT—COMINIQUE	Gold Medal (Orig.)	$ .40	2/25
Pearson, Edmund	MURDER AT SMUTTY NOSE: And Other Murders	Dolphin Books	$ .95	3/19
Ransome, Stephen	THE FRAZER ACQUITTAL	Popular Library, Inc.	$ .50	3/18

Erle Stanley Gardner
Rex Stout (about **Nero Wolfe**)
Agatha Christie
Cornell Woolrich
William Irish
Hugh Pentecost
Patrick Quentin
Q. Patrick
Ed McBain
the **Gordons**
Julian Symons
Victor Canning
Kelley Roos
Philip Wylie
Helen McCloy
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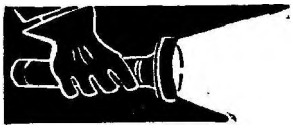

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

After years of neglect by American publishers, Alan Hunter's Superintendent Gently appears in a batch of paperbacks (Berkley, 50¢ each): GENTLY IN THE SUN (F1000), GENTLY FLOATING (F1001), GENTLY GO MAN (F1021) and GENTLY TO THE SUMMIT (F1040)—not reprints, but U.S. first editions of novels published in England 1959-63. With much of the patience and intuition of Maigret, plus a skill in interrogation that's all his own, Gently is a policeman whose acquaintance you must make.

★★★★ **FUNERAL IN BERLIN, *by Len Deighton*** (Putnam's, $4.95)
Tough, cryptic, cynical and intricately plotted, this is easily the top spy novel of the new year.

★★★★ **MIDNIGHT PLUS ONE, *by Gavin Lyall*** (Scribner's, $4.50)
Lyall turns from espionage to more private deadly undertakings, with results just as breathtaking as in his earlier thrillers.

★★★★ **THE LEGEND OF THE SEVENTH VIRGIN, *by Victoria Holt*** (Doubleday, $4.95)
Best yet by the author of MISTRESSS OF MELLYN, with more character-complexity and bite than one expects in the feminine neo-Gothic.

★★★★ **THE FAR SIDE OF THE DOLLAR, *by Ross Macdonald*** (Knopf, $3.95)
Like every case for Lew Archer, a fine hard-boiled detective story which is also a novel of substance and distinction.

★★★ **LOOK THREE WAYS AT MURDER, *by John Creasey*** (Scribner's, $3.50)
One of Chief Superintendent West's major cases, with the realism, in procedure and in psychology, of the Gideon series.

★★★ **CANARY YELLOW, *by Elizabeth Cadell*** (Morrow, $3.95)
Cadell's too infrequent mysteries are always marked by grace, ingenuity, gentle charm and attractive love stories.

IN FATAL FASCINATION (Little, Brown, $4.95), Nigel Balchin, C. S. Forester and others acutely discuss significant political murders; in THE TRIAL OF STEPHEN WARD (Simon & Schuster, $4.95), Ludovic Kennedy penetratingly and disturbingly analyzes a more recent scandal.

HISTORICAL NOTE: *At the time "The Ides of Michael Magoon" was first written and published, the date for the annual payment of income taxes in the United States was March 15th. Since that time the date has been changed to April 15th (a grace period that somehow is never long enough!).*

In now bringing you the March story of the "Calendar of Crime" series we've decided not to tamper with history: that's the way it was, that's the way it will remain forever in "The Ides of Michael Magoon." Besides, by keeping the settlement date on March 15th, we give you a chance to enjoy reading about the paying of income taxes—before it hurts . . .

THE IDES OF MICHAEL MAGOON

by ELLERY QUEEN

IT WAS PASSED IN THE THIRD SESsion of the 65th Congress and approved as of 6:55 P.M. on the twenty-fourth of February, 1919, and its title is: Public—No. 254 [H.R. 12863].

Nor is there anything alarming in its subtitle, which happens to be *An Act To provide revenue, and for other purposes.* The fifth word may raise a few scattered goose pimples, but hardly more.

It is necessary to read on.

Nothing will be clear until you come upon the phrase, "on or before the fifteenth day of March."

Then everything will be clear—clear as the clap of the tocsin. There is only one calamity which befalls America, *urbs et suburbs,* on or before the fifteenth of March, and that is the income tax.

Before going on to Michael Magoon and his unusual tax problem, it is tempting to take a short detour into the statutes, which concern not Mike alone but very nearly all of us. There was income tax legislation before the Revenue Act of 1918, and there has been income tax legislation since; but Public—No. 254 [H.R. 12863] bears a curious distinction. It was the first income tax law which pronounced the annual Judgment Day to be March the fifteenth. Its predecessors designated March the first.

Why the change in dates?

There is a reason, of course, and it is not the reason your tax expert, for all his awful knowledge, can give you.

Someone—perhaps it was Mr. Secretary of the Treasury, or a Gentleman from Indiana or Ohio, or even some lowlier lackey of the People with a finger in the legislative pie—someone with a frightening lack of humor remembered great Caesar and the bloody daggers. Someone remembered the signs and the portents and the gathering crimson thunderheads over the full Capitoline moon. He may even have recalled that *postridie idus*., the day following the Ides, was held by the ancient Romans to be unlucky.

And who among us, after rendering unto Caesar, will deny on any given March the sixteenth that the Romans were right?

The whole thing was certainly unlucky for Magoon.

Mike was what the fancy boys like to call a private "op," or "eye." These fascinating terms inevitably materialize a slim-hipped, narrow-eyed, cigarette-dragging character in a Finchley custom-drape, a Sulka tie, and a $35 Dobbs, who is greased death on the draw, kills five thugs and one mastermind on every case, is as irresistible with dames as a fox in a hen coop, carries a self-refillable flask of Scottish dew on the other hip, and speaks, when he speaks at all, in insolent monosyllables.

Alas, Mike Magoon was a sagging 63 with a 48 waist, very large flat feet, and blinky brown eyes covered by tortoiseshell glasses, which gave him an air of groping astonishment. He wore Adam hats, suits from Barney's, and shoes by W. L. Douglas. And he neither smoked nor drank—asthma barred the one and, as for the other, his good wife had the nasal infallibility of a beagle.

He had never manhandled a lady client in his life; not that he lacked a libido, but he cherished his license more. And in the sudden death department, he had discharged his Police Positive exactly twice since resigning from the Force four years before, and one of those times he was cleaning his pistol on the fire escape when a neighbor's pride and joy whanged his shooting hand with a well-directed BB shot.

No cases came Mike's way involving mysterious fat men with inscrutable eyes, or Maltese falcons, or gangster chieftains in luxurious penthouses. For the most part he spent his time trailing thirtyish ladies for suspicious husbands or putting the grab on shop clerks allergic to the boss's till. On those Saturday nights when he was not working, he took his wife to the movies. On Sundays, after church, there was always The Little Ukraine on Fordham Road—Mike was mad about *shashlik* and *borscht* with sour cream. And on Wednesday nights, Bingo.

The first three years Mike was a private eye he operated out of his three-room Bronx flat to cut the overhead, picking up what cases he could through tips from old friends in brass buttons. Then he and Mrs. Magoon decided that a front and a midtown telephone number might pay for more Bingo games, so Mike sublet one room of a four-office suite in a 42nd Street office building, shared the premises with a public stenographer, a commercial artist, and a little bald man with a gold tooth who had four phones which were always ringing.

A week after *Michael Magoon, Confidential Investigations* had sprouted in gilt on his pebbled-glass door, Mike opened it to admit Mrs. Clementa Van Dome, the kind of client the Magoons of this world lie awake nights praying for: the client who pays an annual retainer for continuous services rendered. It was a klep case in which—but more of Mrs. Van Dome anon.

Three times since that gold-letter day the Ides of Martius came and went, and Caesar was satisfied. And then came the fourth time.

The fourth time it was Mike who went, hurrying as fast as his asthma and flat feet would permit, to the Queen apartment.

A detective consulting a detective struck Nikki's funnybone. And poor Mike's manner as he looked around at the Queen walls somehow made it even funnier.

But the best was still to come.

"Ellery," said Mike, blushing, "I have been robbed."

"Robbed," said Ellery with a straight face. "Robbed of what, Mike?"

"My income tax return."

Nikki excused herself heroically. When she came back, Ellery was putting his handkerchief away.

"Forgive me, Mike," he was saying. "My old pleurisy. Did you say your tax return has been stolen?"

"That's what I said, and you're healthy as a horse," said Mike Magoon doggedly. "Oh, I don't blame you for goin' into hysterics. But it ain't funny, McGee. Today's the fourteenth of March. How am I gonna make the March fifteenth deadline?"

"Well, your—hrm!—return can't be terribly complicated, Michael," said Ellery gravely. "Get another blank and fill it in, and so on."

"With what, I ask you!"

"With what?"

"You gotta have data!"

"Well, certainly. Don't you have data?"

"No!"

"But—"

"Listen, Ellery. All my papers and records—everything I was usin' to make out my return—it's *all* been swiped!"

"Oh."

"It was in this brief case, the whole business. It'd take me weeks to round up duplicates of my records! Meanwhile what do I say to

the Collector of Internal Revenue?" And Mike, because he was an old stablemate of Inspector Queen's and had known Ellery when he was a cigar in the Inspector's pocket, added, "Wise guy?"

"Ellery, that is a nuisance," said Nikki, glancing over at the table to make sure that her own records and returns were still there.

"Records and all . . . Where were the contents of your brief case stolen from, Mike?"

"My office. You been up there, Ellery—you know there's three other tenants—"

"And you all use a common reception room," Ellery nodded. "Were you in your office at the time, Mike?"

"Yes. Well, no—not exactly. Look. I better tell you the whole thing, just the way it happened. It's got me loopin'."

It had happened around six P.M. the previous day. Mike had been working on his tax return. Just before six he had decided to give up the struggle for the day. He had collected his canceled checks, memoranda, receipted bills, and so on and had put them, together with his return, into his brief case.

"I'd just put on my overcoat," said Mike, "when Mrs. Carson—she's the public steno who leases the suite and rents out the offices—Mrs. Carson comes runnin' into my office yellin' there's a fire in the reception room. So I run out there and, sure enough, the settee's on fire. Somebody'd dropped a match into a wastepaper basket right next to it, and it blazed up and the settee caught fire. Well, it wasn't much—I put it out in five minutes—then I go back to my office, pick up my hat and brief case, and amble on home."

"And of course," sighed Ellery, "when you got home you opened your brief case and your return and records were gone."

"With the wind," said Michael Magoon bitterly. "Cleaned out and a newspaper stuffed inside instead."

"Could the transfer have been made, Mike, en route from your office to your home?"

"Impossible. I walked over from the office to the garage where I park my car, with the brief case under my arm. Then I drove home, the case next to me on the car seat."

"You're sure this is the same brief case?"

"Oh, sure. It's an old one. It's my case, all right."

"Then it wasn't a wholesale substitution," said Ellery thoughtfully. "Someone opened your case on your office desk, removed its contents, substituted a newspaper, and closed the case again, all while you were putting out the fire in the reception room."

"It must have been that Mrs. Carson," said Nikki, wondering how the obvious could have escaped even so pedestrian a sleuth as Mike Magoon.

"How about it, Mike?" asked Ellery.

"Not a chance. She ran out in front of me and stayed with me in the reception room, runnin' back and forth from the water cooler to the settee with a vase she keeps on her desk. Didn't leave my sight for a second."

"Who else was in the suite, Mike?"

"The other two tenants. One of 'em's a commercial artist named Vince, Leonardo Vince, a screwball if I ever saw one. The other's a little crumb calls himself Ziggy, Jack Ziggy. He thinks I don't know it, but he's a bookie."

"Didn't Vince and Ziggy run out of their offices when you and Mrs. Carson tackled the fire?"

"Sure. But they didn't help put it out—just stood around givin' advice. I didn't pay any attention to either of 'em."

"Then it's possible one of *them* —?"

"It's possible. But I can't be sure. Anyway, I drove right back down to the office again last night, thinkin' maybe I'd left my tax stuff on my desk or somethin'—"

"But of course it wasn't there."

"I didn't sleep last night," said Mike miserably, "and if I could have slept, the old lady's jawin' would have kept me awake."

"Have you been to the office this morning, Mike?"

"No. I came right here, Ellery."

"Well." Ellery rose and began to fill his pipe. "A very unusual problem, Mike."

"Huh?"

"Unusual!" said Nikki. "All right, Mr. Queen, I'll bite. What's unusual about it?"

"Why should someone steal a man's income tax return—the return of a man like Mike? To find out what Mike's income was last year? With all respect to your industry, Michael, that could hardly interest anyone; and more to the point, if that was what the thief was after, he wouldn't have to *steal* the return—a quick look would tell him what he wanted to know."

"Then why," asked Nikki, "did he steal it?"

"That," replied Ellery, "is what makes the problem interesting. Mike." He eyed Mike sternly. "Have you been up to anything illegal?"

"Illegal?"

