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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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WINNER OF A SPECIAL PRIZE: FRANCIS BONNAMY

Who is Francis Bonnamy? . . . He has been described as "the season's most entertaining Watson." Dorothy B. Hughes has pronounced him "the old professional Bonnamy who can keep you glued to the pages of his manuscript as he unfolds a fearful story." Anthony Boucher has declared that Francis Bonnamy is "one of the most amusingly civilized mysterymongers extant."

All these are wise and winnowed words, but as the author reminds us, they wouldn't help you pick Francis Bonnamy out of a crowd, or even out of a twosome. Of course, you know him (or her) as the author of DEAD RECKONING, A ROPE OF SAND, PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A DEAD MAN, BLOOD AND THIRSTY, *and* THE KING IS DEAD ON QUEEN STREET (*which, understandably, we personally prefer to such a title as* THE QUEEN IS DEAD ON KING STREET).

But the simple truth is, Francis Bonnamy is a pseudonym of Audrey Walz of Alexandria, Virginia (the lethal locale of "The Loaded House"). In collaboration with her husband, Jay Walz, she recently published a fictionalized biography of the early Randolph family of Virginia, titled THE BIZARRE SISTERS, *which has been a bestseller for months.*

And now about "Bonnamy's" prize story: When we first read the manuscript we liked the story well enough to award it a special prize; then, while we were preparing the manuscript for the printer, we had an unusual experience — we liked the story even better the second time we read it! The style is bright and amusing, and it wears well; the story is full of antique furniture and antique guns and antique customs — to say nothing of a strange sort of Southern hospitality that gave us the shivers between the gay and carefree passages. And that yackety-yak young Southern honey-chile — what a character to get in the hair of both the police and the reader! And there is another appealing quality in this story: it is chockful, ram-jam-loaded with detectives; besides the official Alexandrian investigators, headed by Lieutenant Haggard, there are Bonnamy, who contributes at least one important bit of reasoning, and Cora Richter, the congressman's widow, who contributes another important piece of observation, and finally, the catalytic college professor who dresses like a diplomat and thinks like a dick, Peter Utley Shane, who puts the bits and pieces together and unlocks the door of the loaded house.

THE LOADED HOUSE

by FRANCIS BONNAMY

THREE to four million tourists visit our national capital every year without stumbling over an appreciable number of corpses. The figure is probably .000000002 of a body to a tourist. When I, however, stay in Washington or that part of Virginia bordering on the District, the area becomes littered with the sudden dead.

Heretofore, I have blamed the circumstance on my being there in my professional capacity as assistant to Peter Utley Shane, head of the Department of Criminology at the University of Chicago. He is frequently consulted by former pupils who practice as policemen what he preaches as professor. But this last trip I went there as a tourist to enjoy with my bride of all too few weeks, my delectable Mavis, the simple pleasures of the sightseer.

I wanted to hold her hand while we rode in the silly little Senate subway; to pose her prettily by the Reflecting Pool with the Lincoln Memorial for a backdrop; to hear her sigh with satisfaction at General Washington's own view of the Potomac at Mount Vernon. Unfortunately, returning from that plantation, we stopped off at Alexandria.

During my wartime stint with the Signal Corps I lived in that Virginia town, in a beautiful old Georgian house at the foot of Queen Street. I wanted Mavis to see the place, to meet the delightful friends I had made there. Besides, the old port was celebrating its bicentennial not just with a commemorative stamp but with a pageant and other trimmings. Those I had to see.

So we called on Cora Richter, congressman's widow and outspoken landlady of my Alexandria past.

At the sight of me, she put her hand to her eyes. "Oh, no! Not Death's advance man!"

"Cora," I said, "you are speaking of the man my wife loves. This is Mavis."

"My dear, I'm sorry." She took both of Mavis's hands in loving welcome. "Come have a cup of tea and I'll explain. It's just that I didn't think it would come to murder. Now that Frank's here, I don't know —" Her voice trailed ahead of us through her cool, shaded drawing-room.

Mavis nodded toward the Hepplewhite-Adam pieces all around us and whispered, "Are they really there?"

"Fugitives from a museum." They were a little incredible, but the things you can see in almost any elderly gentlewoman's house in Alexandria generally are.

When we were settled by the tea table in the library, I asked, "What may come to murder?"

"We've been having a furore."