Ellery chuckled. "Routine question, Michael. Of course, if you were finagling, you'd hardly report it to Uncle Sam. No." Ellery puffed on his pipe. "The only thing that makes sense is the source of your income."

"I don't get it," complained the eye.

"Now, now. After all, Mike, you're a private dick. Your own shingle advertises the confidential nature of your work. Tell me: Which paper or papers in your brief case referred to a client or case in which *secrecy* is of the essence?"

Mike looked doubtful. "Well, all my cases are what you might call confidential—"

"Mike, I'm willing to bet my tax against yours that you have at least one client who's extremely wealthy, who came to you under a pledge of absolute secrecy . . . and whose records, or a record of whose case, were in your brief case yesterday."

"Mrs. Van Dome," said Magoon, gaping.

"Mrs. Van Dome," said Ellery briskly. "Sounds as if I've hit the jackpot, Mike. Nikki—notes!"

And Michael Magoon told the story of his very best client, Mrs. Clementa Van Swicken Van Dome.

Mrs. Clementa Van Swicken Van Dome, had she been either a Van Swicken or a Van Dome, would have occupied a position of high altitude on the social pyramid. Being both a Van Swicken and a Van Dome, she reigned alone at the very apex, surrounded by the stratosphere and God. She was so far out of sight of mere earthlings that Nikki, who was Ellery's Almanach de Gotha, had never heard of her, whereas Ellery had.

Mrs. Van Dome considered Park Avenue gauche, and the D.A.R. upstarts. A Van Swicken had helped build Fort Amsterdam in ye Manhatas, and a Van Dome had led the trek to Gowanus Bay nine years before he became restless and moved on to establish a settlement which was named Breuckelen.

The measure of Mrs. Clementa Van Swicken Van Dome's social standing was that she was invited to all the most exclusive functions in New York and never went to any. She herself gave one party each year; her guest list was more carefully scrutinized than the personnel at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and only those were invited whose forefathers had settled in the New World before 1651 and whose fortunes had not been tainted by trade for at least six generations.

Mrs. Van Dome was a widow, and she had one child, a daughter.

"You ought to see this Margreta," said Mike Magoon. "Skinny as a pretzel stick, pimples all over her map, forty-five if she's a day, and she's a poetess."

"A what?" said Nikki.

"She writes poetry," said Mike firmly.

"Under the name of Hollandia," nodded Ellery. "Brutal stuff. I take it, Mike, mama consulted you about Margreta?"

"That's it."

"Just because she writes bad poetry?" said Nikki.

"Because she's a klep, Miss Porter."

Nikki looked excited. "What's that? It sounds—"

"Relax, Nikki," said Ellery. "Mike means a kleptomaniac. It all begins to be too, too clear, Michael. Stop me if I'm wrong. If there's one thing Mrs. Van Dome fears, it's scandal. The unlovely Margreta

does not merely commit the crime of writing bad poetry, she also develops a yearning to take things belonging to other people. There have been polite complaints, perhaps, discreetly made to mama. Mama pays, but begins to worry. Margreta shows no signs of reform. The habit grows. It will soon be in the papers. Mama comes to a relatively unknown private detective—no doubt after checking your personal reputation, Mike, with your old pals at Headquarters—and puts Margreta into your hands on a one-hundred-percent hush-hush basis."

"That's it," said Mike. "My job is to protect Margreta from arrest and publicity. I trail her whenever she hits the street. When I see her take somethin', I quietly pay for it after she drifts on. Mrs. Van Dome gives me an expense account—which, believe me, she looks over with an eagle eye! I get an annual retainer —not a heck of a lot, but it's good steady dough."

"And among your income tax records," nodded Ellery, "were the various accounts and receipted bills pertaining to the misadventures of Margreta."

"Somebody," cried Nikki, "trailed Mr. Magoon, saw what was going on, then stole his income tax records to . . ." Nikki stopped. "To what?"

"To make use of them," said Ellery dryly. "Obviously."

"Blackmail!" roared Mike, jumping up as if he had just been given the hotfoot. "By cripes, Ellery, with those receipted bills and correspondence and stuff—whoever it was could blackmail old lady Van Dome till she was . . . black in the face! She'd pay anything to keep that yarn from gettin' out! That's it!"

"Somebody," said Nikki. "Who's somebody?"

Mike sat down.

But Ellery, knocking his pipe out on the fire screen, said, "Mrs. Carson."

"Mrs. Carson?" said Mike, blinking.

"But Ellery, Mr. Magoon says she couldn't possibly—"

"Nikki. A fire starts in a wastebasket which ignites an office settee which sends Mrs. Carson running into Mike's office yelling for him to . . . what? Run out—with her. Mike does so. And Mrs. Carson sticks with him." Ellery shrugged. "By the same token, Mike sticks with Mrs. Carson—while Mrs. Carson's accomplice slips into Mike's office and, having no time to winnow the Van Dome papers from the rest, lifts the entire contents of Mike's brief case, puts a newspaper stuffing in their place, and slips out. Mike," said Ellery, setting his pipe into the mantelpiece rack, "let's go down to your office and give that public stenographer a little dictation."

So Collector of Internal Revenue vs. Magoon was a simple business after all.

Only, it wasn't.

When they opened Mrs. Carson's door they found Mrs. Carson taking dictation from a higher Authority.

"Felling better now?" asked Ellery, drinking the rest of the bourbon in the paper cup.

"Oh, Ellery," moaned Nikki. "That dead woman."

"Is a dead woman."

"But a dead woman without a face!"

"I should think you'd be used to that sort of thing by now, Nikki."

"I suppose that's why you finished my drink."

"I was thirsty," said Ellery with dignity; and he strolled through Mrs. Carson's doorway waging a heroic battle with his stomach.

They were standing around the typewriter desk staring down at Mrs. Carson's ruins.

"Oh, Ellery."

"Dad."

"Six inches," said Inspector Queen in a wondering voice. "The rod was fired not more than six inches from her pan."

"There's no question that it's Mrs. Carson?"

"It's her, all right." Mike was slugging it out, too.

"Mrs.," said Ellery, looking at her left hand. "Where's Mr.?"

"In Montefiore Cemetery," said Mike, still swallowing powerfully. "He kicked off six years ago, she told me."

"How old was she, Mike?" Funny how hard it was to tell a woman's age when her face was not there for reference.

"I'd have said around thirty-six, thirty-eight."

"Ever mention a boy friend?" asked the Inspector.

"Nope. And she never seemed to have a date, Inspector. Always workin' in here late."

"Michael, Michael," said Inspector Queen. "That's *why* she worked in here late. Only she wasn't working. Not at a typewriter, anyway."

Through the greenish overcast Mike looked puzzled.

The old gentleman said impatiently, "We know she decoyed you with that fire she set herself; we know somebody lifted the Van Dome stuff from your brief case during the fire. And who was here at the time? The other two tenants. So one of *them* was the Carson woman's accomplice. Does it fit? Sure, Mike. When she was 'working late,' she was playing hoopla with either Leonardo Vince or Jack Ziggy right here in the office."

"But then," muttered Mike Magoon, "who plugged her last night? You mean Vince or Ziggy?"

The Inspector nodded.

"But why, Inspector!"

"Michael, Michael."

"The double-cross, Dad?" asked Ellery, not skeptically—just asking.

"What else? She helps him swipe the documents he can blackmail Mrs. Van Dome with, so then he

rubs the girl friend out. He's got it all to himself, and no blabbermouth to worry about besides. Ellery, why are you looking as if you smell something?"

"He must be very stupid," said Ellery.

"Sure," said his father cheerfully. "They're only smart in the fairy tales you write. Now if this were one of your mystery plots, Ellery, you know who'd be the criminal?"

"Mike," said Ellery.

"*Me!*" Mike immediately looked guilty.

"Sure, Mike," chuckled the Inspector. "By the way, what time was it when you got back here last night? Your return trip, Mike—when you came back to see if you'd left your papers behind?"

"So that's it," growled Mike. "Listen here, Inspector—"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Mike," said Ellery irritably. "What time was it? Was she alive? Was her light on?"

"Oh. Yeah, sure. Must have been a quarter of eight or so. She was workin' in her office here. I says, Mrs. Carson did you find any papers of mine around from my brief case, and she says, no, Mr. Magoon, I didn't. I says, where's Ziggy and that nut artist, and she says, oh, they went home long ago. So I says, good night, and goes back home myself."

"How did she seem to you at the time, Mike?"

"Okay."

"Not nervous?"

"Hell, I don't know. She was always nervous."

"Well." The Inspector scratched his head. "The best Doc Prouty can give us is that she was killed between seven and nine last night. The cleaning woman's no help—she was through giving the offices a lick and a promise by seven o'clock, she says, and she says Mrs. Carson was here alone. So, Mike, if you left her alive near eight, then she was bopped between eight and nine."

"By one of these two characters," said Sergeant Velie from the doorway.

The first man was a tall, frayed, decaying-looking fellow with prehensile dirty fingers and half slices of lemon under his eyes. The second was a little bald-headed man with a very gold tooth. Their eyes bugged at the thing lolling on the typewriter and they both backpedaled fast. But Sergeant Velie was leaning in the doorway, licking a cigar.

The tall man went over to the window, opened it, and stuck his face out into the cold March airstream. The small man went over to Mrs. Carson's wastebasket and bent over, almost embracing it.

"How can you stand it? How can you stand it?" the tall man kept saying.

"Arrrgh," said the little man.

"That's Vince the artist," said Mike. "That's Jack Ziggy the bookie," said Mike.

"I didn't kill her," said the tall man. "I'm an artist. I'm interested in life. I couldn't kill a spider crawling up my leg. Ask anybody. Don't think you'll make me say I did it. Cut pieces out of me—" Leonardo Vince was getting worked up, blood in his musty face again.

"You've made your point, Vince," said the Inspector mildly. "I suppose, Ziggy, you didn't kill her either."

The little bald man raised his head to reply, but then he stooped quickly again and repeated, "Arrrgh."

Sergeant Velie drawled, "Inspector, the night man here says Vince and Ziggy both came back to the buildin' last night. He can't remember the exact times but he says they came separate, and they came between eight and nine."

Mrs. Carson was a pall, definitely. Even Sergeant Velie sucked on his cigar with more enjoyment when she floated out of the office between two Welfare men.

Leonardo Vince shut the window, shivering, and the little bookmaker straightened up with the wastebasket, glancing around apologetically. The Inspector nodded to a detective and Jack Ziggy went out holding the basket high and wide.

"Cobalt blue," said the Inspector to the artist. "You were saying . . . ?"

"You can't make it out red or ocher or any damned thing but what I say it was," said Vince wearily. "It was cobalt blue. Go into my office and see if you can find the tube. You can't. It's not there. I took it home last night. That's why I came back. I may serve commerce during the day, and damn the shriveled souls of all agency men!—but my nights are dedicated to Art, gentlemen, with a capital and profitless A. I got home, had a bite, went to my easel, and found I had no cobalt blue, which I happened to need for a purpose which would be far above your vulgar understanding. The supply stores were closed. I returned to the office here for a tube of—"

"Cobalt blue," said the Inspector, nodding. He stared at Vince hard. Vince stared back. "And Mrs. Carson was—?"

"Am I supposed to contradict myself?" asked the artist bitterly. "But how could I? A child could repeat this story *ad infinitum*. I didn't even see Mrs. Carson. There was a light on in her office but the door was shut. Don't bother to ask the next question. It was about eight fifteen. No, the homunculus wasn't here—I refer to the creature who calls himself Ziggy—at least, I didn't see him. And I have no idea if the woman was alive or dead; I heard not a whisper from her office. And lastly, I am a woman hater. Now what do I do—say it over again?"

On the heels of this remarkable soliloquy came the homunculus, with the detective but without the wastebasket.

"And me," whined Ziggy, "me, I don't know—"

"Nuttin."

"—nuttin. But from nuttin."

"You had a couple of parties to ring up," prompted Inspector Queen politely, "and—?"

"Yeah. Private calls, see? Confidentially, some of my clients owe me some back dough and they been tryin' to sucker me, so I come back at eight thirty to use my own phone, see? More private, like. And I don't remember a thing, not a thing. No light, no Mrs. Carson, no nuttin. I don't remember nuttin. I don't see nobody, I don't hear nobody—"

"Oh, hell," said the Inspector. "Ellery, have you got anything?"

"I see no reason," said Ellery absently, "to hold these two men any longer."

His father frowned.

"You've established no connection between these fellows and Mrs. Carson, beyond a common tenancy. The woman was obviously killed by someone else. Get them out of here, Dad—I'm sicker of them than you are."

When Leonardo Vince and Jack Ziggy were gone, the old gentleman said, "All right, Mastermind. What's the great big plot?"

"And why'd you warn us not to say anything about Mike's income tax stuff on Mrs. Van Dome bein' swiped?" demanded Sergeant Velie.

"Suppose," said Ellery, "suppose thief-killer-potential-blackmailer is in desperate need of ready cash." He looked at them.