"Over the management of the Bi-

centennial? We saw nothing had been done to the Ramsay House." That's the oldest house in town, and sits in ramshackle state on a main corner. Its restoration has been planned for years, and I had heard it would at least have a new roof and a coat of paint for the celebration, but we found it in more abject disrepair than ever. "And Goat's Hill playground has been prettily renamed King George's Meadows and chosen the site for the amphitheater." Only weeds flourish on that dusty sweep down to the Potomac. The children scorn it to play in the street. Along the "meadow's" edge a railroad spur runs to the glowering power plant. "So the pageant's powdered wigs will be silhouetted against smoke stacks, and the diesel engine can whistle an obligato to the minuet."

"Oh, that." Cora shrugged. "That's Alexandria." She said it half in pride, as one speaks of an incorrigible maiden aunt. "No, it's here on Queen Street. Weren't you struck by that — that horrible edifice?"

"I read a news story about the wall of one old Alexandria house falling in, but nothing toppled on us today."

"Don't be dense. I mean that barn-red thing with the picture window. A modern house in the old part of town! In our bicentennial year, too. Defying tradition like that. Disgraceful! And right next door to the Carter Mansion and young George Henry Lee Carter —"

"The IV," I hazarded.

"Well, yes," Cora acknowledged, "desperate to sell the place to that odious Yankee lobbyist. The fellow's using Rosemary's house to drive the price down. Including that wonderful furniture and the perfect period draperies and everything that Julian Maxon fixed up for Madv Carter before she died. Of course that McGhee creature will pay cash and it might be months before poor George Henry sold everything for what it's really worth. You have to find just the right collector for rarities like that. I could spank Rosemary."

Mavis was not bewildered. She's a smart girl for all her dewy look. "I've got it in hand," she assured me. "Someone named Rosemary was so brash as to build a modern house in old Alexandria."

"Rosemary Stannard," Cora said. "The annoying thing is — I *like* her. Too pretty a girl to have such horrid tastes." She might have been an arsenic eater from Cora's tone. "At my Christmas party, right after they first came here, she wore the quaintest ermine tippet and toque with a dark red rose on it. Reminded me of the Duchess of Towers in 'Peter Ibbetson.'"

A girl with camellia skin and dark hair curling around a small fine head peered in through the terrace door. "Who reminded you of a duchess?" she inquired, and came on in. She was barefoot and wore a white shirt and bright-red denim pants cut off at the knee.

"You did," Cora said sharply, "but that was last Christmas."

"Me?" The girl's candent gray eyes widened with amusement.

"Now you look like Huck Finn."

"How better could anyone look in summer? I came over to ask you to help christen our swimming pool this afternoon. Spur of the moment, but we'll have champagne to make it official. Should we dump it right in, do you think?" she asked us earnestly. "You come, too. It may be as crowded as the Ganges at Benares, but it will be cool. I've been inviting everybody, so they could get a good hard look at the joint. If enough of us get in at one time, maybe our pool will overflow and flood the basement of the Society for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities. More fun. Yes, Cora, I invited the Society's Secretary."

"The poor man keeps most of his records in the basement and Rosemary's pool will burst one day, he's sure. It takes up practically her whole garden, and what space it doesn't cover, Joe Stannard has paved with bricks in fancy patterns."

"Joe loathes grass. He has a brick thumb. A couple of potted trees were sneaked in, when he wasn't looking, and of course we get the benefit of Carter's box hedge."

"Two hundred years old and seven feet high, growing for centuries to provide privacy for a swimming hole." Cora was bitter. "You have gathered who she is. They," she introduced us belatedly to Mrs. Stannard, "are the Bonnamys. Newly married and he wants his bride to meet old friends here. So maybe they'd better come."

"It sounds promising," Mavis said.

"Certainly everyone will be there," Cora continued, "*sniffing!*"

With a maximum of poise and a minimum of covering, Rosemary greeted us that afternoon. She wore a one-piece strapless bathing suit, white with black dots woven into the knit. It somehow suggested ermine, and to tease Cora, she had fastened to her shoulder, where a shoulder strap should be, but wasn't, a corsage made of ermine tails and a big red rose.

In the scientific spirit I asked, "How do you keep that flower on?" It could hardly be pinned to her smooth skin.

"Scotch tape."

Of course. On her feet she wore Grecian sandals of white kid. As a hostess she would have been startling anywhere, and in Alexandria —

The vast living-room was crowded with matrons in flowery printed dresses and big hats. They appeared curiously bundled up. Most faces were strange to me until I spotted, in a sharply tailored ice-green suit, the wife of a murderer I once helped to catch and felt more at home. She greeted me with such pleasure it positively animated her horsey face and assured me in her whiskey baritone, "Nobody's in town, simply nobody." Around us the mob surged.