"He wouldn't dare," breathed his father. "Not *now*."

"He doesn't know we've made the least connection between the theft of Mike's records and the murder of Mrs. Carson."

Inspector Queen trotted around the office, pulling at his mustache. Then he stopped and said, "Mike, phone that Mrs. Van Dome. I want to talk to her."

The next morning, when Ellery hung up, he said to his audience, "It's a curious experience, speaking to Mrs. Van Dome. Didn't you find it so yesterday, Dad?"

"Never mind how I found that snooty, upstaging, cop-hating old battle-ax," grunted the Inspector. "What did she just say, Ellery?"

"Like a trip through outer space. It leaves you with an exhilarating memory of indescribable grandeurs and only the vaguest sense of reality. Mike, does she really exist?"

"Never mind the fancy stuff," growled Magoon. "What did she *say*?"

"She received the note in the first mail this morning."

"Really, Ellery," said Nikki, "your prescience is disgusting."

"I better ankle over there," said Sergeant Velie, "see Her Nibs, get the note, and arrange for—"

"You will not be received," said Ellery dreamily. "Mrs. Clementa

Van Swicken Van Dome has just passed a Law. It is to the effect that if she wants to pay blackmail, she'll pay blackmail, and if the City of New York sends so much as one policeman or detective to the rendezvous, she'll sue said City for a large number of millions."

"You mean—" cried the Inspector.

"She's afraid that you'd scare off the blackmailer, Dad. Then he'd give the full and documented story of Margreta's little problem to the newspapers. To prevent that she's ready to pay ten thousand dollars, and so on. She was quite nasty about it in an imperial sort of way."

"So our hands are tied," groaned the Inspector. "If only we knew what was in that note!"

"Oh, that. I have it here on my pad, word for word."

"She *read* it to you?"

"It seems that I," said Ellery, "am a gentleman—of a lower order, to be sure—but still . . . Oh, you heard my line. Here's the note: 'Mrs. Van Dome. I have the proof your daughter is a crook. Be in the south Waiting Room at Penn Station at eight P.M. tonight. Bring ten thousand dollars in nothing bigger than twenties. Wear a black hat with a purple veil. Wrap the dough in red paper, hold it under your left arm. Don't tell police. If there's any sign of gumshoes or cops tonight I'll see to it every paper in town gets the lowdown—with photostats—on how your daughter's been lifting stuff from New York department stores for years. Be smart. Play ball. I mean business.' No signature."

"It sounds like that gold-tooth man," said Nikki.

"I think it's Vince," said Mike excitedly.

"Might be either," grunted the Inspector. "Ziggy being extra-careful about his English, or Vince being purposely sloppy. Good work, son. We'll be there and—"

"Oh, no, you won't."

"I won't?"

"City suit. Besides," said Ellery, "I gave Mrs. Van D. my word as a gentleman that no policeman or city detective would be at the rendezvous tonight."

"Ellery," groaned his father.

"On the other hand, I'm not a policeman or city detective, am I? Nor is Mike. And certainly Nikki isn't."

"Ellery!"

"Mike, you don't look pleased."

"Pleased! Today is March the fifteenth," said Mike through his teeth. "The rat won't show till eight P.M.—the deadline for income tax returns is midnight—and he says I don't look pleased."

"Why, Michael," said Ellery soothingly. "That gives us all of four hours."

"To collar this skunk, find out where he's hid my tax stuff, get 'em, finish workin' out my return, and have it in the mail—all between eight and twelve!"

"Cinch," said Ellery. "Michael,

my boy, it's as good as in the bag—the mail bag—right now."

Prophecy is a perilous art.

At twelve minutes of eight o'clock on the evening of March fifteenth a large stout woman wearing a black hat and a purple veil, carrying a fat parcel wrapped in red paper under her left arm, appeared suddenly in the entrance to the south Waiting Room at Pennsylvania Station.

Mrs. Clementa Van Swicken Van Dome surveyed her fellow Americans. There was an expression of excitement on those remote features. So these were the People, it said. One gathered that this was at least a great adventure.

The People stared back, rather uneasily. The steamfitter jaw bunched, and Mrs. Van Dome swept regally to the nearest bench. A soldier moved over to make room for her. On the other side a young mother was struggling to diaper a kicking, screaming infant. Mrs. Van Dome was seen to take a long, deep breath. Then she sat down, and she sat rigidly. She grew red in the face. She was trying not to breathe.

At twelve minutes of ten she was still seated there. By now her neighbors were an old man without a tie who was carrying a paper bag, and a girl in a mink coat and no hat who was smoking a cigarette.

The three watchers crossed glances over their newspapers.

"All this excitement," muttered Nikki, "is killing me—" she stirred tenderly—"and you know where."

"He couldn't have spotted us," mumbled Mike. "Ellery, he couldn't have."

"It's unlikely," said Ellery. "Unless he was here at six o'clock and saw us enter the Station. If he wasn't, it's even unlikelier because, from where we're sitting, we're invisible unless you come *into* the Waiting Room, or at least stand in the entrance. That's why I picked this spot."

"But then we'd have seen *him*," winced Nikki.

"Exactly." Ellery rose. "We've either been gulled, or he got cold feet at the last moment."

"But what about Mrs. Van Dome?" asked Nikki.

"Let her stay here inhaling the odors of America," said Ellery. "Do her good. Come on."

"My income tax," groaned Mike Magoon.

And the first people they saw when they entered Inspector Queen's anteroom at Police Headquarters were Leonardo Vince and Jack Ziggy.

"Ellery—" cried Nikki; but then she saw the Inspector's face, and she stopped.

"Ah, here's a man who'll be interested in your yarn, Mr. Vince," said the Inspector genially. "Ellery, guess what. —Oh, by the way, son. Did you have a good *dinner*?"

"Disappointing."

"You can't always tell from those fancy menus, can you? As I was saying. At seven thirty this evening Mr. Vince marches into Headquarters here. Mr. Vince, tell my son what you told me."

"I was home painting," said Leonardo Vince wearily. "About a quarter of seven my phone rang. It was Western Union. They read me a telegram. It said: 'Want to commission daughter's portrait. Am leaving town tonight but will have few minutes to discuss it with you before train time. Meet me eight tonight south Waiting Room Penn Station. Will be wearing black hat and purple veil and carrying red parcel.' "

"Signed," said Inspector Queen, "'Clementa Van Swicken Van Dome.' "

"Have you—?" began Ellery.

"Sure, Maestro," said Sergeant Velie. "That's the copy I myself got from the telegraph office this evenin' when I checked. The message was phoned in to a midtown station in the middle of the afternoon. They can't tell us who phoned it in. They had instructions to deliver the wire to the addressee at a quarter of seven tonight."

Then Ellery turned to the artist and asked pleasantly, "Well, why didn't you keep the appointment, Mr. Vince?"

The artist bared his woody-looking teeth. "Oh, no," he grinned. "Not little Leonardo. You develop an animal instinct for danger when you've been hunted in this world as long as I have. Riches descend on me the very same day I become a suspect in a murder case? Ha, ha! I came straight to Inspector Queen."

"And he's been here," said Inspector Queen dryly, "ever since."

"Can't get him out of the office," complained the Sergeant.

"It's such a nice, safe office," said Leonardo Vince.

"And Mr. Jack Ziggy?" asked Ellery.

The little bookmaker started. Then he said, "It's a frame. I don't know—"

"Nuttin," said the Inspector. "Mr. Jack Ziggy was picked up at seven thirty this evening in a routine raid on a big bookie joint on 34th Street and Eighth Avenue."

"When the boys found out who they had," said Velie, "they brought him right here." He looked baleful.

"Where he's been keeping Mr. Vince company. Velie, stay here and entertain these gentlemen. We're going into my office."

"My income tax," moaned Mike Magoon.

"The way I see it," said the Inspector comfortably, putting his feet up on his desk, "is that this is pretty smart stuff. Vince is our baby. He's a cutie. He knows we've connected the theft and the murder. Or he suspects we have, maybe because we haven't handled Mike as a sus-

pect, too. So he decides to play it safe."

"Sends that letter to Mrs. Van Dome," said Nikki, "making the appointment at Penn Station—then today he wires *himself* to keep it!"

"And, of course, promptly comes hotfooting it down to me with it instead," nodded the Inspector. "Effect? He's an innocent man being framed for theft, intended extortion, murder—the book."

"But then," protested Mike, "how's he ever figure to blackmail Mrs. Van Dome? I thought that was the whole idea!"

"I said he's a cutie, Mike," replied the Inspector. "He weighs relative values. Decides his original hunch was a bad mistake and this is his way of covering up while he backs out. How does it sound to you, Ellery?"

"Admissible, but rather on the involved side, don't you think?" Ellery scowled. "There's an alternate theory which is much simpler. Mr. Jack Ziggy. Mr. Ziggy, too, develops chilled feet. Mr. Ziggy therefore decides to give us a fall guy. Writes the note to Mrs. Van Dome, sends the wire to Leonardo Vince."

"Maybe he even heard a rumor about that raid," cried Nikki, "and purposely went to that bookie place to be picked up before the eight o'clock meeting tonight at Penn Station! With Vince meeting Mrs. Van Dome, and himself arrested on a minor charge—"

"What's wrong with that, Dad?"

"Not a thing," snarled his father. "*Two* theories. Why couldn't there be just one?"

"My income tax," complained Mike. "Ain't anybody interested in my income tax? Look at the time!"

"Oh, there are more than two theories, Dad," said Ellery absently. "I can think of at least two others—either of which would satisfy my plot appetite considerably more. The trouble is—" But then Ellery stopped. He was staring at his father's feet.

"What's the matter?" said the Inspector, sighting along his legs. "Hole in my shoe?"

"That brief case you've got your feet on," said Ellery.

"What?"

"That's mine," said Mike. "You remember, Ellery, the one I brought when I came to you."

"We took it from Mike after we got down to the office," said the Inspector. "Here, Mike, we're through with it."

"Wait a minute, Mike," said Ellery. "You know, come to think of it, I never did examine this brief case while you were at the apartment, and finding Mrs. Carson dead at the office as soon as we got there . . . Dad, may I have that?"

"Sure. But it won't tell you anything."

"Is this the newspaper that the thief stuffed into it?" asked Ellery, drawing out a rather crumpled copy of *The New York Times*.

"Lemme see," said Mike. "Yeah.

I remember that tear just over the *N*."

"You're sure, Mike?"

"Sure I'm sure!"

"What are you looking so eagle-eyed about?" sniffed Nikki, peering over Ellery's shoulder. "It's just a copy of yesterday's *New York Times*."

"And there isn't an identifiable fingerprint on it," said the Inspector. "We checked."

"So now tell me you've made a great big blinding deduction."

Ellery opened his mouth, but something else opened simultaneously—the door to Inspector Queen's anteroom. Sergeant Velie stood there.

"Her Highness," said the Sergeant, "is back from the front—madder'n hell."

"Ah, Mrs. Van Dome!" said Ellery, jumping to his feet. "Come in, come in—you're just in time."

"I imagine, Mike," said Ellery, "that your original plan didn't include the concept of an accomplice at all."

"What's that?" said Mike. "What did you say, Ellery?"

"When you set fire to the reception room settee, it was in a less involved plot. You would smell smoke, you would come running out of your office raising an outcry, Ziggy and Vince and—yes—Mrs. Carson would dash out of *their* offices to see what was the matter, you would put the fire out yourself, and meanwhile any of the three—yes, including Mrs. Carson—might have been the 'thief' who slipped into your office and stole the Van Dome kleptomania-case records. You would have given us three red herrings instead of two—a more nourishing diet."

"What are you talkin' about, Ellery!"

"But something went wrong. In fact, Mike, the most interesting part of your plot to extort money from Mrs. Van Dome is that it never really got started. Something went wrong at the outset. Since Mrs. Carson is the one you murdered, it takes no great intellect to infer that it was Mrs. Carson who threw the monkey wrench. What was it, Mike? *Did Mrs. Carson accidentally see you set the fire with your own hands?*"

Mike sat very straight in the honored chair beside the Inspector's desk. But then, all at once, he sagged.

"Yes. She saw you do it, Mike. But you didn't know that till you came back to the office that evening ostensibly to 'see' if you hadn't left your tax records there by mistake. You found Mrs. Carson there alone, you asked her about the tax records . . . and she told you she had seen you set the fire.

"Did she also perceive dimly that you had taken your own property? I think so, Mike. I think Mrs. Carson accused you of skulduggery, and I think it was then and there

that you gave up all thought of bleeding Mrs. Van Dome of considerably more than she was paying you to protect her daughter's name. You took out your gun and shot Mrs. Carson to death. Very stupid, Mike. Lost your head. But that's the way it is with honest men who go wrong.

"You'd have been better off to let Mrs. Carson talk. The worst that would have happened is that you might lose your license—you had still not committed any crime! And even if you had already tried to extort, would Mrs. Van Dome have prosecuted? No, indeed. Your very plot in its origin—setting up a straw man who 'stole' your tax records and so got into the position of being able to blackmail Mrs. Van Dome—was predicated on Mrs. Van Dome's willingness to do anything rather than let the story of her daughter's kleptomania come out.