The sniffers among the guests disapproved of the excessive comfort of the chairs, the odd shapes of the tables, the expanses of textured wall, everything but the food spread on a

twelve-foot table. It vanished as speedily as though there were locusts present.

Almost shrieking over the hubbub, Rosemary announced she was about to draw the curtains on the big picture window overlooking the pool. With a susurrus like the swish of water itself, the heavy oyster silk draperies parted to reveal an almost invisible wall of glass and beyond it, glittering in the brilliant sunlight, a large, asymmetrical pool of lime-green water. Along its length, black-green in contrast, stretched a magnificent hedge of English boxwood. Only a narrow brick runway separated water and leafy wall.

Little gasps of pleasure were quickly stifled.

"Really too theatrical."

"Pure Hollywood."

"What did you expect? They're California people."

"She'll have to hire a lifeguard to keep the neighborhood children from drowning themselves. With my two, I shan't have a moment's peace all summer."

"Couldn't it be condemned as a nuisance?"

"George Henry did take it up with the Council, I heard, but the whole back half of this property is zoned commercial. There used to be a livery stable there."

Rosemary had kicked off her elegant sandals and run out, followed by several gallant spirits who had been out of sight changing into swim suits. With a beautiful beckoning gesture she urged them toward the water. Turning, her whole body poised to dive, she suddenly stood rigid. So did they all — the young men in gaudy swim trunks, the girls in fliply skirted little suits, bright as the flowers that odd garden had no place for. They stood there swaying, blocking our view of whatever it was that gave them pause. Inside, there was suddenly no sound. Heads were thrust forward in painful curiosity. Then a girl screamed and ran sobbing to the house.

"There's a body in the water! Lying there as if he were having a nap. So peaceful! I can't bear his looking so peaceful!" She whispered, "peaceful," shuddered, and went into hysterics. Cora threw a cup of punch in her face, slapped her hard, and she was led off weeping quietly.

"Didn't I say right at the beginning?"

"I'm not in the least surprised."

"Is it anyone we know?"

A stocky young man came in to telephone.

"Who is it, Joe? Some drunk from the waterfront?" a smallish gentleman in big glasses pushed up to ask. For all his unimpressive appearance, he had about him an air of authority.

"I don't think so, Doc. Show you in a second." Joe dialed methodically. He must have been our hitherto invisible host.

A chatty female voice identified "Doc" as Dr. Hazlitt — "I keep forgetting it, but he is the Coroner, you know. He's been Coroner for ages."

"How in the world does Rosemary happen to know him?"

"Oh, he lives just down the street, and he's taken a positively malicious interest in this house. Because he knows it upsets everyone, he keeps saying what Alexandria needs is more modern houses! I heard him say myself, 'Tear down all these old wrecks and start fresh. After two hundred years, ain't it about time?' "

"Really!"

A stylish stout was assailing Stannard's free ear. The other he pressed intently to the telephone. "You must know who it is," she declared, "you were looking right at him."

"I don't know everyone in town," Joe pointed out. "New here. But the others are guessing it's that guy who wanted to buy the house next door. Not sure because they can't see his face very well."

"Ham McGhee? What's he doing in your pool?"

"He isn't lobbying," Joe said.

"Who," I asked the doctor, "is McGhee and what does he lobby for?"

"Well, now," Dr. Hazlitt twirled his glasses thoughtfully, "I couldn't rightly say on either count. All I know is he had the wrong kind of New York accent and the right kind of bankroll. And I never ask a lobbyist who he works for. Like asking a money lender what interest he charges. Whatever he did, he was Almighty busy doing it. Anything I detest, it's a busy man." He shoved his glasses back on his face and immediately looked like a wise little owl. I decided I liked the doctor.

A cluster of women had begun to move furtively toward the front door. "Hey!" Joe called to them. "Nobody leaves until the police take names. The Lord only knows who Rosemary invited today. She invites on impulse," he confided to Hazlitt and me. "They're old friends of yours, Dr. Hazlitt. You stop 'em." He turned back to report crisply to the police the fact of a dead body on his premises. In that brief time the room was more than half-emptied.

Dr. Hazlitt, who had been making futile shooing motions near the door, came back to say, "You're young, Stannard, and a newcomer. If I could stop a herd of middle-aged women who are Daughters both of the American Revolution *and* the Confederacy, I'd be a better man than Robert E. Lee."