"All this must have been obvious to you—and still you shot Mrs. Carson. Mike, Mike."

The Inspector was sitting there with his mouth open.

"The rest," said Ellery, scowling, "followed logically. Having killed, you then had to direct attention away from yourself. You'd already made a beginning with the fire. The killing made it look as if Mrs. Carson had been murdered by an 'accomplice.' The 'accomplice' was what you had to work with.

"And you worked it to death, winding up with a frame of Leonardo Vince—who was supposed to take the rap for you, but—so unpredictable are plots, Mike—who refused to fall into the trap. That was another bad mistake, Mike—picking Mr. Vince. But you made a mistake that was even worse."

The Inspector tried twice to speak, nothing coming out but a bray and a croak. The third time he made it. "But Ellery, this is all speculation! You haven't *deduced* anything. It's guesswork!"

This was the most repulsive word in the Queen lexicon.

"Wrong, Dad. There's a clue which, taken at the source, leads on to the logical conclusion. This newspaper." Ellery waved *The New York Times* from Mike's brief case.

Even Mike looked curious at that. Out of the stupor into which he had fallen he roused himself to blink and lick his lips and glance uneasily at the paper.

"Nikki," said Ellery, "what day is today?"

Nikki jumped. "Day? Why, March fifteenth."

"And what is the date on this newspaper?"

"Why, you saw it yourself. And I mentioned it. Yesterday's paper, I said."

"Yesterday's. Then it's *The New York Times* of *March fourteenth*. When did Mike come to consult me?"

"Yesterday morning."

"The morning of March *fourteenth*. But when, according to

Mike's story, had the theft of his income tax records taken place—the fire, the theft, the substitution of a newspaper for the records in his brief case?"

"Why, the evening before that."

"March *thirteenth*. And what did Mike say?" asked Ellery.

"That the fire and substitution of newspaper for records had taken place around six P.M. on March thirteenth! How could a *New York Times* dated March *fourteenth* have been put into Mike Magoon's brief case at six P.M. on March *thirteenth*? It couldn't have been. Not possibly. No *New York Times* comes out that early the previous day!

"So Mike Magoon lied. The substitution hadn't been made the previous day at all—it had been made on the morning of the fourteenth—just before Mike came to see me . . . obviously by Mike himself. Then Mike's whole story collapses, and all I had to do was re-examine the known facts in the light of Mike's duplicity."

Ellery glanced at the clock. "There's still time to send your tax return to Uncle Sam, Mike," he said, "although I'm afraid you'll have to change your address."

Richard M. Gordon has a turn of mind all his own. He is not a prolific writer of fiction, but surely it is apparent now that his infrequent short stories are "different." And this newest one—it too is "different." It might be called "A Fable of the Future" . . .

THE WAY HOME

by RICHARD M. GORDON

ONCE THEY HAD GAINED SOLID ground, the two astronauts watched as their broken rocket sank slowly into the quicksand. Food, water, the necessities of life, and all possibility of communicating with their fellows were going down with it. They were left only with what they had on their backs.

The two men did not speak; their helmets made talking difficult, and, with the ship gone, there was nothing much to say anyway. There was no way home, no one to rescue them, nothing to do in an unfriendly land but to die. From the condition of the wreck it seemed a miracle that they were not dead already. In a way, of course, they were; there was nothing salvageable, nothing repairable, nothing recoverable. They watched for a moment, and then they turned without a word and began to make their way westward toward the line of hills in the distance.

Both men were magnificent specimens, lean, hard, and lithe; but they moved awkwardly and heavily in their clumsy boots, the stiff joints of their suits stealing the spring from their steps and the grace from their carriage. They never once looked back; they just walked away and left their ship; and by the time they were out of sight, the rocket was already more than half buried in the sand which had falsely promised so safe a landing place and had turned instead into a shifting, sucking, murderous trap.

They plodded on for hours through the alien countryside. The hills seemed as far away as ever, but the sun had fallen behind them, leaving the plain in a gloomy sort of twilight broken only by the black shadows of stunted, tortured trees and wild bushes.

"We might just as well go on," rasped the older man. "There's no good reason to stop. Of course," he added, "there's no good reason to go on either."

The younger man just nodded, husbanding his strength. They trudged through the growing darkness, looking neither to the left nor to the right, stubbornly determined to meet death halfway, on their

feet, rather than to wait for it huddled in the dark. Straight ahead toward the fading hills they went, moving toward a goal if not toward a purpose—and then a voice called softly behind them.

"Gentlemen!"

The two spun about, their gauntleted hands dropping to the weapons at their sides, and stared at the woman who stood there. She was tall, taller than either of them, and she was old. The weight of years had bent her body; toil had ruined her hands; and, perhaps, the bitterness in her face came from the sorrow of having been widowed too early; but she still possessed remnants of great beauty. She held no weapon and did not seem threatening in any way; she was just tall and old and rather sad.

"Will you come with me?" she asked.

The younger astronaut looked at his companion who shrugged and muttered, "Might as well be here as anywhere else," and walked toward the woman. The younger man followed. She led them through an opening in a hedge which was so overgrown that they had taken it for natural vegetation when they had passed it in the dark. Inside there was a neglected garden and a house which, like its mistress, was tall, dark, and ruined.

"Sit down," she said, and the two men sat down on a rotting bench under a dying tree. "You can take those silly helmets off," she continued. "Nothing will hurt you here." She sat opposite them on a crumbling love seat which encircled a decaying stump.

The younger man removed his helmet, breathed deeply, and wiped his forehead gratefully with the back of his glove. His companion watched him for a moment and then he too removed his helmet.

"No," she told them, "you are not the first members of your race to venture this way." They stared at each other in sudden consternation. She did not seem to notice. "I have no reason to love men," she mused. A more profound expression of sadness crossed her face. "Sit down," she said again, although the two men were already seated, "and I'll tell you of the murder of my husband."

There is a bottomless pit at the end of my garden (she began). If you drop a stone into it, you will never hear it land. If you shout into it, there is no echo. And you can never fill it up — oh, I've tried, I've tried! It is boarded up now, but one evening—it seems forever ago—I was gathering fruit for my husband's supper, and a boy climbed out of that pit. He was a saucy boy and a wicked boy, but, most important to me then, he was a hungry boy.

"Mistress," he told me, "I have been climbing since early morning, and I was hungry even then. What have you for me, Mistress?" I had

very little, but I gave him all I had —my supper, my husband's supper, everything.

And he ate! I watched him and felt glad—you see, I had no child of my own. He ate what a boy would eat; he ate what a man would eat; he ate what a giant would eat; and when there was no more, he asked, "Is this all, Mistress?" I told him that it was. "Then it must be enough," he said.

He left the table and disappeared into the shadow beyond the glow of the lamp. At that moment my husband came in. He was a big man but gentle—a dreamer, a philosopher, and a poet; not a great poet perhaps, but he made my life warm with his lovesongs when we had no wood to burn, and I was better fed on poems than other wives on bread and wine.

He stood in the doorway and shouted as was his wont, "A kiss, wife, and my supper!"

"Kisses I have," I told him, "as many as you wish, but there is no supper. I gave it all to the boy."

"The boy? What boy?" he asked, and I looked, and there was no boy. He was gone.

"A hungry boy climbed out of the pit at the end of the garden," I said, "and I gave him our supper. He's gone without even a thank-you, and I did not hear him go."

My husband, seeing that I was unhappy, made a joke of it to cheer me. He said that if the boy had his supper, he would have the boy for his supper. He even made a rhyme of it and made me laugh. And I kissed him; at least I had that, that last kiss—although I didn't know it then.

"I will sing us our supper," he said. "It wouldn't do to go hungry to bed."

He sat down at the empty table, and I brought him his harp. From the eaves his pet hen flew down and sat on the table near his hand. My husband laughed. "Perhaps we shall have our supper after all. Lay!" he commanded the hen. But the hen sat there like me and waited for the music.

So he sang. He sang of love and of the old days when the world was ours and of the future when there would be food enough to keep us and our children. We never had those children, but that night I could almost believe that we did. I felt nourished with love for my gentle husband and for the children that we would have.

He sang and sang, and at last, weary, he fell asleep at the table, harp at one hand, hen at the other, and I was loath to wake him, to call him back to the hunger for his missed supper. So I took myself off to bed.

I know not how many hours later I awoke. The boy had left the oven in which he had hidden, and, stealing out of the shadows, had seized the harp and the hen and made for the door. The hen, roused from sleep, cried out, and my husband

heard and pursued the thief. I heard the outraged squawking of the hen and the wind of the boy's flight through the strings of the harp.

My husband pounded after him as he fled down the garden. I followed with the lamp. The boy reached the pit and threw himself into it, climbing rapidly down the ropy vines which festooned its sides. My husband followed, and the vines groaned under his weight.

Soon both of them were out of sight, the young thief and my gentle husband. I stayed and listened; what else could I do?

And then, long after, I heard the terrible shriek of my husband as he fell. I never heard him land.

The old woman fell silent and sat rocking to and fro with her face in her hands. After a while the older man stood up and walked quietly away from the house toward the bottom of the garden where the widow had said the pit lay. In a moment the other man followed.

When they were well out of earshot, the younger astronaut spoke for the first time. "Gosh, Gordo, for a minute when she said that we weren't the first, I thought she meant the Russians."

The older man smiled. "No, it wasn't the Russians. Let's look for that hole and see if we can find our way home," he whispered. "Didn't you recognize it? It was upside down and backwards, and I haven't heard it since I was a child, but that was the other side of the story of Jack and the Beanstalk. Most likely the true version. I wonder how we got here . . ."

If you do not read "A Sad and Bloody Hour" clear through to the end—indeed, to the final two words—you will miss one of the most rewarding reading experiences it has been EQMM's privilege to offer in 24 years. Here, then, is the story of a Sixteenth Century detective investigation which a lone man made in the murder, "most foul and unnatural," of Christopher Marlowe, poet and dramatist, on May 30, 1593 . . . and that is all we shall tell you about this remarkable reconstruction . . .

A SAD AND BLOODY HOUR

by JOE GORES

PERHAPS IT WAS UNSCANNED SELF-love, concern for the first heir of my wit's invention, that brought me back to London from the safety of Dover where The Admiral's Men were presenting Marlowe's *Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*. It was a grisly visit, for eleven-hundred a week were dying of the plague. This scourge of God had carried away few of my acquaintance save poor Kit, but his loss was heavy: our friendship had been much deeper than mere feigning.

I finished my business with Dick Field and in the afternoon returned to my rented room on Bishopsgate near Crosby Hall. When I ascended the dank ill-lit staircase to my chamber I found a lady waiting me within. As she turned from a window I saw she was not Puritan Agnes come to see her player husband, but a pretty bit of virginity with a small voice as befits a woman.

"Thank God I found you before your return to the provinces!"

Her words, and the depths of her steady blue eyes, made me realize that she was only about five years younger than my twenty-nine. With her bodice laces daringly loosened to display her bright red stomacher beneath, and wearing no hat or gloves, she might have been a common drab: but never had I seen a bawdy woman with so much character in her face. As if reading my thought she drew herself up.

"I am Anne Page, daughter to Master Thomas Page and until recently maid to Mistress Audry, wife of Squire Thomas Walsingham of Scadbury Park, Chislehurst."

All things seemed that day conspired to remind me of poor Marlowe, for Walsingham had been his patron since Cambridge.

"Then you knew Kit?"

"Knew him?" She turned away

as if seeking his swarthy face in the unshuttered window. "With his beard cut short like a Spaniard's, full of strange oaths and quick to quarrel for his honour! Knew him?" She turned back to me suddenly. "Were you truly his friend? By all the gods at once, I need a man to imitate the tiger!"

"I am young and raw, Mistress Page, but believe me: sorrow bites more lightly those who mock it."

"Say rage, rather! Oh, were I a man my sword should end it!" Her eyes flashed as if seeing more devils than hell could hold. "Didn't you know that last May when Tom Kyd was arrested, he deposed that Kit had done the heretical writings found in his room?"

"The players were scattered by the closing of the theatres."

"On the strength of Kyd's testimony a warrant was issued; Kit was staying at Scadbury Park to avoid the plague, so Squire Thomas put up bail. But then a second indictment was brought, this time before the Privy Council by the informer Richard Baines. On May twenty-ninth I was listening outside the library door when the Squire accused Kit of compromising those in high places whose friendship he had taken."

I shook my head sorrowfully. "And the next day he died!"

"Died!" Her laugh was scornful. "When he left the library, Kit told me that two of Squire Thomas's creatures, Ingram Frizer and Nicholas Skeres, would meet him at a Deptford tavern to help him flee the country. I begged him be careful but ever he sought the bubble reputation, even in the cannon's mouth; and so he now lies in St. Nicholas churchyard. And so I wish I were with him, in heaven or in hell!"

"But why do you say cannon's mouth? His death was—"

"Murder! Murder most foul and unnatural, arranged beneath the guise of friendship and bought with gold from Walsingham's coffers! Kit was stabbed to death that afternoon in Eleanor Bull's tavern!"

I shivered, and heard a spy in every creaking floor-board; it is ever dangerous for baser natures to come between the mighty and their designs, and Squire Thomas's late cousin Sir Francis, had, as Secretary of State, crushed the Babington Conspiracy against the Queen.

"But what proof could you have? You were not there to see it."

"Do I need proof that Rob Poley, back from the Hague only that morning, was despatched to the tavern two hours before Kit's end? Proof that Squire Thomas, learning that I had been listening outside the library door, discharged me without reference so I have become . . ." She broke off, pallid cheeks aflame, then plunged on: "Oh, player, had you the motive and cue for passion that I have! I beg you, go to Deptford, ferret out

what happened! If it was murder, then I'll do bitterness such as the day will fear to look upon!"

She admitted she was a discharged serving wench with a grievance against Walsingham; yet her form, conjoined with the cause she preached, might have made a stone capable. I heard my own voice saying staunchly: "To-morrow I'll go to Deptford to learn the truth of it."

"Oh, God bless you!" Swift as a stoat she darted to the door; her eyes glowed darkly back at me from the folds of her mantle. "To-morrow night and each night thereafter until we meet . . . Paul's Walk."

She was gone. I ran after her but St. Mary's Axe was empty. Down Bishopsgate the spires of St. Helen's Church were sheathed in gold.

Kit Marlowe murdered by his patron Thomas Walsingham! It could not be. And yet . . . I determined to seek Dick Quiney and his advice.

The doors wore red plague crosses and the shops were shuttered as I turned into Candlewick towards the imposing bulk of St. Paul's. In Carter Lane the householders were lighting their horn lanterns; beyond Tom Creed's house was The Bell where I hoped to find Dick Quiney. Though he's now a High Bailiff in Warwickshire, his mercer's business often calls him to London. I hoped that I would find him now in the City.

The Bell's front woodwork was grotesquely carved and painted with red and blue gargoyles, and a sign worth £40 creaked over the walk on a wrought-iron bracket: it bore a bell and no other mark besides, but good wine needs no bush to herald it. Through the leaded casement windows came the tapster's cry, "Score at the bar!" When I asked the drawer, a paunchy man with nothing on his crown between him and heaven, if Dick Quiney were staying there, he gestured up the broad oak stairway.

"In the Dolphin Chamber, master."

The room faced the inner court on the second floor. When I thrust open the door, Dick, with an oath, sprang for the scabbarded rapier hung over the back of his chair: forcible entry to another's chamber has been often used for hired murder. But then he laughed.

"Johannus Factotem! I feared my hour had come. How do you, lad?"

"As an indifferent child of earth."

"What makes the handsome well-shaped player brave the plague—oho! September twenty-second tomorrow!" He laughed again, a wee quick wiry man in green hose and brown unpadded doublet. "The upstart crow, beautified with their feathers, will give them all a purge."

"'Let base conceited wits admire vile things, fair Phoebus lead me to the Muses springs'," I quoted. "You ought to recognize Ovid—we read him in the grammar long ago. As for the translation, I had it from Kit last spring."

"Still harping on Marlowe, lad? We all owe God a death."

"What reports have you had of the cause of his?"

"Surely it was the plague. Gabriel Harvey's 'Gorgon' says—"

"That's now disputed." Over meat I recounted all. "I fear Walsingham, but if I should be fattening the region's kites with his—"

"Would you number sands and drink oceans dry? In justice—"

"—none of us should see salvation. Not justice, friendship: forgotten, it stings sharper than the winter wind."

"Pah! Marlowe was hasty as fire and deaf as the sea in his rages. You'd do him no disservice to leave his bones lie." Then he shrugged. "But as you say, use men as they deserve and who would escape the whipping? So you'll off to Deptford, seeking truth."

"I will. If you could go to Harrison's White Greyhound—"

"I'll oversee your interests." He clapped me on the back. "Give tomorrow to gaunt ghosts the grave's inherited, to-night there's excellent *theologicum* and humming ale made with fat standing Thames water."

I could find no boats at Paul's Pier; and at Queenhithe, the watermen's gathering place of late years, were boats but no pilots. As I started for the Red Knight, a boy hailed me from the dock.

"John Taylor, boatman's apprentice, at your service." Barely thirteen, he had an honest open face, curly brown hair, and sharp eyes. "Do you travel to escape the plague?"

I sat down on the embroidered cushions in the stern of his boat. "No, I'm a journeyman to grief. Westward ho— to Deptford, lad."

The ebbing tide carried us towards the stone arches of London Bridge, sliding us beneath her covered arcade and crowded houses like an eel from the hand. As we passed the Tower the boy spoke suddenly.

"Weren't you a player in *The True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York*, at The Theatre last year?"

"You know much of the stage for one so young," I grunted. Yet I was pleased that he had recognized me, for all men seek fame.

The bells of St. Saviour's on the Surrey Side were pealing eight far behind us when Deptford docks came into view around a bend in the river, crowded with the polyglot shipping of all nations. A sailor with one eye directed me to St. Nicholas Church, the mean stone chapel not far from the docks where Anne Page had said Kit was buried.

The rector was a stubby white-haired man, soberly dressed as befits the clergy, with his spectacles on his nose and his hose hanging on shrunken shanks.

"Give you God's blessings, sir." His piping voice would have been drowned in the Sunday coughings of his congregation. "Even as the holy Stephen gave soft words to those heathens who were stoning him."

"Let's talk of graves and worms and epitaphs. I want to see your register of burials for the present year."

"Here are many graved in the hollow ground, as was holy Lawrence after that naughty man Valerian broiled him on a slow grid." He squeaked and gibbered like the Roman dead upon the death of Caesar, but finally laid out the great leather-covered volume I desired. "Seek only that which concerns you: sin not with the eyes. Consider Lucy of Syracuse; when complimented by a noble on her beautiful eyes, she did tear them out and hand them to him so that she might avoid immodest pride."

"I search for only one name—that of Christopher Marlowe."

"Marlowe? Why, a very devil, that man, a player and—"

"Churlish priest! Kit will be singing when you lie howling! And why have you written only: *First June, 1593, Christopher Marlowe slain by Francis Archer.* No word of his monument or epitaph."

The old cleric, ruffled by my words, chirped like a magpie. "His bones lie tombless, with no remembrance over them."

"But he had high friends! Why, after a violent death, was he given such an unworthy burial?"

"Squire Walsingham himself so ordered." Animosity faded from his whizzled walnut face in the hope of vicarious scandal. "Surely his death was a simple tavern brawl? It was so accepted by William Danby, Coroner to the Royal Household, who held the inquest since Her Gracious Highness was lying at Kew."

"The Queen's Coroner would not be corrupt," I said brusquely. But could he be misled? "Now take me to Kit's grave."

In an unmarked oblong of sunken earth in the churchyard, under a plane tree, was Kit, safely stowed with flowers growing from his eyes. I felt the salt tears trickling down my own face.

"Even as St. Nicholas once restored to life through God's grace three boys who had been pickled in a salting-rub for bacon, so may we gather honey from the weed and make a moral of this devil Marlowe. The dead are as but pictures—and only children fear painted devils—but Marlowe was so evil that God struck him down in the midst of sin."

"Pah!" I burst out angrily, dashing away my unmanly tears. "Your preaching leaves an evil taste like

easel! Speak only from the pulpit, father—play the fool only in your own house."

"My Father's House! In His House are many mansions, but none—"

I left his querulous anger behind to search for Eleanor Bull's tavern. Walsingham might have ordered just such a hurried obscure funeral if Kit had died of the plague; but then why had the burial record shown him slain by Francis Archer? And why had Anne Page given me Ingram Frizer as Kit's killer? Had her tale been more matter and less art than it had seemed? Perhaps Eleanor Bull would have the answers.

Playbills were tattered on the notice-post beside the door and Dame Eleanor would have made a good comic character upon the stage herself: a round-faced jolly woman with a bawdy tongue and a nose that had been thrust into more than one tankard of stout, by its color. She wore a fine scarlet robe with a white hood.

"Give you good morrow, sir."

"Good morrow, dame. Would you join me in a cup of wine?"

"By your leave, right gladly, sir." She preceded me up the narrow stairs, panting her remarks over her shoulder in beery lack of breath. "I get few . . . phew . . . other than seafarers here. Rough lot they be, much . . . phew . . . given to profanity." She opened a door, dug me slyly in the ribs as I passed. "La! If I but lodge a lonely gentlewoman or two who live honestly by their needlework, straightway it's claimed I keep a bawdy house!"

I laughed and ordered a pint of white wine each. It was a pleasant chamber overlooking an enclosed garden; the ceiling was oak and a couch was pushed back against the cheap arras showing Richard Crookback and Catesby on Bosworth Field. A fireplace pierced one wall.

"Tell me, mistress: did a man named Christopher Marlowe meet an untimely end in your house some months ago?"

"You knew Marlowe, in truth?" She regarded me shrewdly. "For all his abusing of God's patience and the King's English with quaint curses, he was a man women'd run through fire for. Lord, Lord, master, he was ever a wanton! I'll never laugh as I did in that man's company."

I kept my voice casual. "A brawl over a wench, wasn't it? And the fellow who killed him—Francis Archer?"

"La!" She jingled the keys on her silver-embroidered sash. "You must have seen the decayed cleric of St. Nicholas Church—he can scarce root the garden with his shaking fingers, let alone write right a stranger's name. Ingram Frizer was the man who shuffled Kit off."

"I would be pleased to hear an account of it."

"Heaven forgive him and all of

us, I say; he died in this very room, on that very couch. God's blood, I don't know what he was doing in such company, as Nick Skeres is a cutpurse and Frizer a swindler for all his pious talk; but all three were living at Scadbury Park and once spied together for the Privy Council. Rob Poley, another of the same, arrived on a spent horse in the afternoon, and two hours later the fight started. By the time I had run up here, Kit was already flat upon the couch, stabbed through the skull above the right eye."

"Wasn't Frizer charged when the guard arrived?"

"Right speedily: but the others backed his story that Kit, who was lying drunk upon the couch, had attacked him through an argument over the score. Frizer was watching Skeres and Poley at backgammon, when Kit suddenly leaped up cursing, seized Frizer's own knife from its shoulder sheath, and started stabbing him in the face. Frizer got free, they scuffled, Kit fell on the knife." She shrugged. "The inquest was the first of June; by the twenty-eighth Frizer'd been pardoned by the Queen and was back at Scadbury Park in the Squire's pay."

I sat down on the couch, muscles crawling. Kit had been as strong and agile as myself from the tumbling and fencing at which all players excel; and even in a drunken rage would the creator of haughty Tamburlaine and proud Faustus stab from behind? *The room seemed to darken; four dim figures strained in the dusk, Kit's arms jerked back, feet thrust cunningly between his, a cry—silence* —murder.

I looked up at Eleanor Bull. "Do you believe their story?"

"I'll not put my finger in the fire." But then her gaze faltered; her thumb ring glinted as she clutched the arras. She turned suddenly, face distorted. "La! I'll speak of it though hell itself forbid me! It was I who saw him fumble at his doublet, and smile upon his fingers, and cry out 'God! God! God!' It was I who felt his legs and found them cold as any stone. And it is I who now declare that here was cruel murder done!"

Her words brought me to my feet. "Then I'm for Scadbury Park to pluck this bloody villain's beard and blow it in his face!"

She cast her bulk before me, arms outstretched. "Oh, master, that sword which clanks so bravely against your flank will be poor steel against the viper you seek to rouse. These other swashers—la! Three such antics together don't make a man. Skeres is white-livered and red-faced; Frizer has a killing tongue and a quiet sword; and Poley's few good words match as few good deeds. But Squire Thomas! Cross him to learn that one may smile and smile and be a villain."

"I'm committed to one with true cause for weeping. Go I must."

"Then take one of my horses—and my prayers with you."

After a few miles of gently rolling downs whose nestled farmers' cots reminded me of my own Warwickshire, I came to Chislehurst. Beyond a mile of forest was Manor Park Road curving gently up through open orchards to the moated main house of Scadbury Manor, a sprawling tile-roofed timber building over two-hundred years old.

I was led through the vast unceiled central hall to the library, which was furnished in chestnut panels. His books showed the Squire's deep interest in the arts: Holinshed's *Chronicles;* Halle's *Union;* Plutarch's *Lives;* Sir Philip Sydney's *Arcadia,* chief flower of English letters. These were bound in leather and set on the shelves with their gilt-edged leaves facing out to show the gold clasps and jewelled studs. On the other shelves were rolled and piled manuscripts—*Diana Enamorada, Menaechmi*—which I was examining when a low melancholy voice addressed me from the doorway.