"Granted," Joe said.

The first policemen to arrive were a pair who labored under handicaps. The lantern-jawed younger one could hardly tear his fascinated eyes away from Rosemary's corsage. She finally told him laconically, "Scotch tape," as she had me. The information obviously relieved his mind. But he was not able to relax completely until Joe sent his wife off to dress.

The other cop's attention fixed on the big picture window. It was of the type occasionally seen in store fronts with the glass inset at such a slant there appears to be no glass at all. He almost walked right through it before he got the idea, and even then I saw his hand go twice toward the huge

pane as if to make sure it existed. He caught himself in time, however, and with some attempt at getting on with it, tried to gather data.

"How'd he happen to fall in?"

"We don't know that he did. If it was accidental and he couldn't swim, why didn't he come up and grab the ledge while he yelled for help?" Stannard rumpled his fair, thinning hair distractedly. "He's lying on the bottom right near the edge."

"Clutching a piece of paper," added a male swimmer in yellow trunks, printed with dizzying red palm trees. The frustrated swimmers were drifting into the house now.

"What's he doing with paper under water?"

Someone inevitably muttered, "Trying out his new ballpoint pen."

"Cut it out," the cop said. "Now, look, when did you first see him hanging around out there?"

"No one did, so far as I know. Anyone see him?" Joe asked the remaining guests. No one admitted seeing McGhee — if it was McGhee. "We didn't see him come," Joe stated patiently, "we didn't see him fall, we didn't see him at all until we found him in the pool. Whoever he is."

"With that window, how could you miss?" The window brought the pool practically into the living-room and the policeman justifiably jerked an irritable thumb in its direction.

"The curtains were drawn. They weren't opened until a minute or two before the body was discovered. The party here was an unveiling."

The policeman looked at the semi-clad young people clustered around him and said, "Yeah." He scratched behind his ear with his pencil. "When ja last take a look at the pool?"

"When we were done filling it around ten this morning. Then my wife and I came in, decided on the party, and I began preparations while she roamed around inviting people. I had to take time out around noon for a luncheon appointment, and after that there wasn't time or need to check the pool."

"Maybe the folks next door saw him."

"There's no one there," a blonde with a soft Virginia voice confided to us all. "Since his Mama died, George Henry's been stayin' with his Aunt Martha out past Mount Vernon, and he hardly ever comes into town except when there's some estate business or for a party his Aunt Martha approves of. She keeps him on an awful short rein like she hadn't heard yet George Henry's full grown and a property holder since his Mama left the house and everything to him. But till he sells it, the only ready cash he can get is from her — so he has to please her."

The cop went down at least three times under this flood of information.

"Even the shutters are bolted," Joe Stannard said.

This concise statement made the policeman happier. "You got a back gate?"

"It's bolted, too," Joe told him morosely. "Unless the fellow climbed our back wall or came through Car-

ter's hedge, I don't see how he got near enough to the pool to fall in."

"You hope it's that hard. I heard talk some people think that pool's dangerous."

"Come see for yourself. You haven't as yet bothered to view the body." Joe was getting as irritated as the policeman.

"We'll see it all right, and plenty more, too, before we're done."

"Plenty more bodies?" I asked interestedly.

"Cut it out, wise guy."

"I wouldn't say," Cora stated judiciously, "that Mr. Bonnamy is wise, but he is experienced — as a detective. There's always a murder when he's around."

That did it. Thereafter, until the lieutenant in charge of homicide arrived, the window fancier's attention was firmly fixed on me, the nearly invisible detective.

The lieutenant and his crew did a distinctly more professional job of investigating. When, at last, the late Hamilton McGhee was hauled out of the water, it developed that the dead lobbyist had indeed gone through Carter's hedge. His face was scratched and bits of box leaf and stem were still caught in his hair and stuck in his shirt collar and under the buttons of one cuff. The paper he held had, however, slipped aggravatingly out of the corpse's grasp just as it surfaced. It floated soddenly to the bottom.

Rosemary rejoined us, very demure in a neat little blue linen dress. "Why," she wailed, "did I change my swim suit? Somebody has to dive for that letter. It's probably a suicide note. And you policemen aren't dressed for your work. One of you get it for them. You, Julian," she commanded.