"Who asks for Walsingham with Marlowe's name also on his lips?"

He looked the knight that he so ardently sought to be, elegant as a bridegroom and trimly dressed in silken doublet, velvet hose, and scarlet cloak. His voice was like his thrice-gilt rapier in its velvet scabbard: silk with steel beneath. Lengthened by a pointed beard and framed in coiling hair, his face had the cruel features of a Titus or a Caesar: Roman nose, pale appraising eyes, well-shaped disdainful lips. A face to attract and repel in an instant.

"A poor player who begs true detail of Marlowe's quick end."

He advanced leisurely into the room, giving his snuff-box to his nose. "Your clothes make your rude birth and ruder profession obvious. I knew Marlowe slightly and sponsored his serious work—not the plays, of course. But why ask me about his death when the plague—"

"I had it from An— —from a mutual friend that he was slain, not by plague, but in a Deptford tavern brawl by your man Ingram Frizer."

"Did you now? And this gossip—the trollop Anne Page?"

"No," I retorted quickly, "Tom Kyd in Newgate Gaol."

He sneered and rang a small silver bell. "A quick eye and open ear such as yours often make gaol smell of home; and your tongue runs so roundly that it may soon run your head from your irreverent shoulders. But perhaps even the meanly born can honour friendship."

The man who entered was easily recognized as Nicholas Skeres: he was indeed beet-nosed and capon-bellied, and when he learned of my errand he advanced bellowing as

if I would melt like suet in the sun.

"Why, you nosey mummer, Kit was a bawcock and a heart of gold! Why, were he among us now, I'd kiss his dirty toe, I would; for well I loved the lovely bully." He laughed coarsely. "Of course now he's at supper with the worms; but here's Frizer to set you right."

Ingram Frizer had a churchwarden's face but the eye of a man who sleeps little at night. His mouth was an O and his eyes were to heaven, and he aped the cleric's true piety as ill as the odious prattler replacing the well-graced actor upon the stage.

"Poor Marlowe," he intoned unctuously, "He left this life as one who had been studied in his death. Here am I, watching backgammon; there is Kit, upon the couch. He leaps up, seizes my knife—" He moved, and the deadly blade whose hilt was visible over his left shoulder darted out like a serpent's tongue to slash the dancing dustmotes. "He strikes me twice in the face, I pull loose, we grapple, he slips . . . sheathed in his brain. I pluck away the steel, kiss the gash yawning so bloodily on his brow. He smiles a last brave time, takes my hand in feeble grip—but his soul is fled to the Eternal Father."

"Satisfied now, Mars of malcontents?"

"Just one more question, Squire." As my profession is counterfeit emotion, my tone matched Frizer's for buttery sorrow. "Then I will take my leave."

"Nothing will I more readily give you."

"Why did Poley, fresh from the Hague as from the seacoasts of Bohemia, come hurriedly that day to Dame Eleanor's tavern?"

"Question my actions, player, and you'll yield the crows a pudding!" Poley advanced from the shadows; huge, silent-moving, dark and sensual of face, his eyes falcon-fierce and his nose bent aside as if seeking the smell of death. His arms were thick and his chest a brine-barrel beneath his stained leather doublet.

Squire Thomas's sad disdainful smile fluttered beneath his new-reaped moustache like a dove about the cote. "He was just come from Holland. Where better than a tavern to wash away the dust of travel?"

"What of Baines's indictment of Kit that was sure to embarrass you and the others of Raleigh's Circle if it came to court? You had learned of it only the night before; this had nothing to do with Poley's despatch to the tavern on that day?"

His face went ashen, his lips bloodless; his pale eyes flashed and his voice shook with suppressed rage. "Divine my downfall, you little better thing than earth, and you may find yourself beneath it!" With an effort he controlled his emotion. "Apes and actors, they

say, should have their brains removed and given to the dog for a New Year's gift."

He held up a detaining hand. "Soft, you—a word or two before you go. I have done the state some service and they know it. Beware! You said Tom Kyd gave you the news of Marlowe's death, then prattled details only Anne Page could have told you. No murder have I done—yet she spreads her scandals. Seek her out in secret and you will feel that the very cobbles beneath your feet do prate to me your whereabouts."

Such a man bestrides my narrow world like a Colossus; yet was he more fully man than I?

"You despise me for my birth, Walsingham; yet nature cannot choose its origin. Blood will have blood if blood has been let, and murder will out for all your saying."

But I didn't feel safe until good English oak was between us.

Ten had struck before I arrived, in defiance of Squire Thomas, at St. Paul's Cathedral Church. During the hours of worship the shrill cries of the hawkers and the shouts of the roistering Paul's Men compete among the arches with the chants of the choir; but then only my boots echoed upon the stones of Paul's Walk, the great central nave.

I loosened my sword, for one may as easily have his throat cut in the church as elsewhere. When a slight figure in homespun darted from behind a pillar, I recognised Anne Page's eyes glowing beneath the coarse grey mantle just before my steel cleared the sheath.

"You come most carefully upon your hour, player. Tell me, quickly, what did you learn?" Present fears forgotten, we patrolled the nave in measured steps. When I had finished she cried: "Oh, smiling damned villain! From this time shall my thoughts be only bloody!"

I cautioned: "Squire Thomas said that he had done no murder."

"Then you're a fool, or coward! On May eighteenth Walsingham sent Poley to find Kit a place to hide in Holland from the warrant brought by Kyd's deposition. But Baines's charge of blasphemy was too serious—Walsingham feared he would be compromised by helping Kit defy it. More, he determined on murder to prevent the public disclosures of Kit's trial." Her voice writhed in its own venom like a stricken serpent. "Oh, player, I would lay the dust with showers of that man's blood. But hold—enough! My quarrel is yours no further."

"I'll not leave you, Anne," I declared passionately.

"You must. Had I met you before Kit—" Her fingers brushed my lips in sexless caress, and regret laid its vague wings across her face. "Too late! Hell has breathed

contagion on me; I am fit only to drink hot blood."

I shook my head and declared flatly: "I will walk with you, Anne; take you through the dark night to your home."

Outside the Cathedral it was cold and the air bit shrewdly. Rank river fog, driven by the eager nipping wind, obscured all about us. Noxious plague odors assailed us, and from the muffling smoke came the clop-clop of hoofs as a death cart rattled about its grisly business, the cartmen leaping down with iron tongs to drag the sprawled and sightless corpses from the slops and urine of the gutters.

Through the swirling fog of Dowgate Hill I could see the cobbler's house where last year Rob Greene was lost in death's dateless night. Here Anne broke in upon my reverie.

"Now surely twelve has struck—the moon is down, and it goes down at twelve. It's the witching time of night; in my soul shriek owls where mounting larks should sing. And now I must leave you."

"Now? Here? Surely not here, Anne?"

For we had arrived at Cold Harbour, where criminals impudently mock our English courts and the filthy tenements breed every vice.

"Yes, here," she whispered. "Here night cloaks me from my own sight while my body buys me sustenance to nurse revenge; and here I live only in hope of one day taking Walsingham about some act with no salvation in it, so his heels may kick to heaven while his soul is plunged to deepest hell."

She led me down a narrow alley where rats scuttled unseen and my boots slithered in foul mud; suddenly a man was silhouetted before us, naked steel glittering in his right hand.

"Back—this way!" I warned.

Too late! Behind were two more figures. Light glinted off bared swords, a spur chinked stone. I felt so unmanned with terror of my sins that I could not even draw my sword—for thus conscience makes cowards of us all. But then one of the men called out.

"Stand aside—we seek only the woman."

But I recognised the voice; and with recognition came anger.

"Booted and spurred, Rob Poley?" When I cried his name Anne gasped. "You three have ridden hard from Scadbury Park this night."

"You know us, player? Then by these hands you *both* shall die!"

"If hell and Satan hold their promises." My sword hissed out like a basking serpent from beneath its stone, barely in time to turn his darting steel. "Aha, boy!" I cried, "Say you so?"

But as he gave way before me Anne Page flashed by, dagger high.

"Murderer! Your deeds stink

above the earth with carrion men!"

His outthrust rapier passed through her body, showed me half its length behind. She fell heavily sideways. Before his weapon was free I might have struck, but I was slow, for never before had I raised my blade in anger. Then it was too late. He put a ruthless foot against her neck, and jerked free.

"Stand on distance!" he bellowed at Skeres and Frizer. "Make him open his guard. He must not live!"

But by then my youthful blood was roused, and like all players I am expert in the fence. I turned Skeres's blade, shouting: "Now, while your purple hands reek and smoke" I lunged, skewered his dancing shadow in the throat so sparks flew from the stone behind his head, and jerked free. "I know these passes . . . these staccadoes . . ."

My dagger turned Frizer's sword, I covered, thrust, parried, thrust again, my arm longer by three feet of tempered steel. ". . . they're common on the stage . . . here . . . here . . the heart!"

Frizer reeled drunkenly away, arms crossed over his punctured chest; but what of Poley? Fire lanced my arm and my rapier clattered from my nerveless grasp. Fingers like Hanse sausages closed about my windpipe. I felt myself thrust back so his long sword could reach me.

"Say you so now?" His voice was a snarl of triumph. "Are you there, truepenny?"

My head whirled giddily for lack of blood. In an instant his steel would—but then my dagger touched his belly. "How now!" I cried. "Dead for a ducat, dead!"

With my last despairing strength I ripped the two-edged cutter up through his guts, sprawled over his twitching corpse.

Silence. Moisture dripping from overhanging eaves, hot blood staining my fingers. A rat rustling in the gutter. The turning world turning on, aeons passing. Yet I lay silent in the drifting smoke. Then from beyond eternity a weak voice called me back to life.

"Player—my gashes cry for help —" Somehow I crawled to her, cradled her weakly lolling head against my shoulder. Her voice was small, so very small. "The churchyard yawns below me. I'll trade the world for a little grave, a little, little grave, an obscure grave . . ."

My salt tears gave benediction to her death-ravaged face; her body now was lead within the angle of my arm. "Anne!" I cried. "Anne! Oh, God! God forgive us all!"

"Let not this night be the whetstone of your sword." Her heart fluttered briefly within the frail cage of her body; her whispers touched my ear in failing cadence. "Let your heart be blunted. This death is—a joy unmixed with—sorrow."

No more. I lowered her gently to the waiting earth, struggled erect. My breath still rasped and rattled in my throat; dark walls weaved, receded, shifted; lantern bright above Cold Harbour Stairs, stone slimy beneath my vagrant gory fingers, cold Thames below, whispering its litany *she is dead she is dead she is*

Falling. Nothing else besides.

Movement aroused me. I lay on the cushions of a waterman's boat, river fog upon my face. Peering forward I saw a familiar figure.

"Lad, how did I come here?"

John Taylor turned anxious eyes on me. "I found you at the foot of Cold Harbour Stairs." He indicated my sword at my feet. "Your blood upon the cobbles led to this —and one that was a woman. But rest her soul, she's dead. Two others were there also, one with his wizand slit, the other drawn like a bull in the flesh shambles."

I thrust my arm into the clear Thames water, found the wound only a painful furrow in the flesh. Frizer had escaped. Anne was dead. I needed time—time to think.

"The Falcon, lad. I'll see what physic the tavern acords."

I gave the boy my silver and went through the entrance, narrow and thick-walled from pre-Tudor days, to the tap-room. Here I was met by a blast of light and noise. I kept my arm against my side to mask the blood. A jolly group was gathered by the bar.

A cup of wine that's brisk and fine
And drink unto the leman mine:
And a merry heart lives long-a.

"Before God, an excellent song!"

"An English song," laughed the singer. "Indeed, we English are most potent in our potting. I'll drink your Dane dead drunk; I'll overthrow your German; and I'll give your Hollander a vomit before the next bottle's filled!"

But this was Will Sly, the red-faced jolly comedian I'd left in Dover! At sight of me he threw his arms wide.

"Out upon it, old carrion! You can't have heard: The Admiral's Men have been disbanded! By William the Conqueror who came before Richard III, Will Sly finds himself in the good Falcon with bad companions swilling worse ale." He suited actions to words, then leaned closer and lowered his voice as he wiped the foam from his moustache. "But you look pale, lad; and your tankard's dry. Ho! Drawer!"

"Anon, sir."

I had barely drawn him aside with my story when a blustery voice broke in. "Players in the corner? Then some man's reputation's due for a fall. In faith, it's better to have a bad epitaph than the players' ill report while alive.

But let me tell you what I'm about."

"Why, two yards at least, Tom Lucy," laughed Will Sly.

Lucy was from Charlecote, a few miles from my home—a trying man with severe eyes and beard of formal cut, and the brains of a pecking sparrow.

"Perhaps two yards around the waist, Will Sly, but now I'm about thrift, not waste."

He was always full of wise saws and modern instances, so I cut in curtly: "We'll join you at the bar presently, Master Lucy."

After he had turned about I went on; soon Will Sly's face was as long as his cloak. When I told of the meeting with Anne in St. Paul's he burst out bitterly: "Fool! What if you were seen with this Anne Page? If—"

"Anne Page?" said Lucy to me. "I wondered at the name of the doxy you walked beside on Dowgate Hill hard upon mid-night, player."

Will Sly matched his name. "Then you've been seeing double, Tom Lucy; he's matched me pot for pot these four hours past."

"I'm not deceived in her," said Lucy. "In the Bankside Stews her eyes have met mine boldly, like any honest woman's."

"Then the sun shone on a dunghill!" I burst out.

"Now vultures gripe your guts, player!" Lucy clapped hand to sword dramatically. "This'll make you skip like any rat!" When I stiffened he laughed loudly. "What? A tiger wrapped in a player's hide—or merely a kitten crying mew?"

Will Sly drew me away with a hasty hand. "Make nothing of it, lad—bluster must serve him for wit. He lives but for his porridge and fat bull-beef. But never before have I seen you foam up so, like sour beer, at any man. Is this my honest lad, my free and open nature—" He broke off abruptly, eyes wide at the blood upon his fingers.

"They set upon us in Cold Harbour. I left them stiff."

"How many? All? Dead? Why, you hell-kite, you!"

"There were three—Frizer lived, I think. Man, they made love to that employment! They're not near my conscience."

He shook his head. "Until tonight I'd have thought you incapable of taking offence at any man—nothing deeper in you than a smooth and ready wit. But yonder fat fool may yet breed you unnatural troubles."

"Just keep him from me," I said. "My blood is up."

But Lucy stopped me at the door, still not plumbing my mood.

"Hold, puppy! When a man mouths me as you have done, why, I'll fight with him until my eyelids no longer wag!"

Then he winked broadly at the company, waiting for me to turn away as is my wont. But suddenly

I found myself with my rapier in hand, and saw, through the red mists, Lucy's mouth working like a netted luce's.

"Softly, master player!" He backed off rapidly. "I only jested. Er—I hold it fit that we should shake hands and part. You as your desires point you and me—why, I'll go pray."

I saw that he would pass it off as a joke, so I thrust away my sword and ignored his hand to stride from the place with Will Sly behind.

"Why so hot to-night, lad? The rightly great stir only with great argument. When honour's at stake find a quarrel in a straw—"

"Before my eyes they killed her!" I burst out. "Killed Anne!"

"No!" His homely face crinkled in honest sympathy; he turned away. "And you had begun to feel something more for her than pity?"

"I know not, but she and Kit cannot lie unavenged. What is a man if all he does is feed and sleep?"

"A beast, nothing more. And yet, lad, two carrion men crying for burial also shout to me of vengeance taken."

"But Walsingham—"

"Leave him to heaven. Look: he said no murder had he done. Are you God, to judge him false? They might have struck for private reasons, or for hire other than his. Can you be sure they didn't?"

We were at the verge of the river. I could smell the mud and osiers. Across the broad reach of gliding water a few firefly lanterns winked on the London side, for the mist had lifted; from downstream came the creak and grumble of the old bridge in the flood-tide.

Could I be sure of Walsingham's guilt? If killing is once started, where did it end?

The calm gliding river had begun to calm my own troubled spirit. My nature was not bloody, my trade was not revenge. Kit had died as he had lived, in violence; but his death, perhaps, had shown me the way to even greater things than he had done: plumb man's nature to its depths, transfigure with creative light the pain and sorrow and suffering of the human spirit—yes! White hairs to a quiet grave mean not always failure, nor does a life thrown away upon a gesture mean success. Perhaps in all of this my mettle had been hardened.

Perhaps . . .

Will Sly spoke as if divining my thoughts: "Forget these sad and bloody hours, lad; the night is long indeed which never finds a day. In these bones of mine I know the world yet shall hear of you. Don't toss your life away upon revenge, as the tapster tosses off his pot of ale, for one day the mass of men will come to honour and revere your name—the name of William Shakespeare."

EDITORS' NOTE: Yes, a remarkable story . . . for now you know that the narrator, the Sixteenth Century detective who tried to ferret out Kit Marlowe's murderer, was none other than William Shakespeare.

According to Mr. Gores, the only liberties he took with the historical personages are those strictly compatible with known historical facts. The account of Marlowe's death follows exactly the transcript of the testimony at the inquest; however, the interpretation of the known facts of Marlowe's death is Mr. Gores's own.

The clues in this extraordinary tale are almost multitudinous. Elizabethan buffs will find no less than 44 clues of a physical nature which unmistakably identify the narrator-detective as the immortal Bard in human dress.

The very first clue is the title itself: *A Sad and Bloody Hour* is a direct quotation from THE FIRST PART OF KING HENRY IV, Act One, Scene One, line 56. And in the very first paragraph of the story there are three clues: (1) "first heir of my wit's invention": suggested by a phrase in Shakespeare's dedication to Henry Wriothesley on the title page of VENUS AND ADONIS; (2) Dover: the cliffs and beaches are described in KING LEAR; (3) The Admiral's Men: Shakespeare is generally associated with the Chamberlain's Men, but that group was first formed with the reopening of the theatres in 1594; in 1592-3 Shakespeare probably toured with The Admiral's Men.

The second paragraph of the story also contains three clues: (1) Dick Field: one of Shakespeare's boyhood friends; Dick Field became a publisher and printed VENUS AND ADONIS; (2) "my rented room on Bishopsgate near Crosby Hall": in 1598 Shakespeare was assessed £5 on a house in Bishopsgate next to Crosby Hall; (3) "she was not Puritan Agnes come to see her player husband": Anne Hathaway, Shakespeare's wife, was also known as Agnes; the puritan sentiments on her tombstone probably account for her coldness to Shakespeare once he had gone to London to become an actor.

The remaining 37 clues we leave to your own delight in delving and discovering . . .

Equally important in your appreciation of this amazing tour de force are Mr. Gores's clues of quotation and near-quotation. The

incredible number of 396 lines—from 18 of Shakespeare's plays and two of his sonnets—have been quoted or closely paraphrased throughout *A Sad and Bloody Hour*. Mr. Gores comments: "I am sure that Shakespeare would be pleased to see his lines filched for a modern whodunit . . . If my Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man shatters any images of a balding intellectual in a starched ruff, I too am pleased."

Perhaps the greatest compliment we can pay to Mr. Gores's astonishing story is to say this: we are certain you will enjoy *A Sad and Bloody Hour* even more satisfyingly if and when you reread it—and we are certain many of you will reread it . . .

P.S.: The perfect time to have published Mr. Gores's story would have been in April 1964, the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth; but, alas, *A Sad and Bloody Hour* reached us too late. However, we might say, instead of the more obvious "better late than never," that when "all's well that ends well" it's "as you like it" . . .

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **RICHARD DEMING**

TITLE: ***The Most Ethical Man in the Business***

TYPE: Crime Story à la **Black Mask**

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *For a fast change in reading pace: the sentimentally tough story of a hired killer who finds himself faced with a curious problem in professional ethics . . .*

IN MY BUSINESS IT ISN'T OFTEN that I get two assignments in the same month, let alone on the same day. I average about four contracts a year, which at my standard fee of five grand each just barely carries me.

You might think that twenty grand a year tax free would be enough to keep any bachelor in luxury, but I have an expensive hobby: girls. So I need all the business I can get.

The first of the two assignments came through regular channels and in the usual manner. It came by first-class mail in the inevitable thick manila envelope, addressed simply to Spencer Quade, with no Mr. preceding the name, and with no return address.

Inside were the usual 50 one-hundred-dollar bills wrapped in a single sheet of bond paper. There was also the key to a Yale lock, which isn't as usual, but had happened once or twice before. On the paper was typed:

Date: Friday, March 6
Time: 8:30 p.m.
Place: Apt. 3-C, Grandview Apts., Sterling Road, Brooklyn (key enclosed)
Description: Male Caucasian, age 35, hgt. 5′10″, wgt 165
Plan: It will be arranged for subject to win a substantial horse bet on the afternoon of March 6. He will be instructed to pick up his winnings at the above place at the above time. The

apartment has been rented in an untraceable false name, so it will be unnecessary for you to clean up afterward.

There was, of course, no signature or any other means of identifying the sender.

It always gave me a lift to get a stack of hundred-dollar bills in the mail. Not just for the money, you understand, although I always needed that. The real lift came from pride—pride that my reputation for professional ethics was solid enough to bring me full payment in advance.

I knew there were a couple of others in the business who got *half* in advance, but I was the only one The Arranger trusted so completely that the whole fee arrived with the assignment.

It had taken a long time to build a solid enough reputation to earn that kind of respect. You don't merit trust from The Arranger until you've proved over and over that you always deliver the goods and that you hit clean. There was a tacit understanding, of course, that if for some reason I was ever unable to finish an assignment, all the money would immediately be mailed back; but I had never had to do that and I never expected to. I didn't want even any minor stains on my record and reputation as the most ethical man in the business.

I put the money in my money belt and strapped it under my shirt until I could get to the bank that afternoon. After memorizing the instructions, I burned the paper and ground out the ashes.

This was on the morning of Monday, March 2. That afternoon I visited the bank and transferred the five grand to my safe-deposit box. For current expenses I removed a couple of hundred from the rapidly shrinking amount previously in the box. Until I had completed my assignment, I wouldn't touch the new five thousand even if the box became otherwise empty, because there was always the remotest possible chance that I'd have to return the fee.

At about 8:30 that evening my door chimes sounded. When I answered the door, I found Joey Thomas standing in the hall.

"Evening, Speck," he said, giving me an uncertain smile. "Can I come in?"

Shrugging, I stepped aside to let him enter. I had nothing against Joey Thomas, but he was no bosom pal either. As a freelance legman and sometime strong-arm man for a half dozen bookies, he was more or less on the inside; but he didn't carry enough weight to make him worth cultivating. I like to mingle socially only with the top echelons.

He stood in the center of my front room with the same uncertain smile on his face until I told him to sit down. When I asked if he wanted a drink, he accepted so eagerly that it was obvious he needed it.

I only mixed one, because I don't drink myself. Not good for business.

When he was settled with a bourbon highball he said, "This isn't a social call, Speck. It's business—strictly business."

I frowned. I hadn't been aware that he was far enough on the inside to know my business. Of course, even those on the fringes could guess, from my known associations, that I must be in pretty solid with a lot of big people; but only those really high up were supposed to know precisely what my function was.

I said, "What makes you think I have any business?"

He downed most of his highball before speaking, presumably to give himself courage. "I heard some rumors—you know how it is—and finally figured it out. You're not going to get sore at me, are you?"

I said irritably, "Even if I do, all you're risking is a bawling out. What the devil are you so scared of?"

"Well, I wouldn't want you practicing your specialty on me."

I made my voice cold. "If I had a specialty, as you call it, I'd practice it only for money. I wouldn't waste it on a personal grudge."

He breathed a little easier. "You do work for the—ah—The Arranger, don't you?"

Practically everybody in the know has heard of The Arranger, so his reference to the Big Guy didn't surprise me. It would have surprised me, though, if he knew who The Arranger was—because even I didn't know that.

I said, "If I did, what business would it be of yours?"

"I want to hire you, Speck."

After contemplating him for a moment I said, "The rumors you heard were all wrong. If you have business for The Arranger, go through proper channels. You must know some contacts."

"Sure," he agreed. "Only through proper channels the fee is ten grand, and I can't raise that much. I figure your cut must be about half. So why don't we eliminate the middleman? I can go sixty-five hundred, so we'd both be ahead."

Before I tied in with The Arranger I used to free-lance, which had required working out my own deals. Nothing in my unwritten contract said I couldn't take on an outside job, and I could certainly use the extra money. It was at least worth hearing out.

I said, "Bargain-basement shopping, huh? Go ahead and talk. I'm listening."

He took a deep breath and said, "It's my wife, Joan."

Already I didn't like it. I have no objection to hitting women, but I prefer these matters on an impersonal plane. When I get an assignment from The Arranger, I never even know the subject's name—which is the way I like it.

In the old free-lance days I had

frequently known who I was hitting, but I hadn't worked a freelance job in a long time and had gotten in the habit of liking things the way they were. I even carried my preference for anonymous subjects to the point where I deliberately avoided newspapers, and radio and TV news reports, for days afterward—so I wouldn't ever learn who the subject was.

I not only knew Joan Thomas, but I rather liked her. I didn't know her well of course, but I had talked to her at parties and had even danced with her once or twice. She was a busty blonde in her late twenties, with slanting green eyes and a come-on smile which had started my heart pounding the first time I met her—until I learned she was married. Then I had backed off fast, because I never play around with married women. There is enough risk in my business without sticking my neck out for trouble in other areas.

I said, "I thought you and Joan got along pretty good."

"She's playing around with Gyp Fallon. She doesn't even try to hide it. She spends more nights in his apartment than she does at home."

"Then why don't you get a divorce?" I suggested. "If what you say is true, it would be easy to get the evidence."

He let out a bitter laugh. "Drag Gyp Fallon into court as a correspondent? Are you kidding? I might as well commit suicide."

He had a point there. Gyp Fallon was a big-time bookie who had a small army of goons. He was nothing for me to worry about, because *nobody* pushed any of The Arranger's boys; but I could understand how a small-timer like Joey wouldn't want Gyp on his tail.

I said, "So why don't you just kick her out and let her move in with Gyp full time?"

"Because I've got someone else on the string too. And I'm gonna lose her if I don't get legally free of Joan soon. Joan would go for a friendly divorce, all right, but she wants an arm and leg. She's asking twenty grand outright, plus five hundred a month alimony."

I formed my lips into a silent whistle. "You got that much?"

"I average about twelve thousand a year, Speck, which means I'd have to turn over half my income. As for the cash settlement, I own some lots I could sell for twenty grand, but in another five years they'll be worth two or three times that. She knows that's all I own and wants to clean me out."

"If that's all you have, how do you plan to get the sixty-five hundred you mentioned?"

"Oh, I've got about two grand in the bank. I plan to borrow another five on the lots. That way I'll still own them."

I rose to mix him another drink while I considered the proposition. If he had asked me to hit Gyp Fallon instead of his wife, it would be

automatically out, because you don't hit people of Fallon's status without an okay from The Arranger. But Joan Thomas was nobody the upper echelon would care about. She was just a cute little blonde who used to work in a chorus line and was now married to a minor cog in the setup. Gyp Fallon might care, but while the top boys might frown on Gyp himself being hit without advance clearance, they wouldn't give a hoot in hades what happened to one of his female playmates.

There was the consideration that I was acquainted with the woman, which intruded a personal element I didn't like, but $6500 more than counterbalanced that small annoyance.

When I handed Joey the fresh drink I said, "How soon can you come up with the money?"

"How soon can you do the job?" he countered.

"Let's get something straight," I said coldly. "I get paid the full amount in advance. Those are the terms. We don't even discuss when I do the job until the money's in my hand."

He flushed slightly. "The full amount?"

"Every cent," I assured him. "Apparently you didn't hear those rumors from a very hep source."

"What do you mean?"

"If you had you'd know I always get paid in advance."

After considering this he said, "I did hear you never let a client down. But suppose something goes wrong? Then I'm out six and a half grand for nothing."

"My jobs never go wrong. If, by some remote chance, this one does, you get your money back. Satisfaction guaranteed—clean hit or full refund."

When he continued to look doubtful I said testily, "I've never crossed a client yet. I have a reputation for professional ethics to maintain. I don't accept money and then fall down on the job. If you don't like my conditions, go find yourself another boy."

"I believe you," he said quickly. "It may take me a few days to raise the money, though. How about Friday afternoon?"

Friday evening was when my other job was scheduled. I said, "Make it before five or I won't be here. Bring it in hundred-dollar bills."

"Okay," he said, finishing his drink and rising. "Then the deal's definitely on?"

"It's on," I assured him.

That evening I waited until after midnight, then made a reconnaissance of the address listed in my instructions from The Arranger.

The Sterling Road apartment house was near Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn. The name Grandview was a grandiose misnomer, because the only view from it was an identical apartment building on either side and another across the street. They weren't exactly tenement

buildings, but they weren't high-class either. It was a typical workingman's neighborhood, neither classy nor slummy.

There was no one on the street at that time of night and the March weather was too cold for anyone to be sitting outdoors on the stoops. I entered the building without anyone seeing me, by-passed a self-operated elevator, and took a flight of stairs to the third floor.

The Yale key let me into 3-C. It was a furnished apartment consisting of a front room, kitchen, bedroom, and bath. It was heated by hot-water radiators, and whoever had rented the place had adjusted the valves so that the rooms were comfortably warm.

There was no back door, which I didn't much like—it's always nice to have a choice of exits. However, there was never any trouble when The Arranger planned things, so it didn't worry me too much.

I knew the planning had been thorough. For instance, I didn't have to worry about the possibility of the subject arriving accompanied by some friend, because The Arranger would take care of that. How was none of my concern. Perhaps it was known that the subject never picked up winnings in front of witnesses—maybe because he owed too much money and didn't want his creditors to find out he'd made a killing. Whatever the reason, The Arranger never left such matters to chance.

Without removing my thin leather gloves, I took out the .38 automatic I had brought, fitted the silencer to it, and put it in the top drawer of the dresser in the bedroom. A gun with a foot-length silencer attached to it is a pretty bulky object, and I preferred not to bring it in with me the next time I came to the apartment, which would be early in the evening. There was always the chance that at that time I might be seen by some tenant in the hall, and that big bulge under my coat would make me remembered.

After thoroughly checking the place, I turned off all the lights and left as quietly as I had arrived.

About four P.M. on Friday afternoon Joey Thomas showed up as he had promised. He counted out 65 one-hundred-dollar bills.

When I had recounted them, I took them into my bedroom, put them into my money belt, then strapped the belt around my waist under my shirt.

Back in the front room I said, "All right. Now tell me something about your wife's habits. You can skip any hen parties she goes to. I'm interested only in times and places she'll be alone."

He thought this over for a while, then said, "Daytimes she's home alone most of the time. Friday afternoon you'd be sure to find her. That's when she washes her hair."

"Good. What's your living set-up?"

He described the Manhattan

apartment where they lived. It was a fifth-floor apartment in a building so large that hardly anyone would know any of the other tenants, and no one would be likely to pay any attention to a stranger passing in the halls. Besides, I knew how to be unobtrusive, so there was little chance of my being noticed even if I did meet a tenant or two.

"Got an extra key?" I asked.

He said dubiously, "Won't the cops think it funny if you get in by key?"

"They won't know it," I told him. "They'll figure I rang the bell, then forced my way inside when she answered the door. Don't worry. When I leave, things will look as though it was done by a prowler. How about the key?"

He produced a key ring, removed a key, and handed it to me. "I'll have to ring to get in this afternoon. My extra key's in a dresser drawer. Hope Joan's home."

"Isn't she always on Fridays?"

"Yeah, that's right," he said, his face clearing. "About now she's putting her hair up in rollers. She won't show her face on the street until it's all dry and combed out."

"Now about your alibi," I said. "That's important because the husband is always an automatic suspect when a woman gets hit. Can you arrange to be out of New York next Friday?"

"How far out?"

"The farther the better. Why don't you fly down to Miami next Thursday? Let it be known that you plan to spend a week down there. Then just sit tight until the cops contact you to break the news. You can casually let a few friends know where you're staying, so that you can be traced easily. Be sure to be seen in public—in the hotel bar or dining room—every minute of Friday until at least midnight. There should be no question about your actually being in Miami."

"You really do take your clients' interests to heart, don't you?" he said. "I think I can swing that. Joan will be glad to get me out of her hair for a week. She'll figure it'll give her a chance to spend every night at Gyp's place."

"Then that's that," I said. "Don't come here again and don't phone me. If there's any hitch, I'll contact you. Otherwise, as of this minute, we no longer even know each other."

"Suits me," he said in a tone suggesting he felt more relief than disappointment at losing me as an acquaintance.

It was past 4:30 when he left. My bank was open until six on Friday, but I didn't want to take the time to go all the way uptown before driving out to Brooklyn. The bank could wait until Monday. I like to get to my assignments a couple of hours in advance whenever it's feasible.

It took me nearly an hour to drive out to Flatbush. I stopped at a crowded restaurant where I would-

n't be noticed for dinner, which killed another hour. On the way out of the restaurant I bought a newspaper.

I parked on Underwood, just around the corner from the Grandview Apartments, and walked the rest of the way. Again I took the fire stairs, and was lucky enough not to meet anyone in the third-floor hall.

It was just 6:30 when I let myself into apartment 3-C. I left the door unlocked.

I threw my topcoat and hat on the bed in the bedroom, but kept on my thin leather gloves. Removing the silenced automatic from the dresser drawer, I carried it into the front room.

I didn't have to rearrange any furniture, because the sofa was facing the front door. I switched on a bridge lamp and adjusted it so that it hit the door like a spotlight; then I turned off the overhead light. The sofa was still sufficiently illuminated so that I could have read the paper I had brought if I had been in the mood; but anyone entering by the door was going to have to shade his eyes against the bridge lamp to see me clearly.

I sat on the sofa with the gun lying alongside of me and the newspaper folded in my lap and waited.

Time dragged by. I am very patient, though. Waiting is part of my job.

Exactly at 8:30 the doorbell rang. Picking up the gun, I unfolded the paper with my other hand and held it in front of me as though I were reading. It effectively concealed the gun from the view from the doorway.

"Come in," I called.

The door opened and a man wearing a topcoat and hat entered. He squinted against the light in his face as he pushed the door closed behind him.

To my surprise it was Joey Thomas.

Letting the top half of the paper fold toward me on my lap, but still concealing the gun, I said, "What the devil are you doing here?"

Joey moved farther into the room, out of the glare of the bridge lamp, and gazed at me with equal surprise. "I might ask you the same thing. Since when did you hook up with Kuznicki?"

I got it the instant he mentioned the name Kuznicki. The moment I realized it was Joey who had come into the apartment, I assumed that for some unknown reason he had followed me here; but now I realized that he fitted the description of my subject exactly.

Anton Kuznicki was a runner for Gyp Fallon. Therefore, the winning bet the subject had been allowed to make had been arranged by bookie Fallon.

It might have amused me to realize that Gyp Fallon's plans for Joey were identical with Joey's plans for his wife—if I possessed that type of sense of humor. But I dislike com-

plications. They turn clean jobs into messy ones.

I said, "You'd better sit down, Joey. We've got a problem."

He gave me a puzzled look, then walked over to adjust the lampshade downward before taking an easy chair about four feet in front of the sofa. The moment he sat down he realized what the problem was, and his face suddenly drained of color.

"You just got it, huh?" I said.

He started to get up, but quickly sat down again when I pushed the newspaper aside and let him see the silenced gun.

Licking his lips, he said huskily, "I thought you were a square guy, Speck. They all told me you were a square guy." He was beginning to babble.

"I am," I said. "I didn't know you were the subject until you walked in. It complicates things. I can't hit one of my own clients."

That seemed to make him feel better. After a prolonged silence during which his gaze never wavered from the gun he asked, "Who set me up?"

"I never know, but in this case I can guess. It seems pretty obvious that Gyp Fallon bought the hit. Kuznicki's one of his runners. Apparently Gyp thinks more of your wife than you do—enough to want her a widow."

"Why, that dirty rat!" he said indignantly.

"How much were you supposed to have won?" I asked curiously.

"Twelve hundred clams. The only good tip I was ever handed, and it turns out to be a phony! I wondered why the payoff had to be all the way out here, but for twelve hundred I would have driven clear to Albany."

I said, "The problem is that Gyp went through regular channels. I can't hit a client, yet I can't back down on an assignment handed me by The Arranger. You see that, don't you? It's a hell of a problem."

"Mind if I leave while you figure it out?" he asked, making a cautious move to rise.

I let the mouth of the silencer move back and forth. He quickly subsided in his chair. I creased my brow in thought and we sat in silence for some minutes.

Finally my expression cleared. Without lowering the gun, I unbuttoned my shirt with my left hand, reached inside, and loosened the buckle of my money belt. Drawing out the belt, I tossed it in Joey's lap.

"Take all the money out of that," I said.

Puzzled, he opened the belt and drew out all the bills.

"Count it," I instructed.

Placing the stack on one knee, he rapidly fingered through it. When he looked up he said, "Why, this is what I paid you this afternoon—sixty-five hundred bucks."

"Uh-huh. Put it in your pocket—all of it."

He got it then, and he turned dead white. He held the money out at arm's length toward me.

"No, Speck! We have a contract. I'm your client. You said so yourself!"

"How could you be?" I asked reasonably. "I've returned your money, just as I agreed I would if I didn't go through with the assignment. So you're no longer my client."

The sound wasn't any louder than the pop of a burst balloon.

My instructions had said it wasn't necessary to clean up, which meant I could leave the body right there. I paused only long enough to clean up the spilled money, though.

While I'm scrupulously honest in my dealings with clients, I don't see anything ethically wrong in stealing from a deceased non-client. Do you?

(Continued from Other Side)

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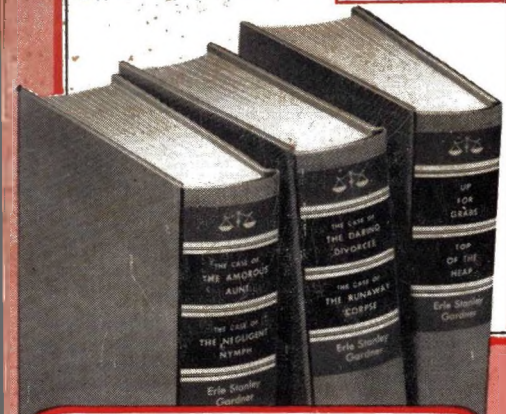

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