She meant the athletic Adonis in the palm-tree trunks. He looked like a swimming coach and he certainly swam like one, diving promptly and beautifully. Unfortunately, he so ruffled the waters that the paper undulated across the bottom, sliding away from the diver's grasping hand. He came up for air, dived again, and missed again. I felt faint surprise that this aggressively masculine specimen should be the interior decorator who did over the Carter house for "dear Mady." Really an outdoor boy, but he missed the third time and had to come up to ask, "Anybody got any diving goggles?"

"That paper is going to be mighty legible, yes, sir!" Stannard and the homicide man shook their heads in grim unison. "Soaked in water and now rubbed on concrete."

"If it's written with permanent ink, I swear it will be readable and I should think a business man like McGhee would use permanent ink," the voluble little blonde assured everyone. "I know about it because I saw the most amazing demonstration in the ten-cent store only last week. Aren't the demonstrators there the most fascinating things? I declare I just can't pass them by, and this one showed you almost had to take a blow torch to burn off that permanent ink. It's

there to stay, he kept saying, and he certainly convinced me, so I can tell you I've been mighty careful ever since what I write down!"

But the blonde's words caused a sudden splashing all around us, inspiring a half-dozen swimmers to bring up that tantalizing sheet of paper. We could see it was beginning to disintegrate into barely connected ribbons. In the end, it was Julian who rescued it, and laid it, a wad of pulp, at the police lieutenant's feet.

"Sorry it's in such a state, but it was hard to get a grip on. Literally gauze by the time I touched it." He wasn't exaggerating.

The lieutenant didn't swear. He considered the blob and said, "Either cheap paper, or old and dry to fall apart that fast."

"Old paper!" The blonde's eyes widened with excitement. "That's what it was! I declare you're the smartest man. To see right off it was an autograph letter. Everybody knows the Carters had old letters from just everybody, and George Henry told me himself he calculated they were worth more than the house probably, and it was just a crying shame his Mama left them to the Society for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, because he'd a lot rather have the house go to the Society instead. So maybe that Ham McGhee broke in to steal some of them before the Society came for their boxes — just boxes and boxes George Henry said — and hearing someone coming he ran out through the garden and not knowing this new pool was here, he pitched his head right on the bottom and was drowned."

The homicide man drew a long breath. Then as he reflected on all the little blonde had said, he exhaled quite cheerfully. "Not bad. What's your name, young lady?"

"Mary Jane Wayne," she cooed, as the dove to the eagle. "Next to G-men I think policemen are the most thrilling he-men."

Her name and comment had a horrid little rhyme that stuck in my head long after the case itself was almost forgotten. Mary Jane Wayne!

The lieutenant grinned at Miss Wayne. "Next to the G-men is where we'd better get. They can tell us how old the paper is, and maybe decipher a word or two or part of a signature. If it was one of the Carter papers and the autopsy shows he died by drowning — Okay if we take him away now, Doc?"

Dr. Hazlitt was as crisply authoritative with the policemen as he had been submissive with the massy matrons. "Set him up for me, boys. I'll be along shortly to do the PM." He turned to his hostess. "Just when I expected a pleasant afternoon. I do so enjoy seeing those women riled. Your house is perfect, Rosemary — for *that* purpose," he concluded impishly.

"I don't know about your house, Rosemary." Mary Jane Wayne shook her blonde curls dubiously. "But your party was simply divine! I declare I don't see how you managed it, having

the most exciting things happen and those picturesque policemen here and such good punch, too, not that I'm mad about punch as a general thing since it's hardly more than fruit juice and ginger ale most places, but I do think it might have been better if you had let Julian put some of his utterly gorgeous old pieces in your house instead of that lopsided furniture you have now, though I will say the color scheme he worked out for you is positively as delicious as your punch."

"Thank you, Mary Jane." Rosemary's control was admirable.

Julian took the blonde firmly by the arm. "Let's leave on that happy note. Heaven knows what you'll say next. Not," he admitted, "that I mind. Your unpredictability is the secret of your hold over me."

"Oh, you!" She rolled her big eyes at him and ran offstage right toward what I deduced must be the women's dressing-room, since Julian sauntered off to the left.

"Tidy and proper," I told Mrs. Stannard.

"And lots of good big towels. Very luxurious we are. And peaceful now that everybody's gone." She let out a little sigh and leaned against Joe. "Or almost everybody." She nodded across the pool.

The window fancier was left on guard there. He came up now to say darkly, "With a window like that you can see anything that goes on in that living-room or whatever you call it. Eat there too, don't you? Maybe this fellow seen something. That he shouldn't. So it was curtains for him as well as the window." He suddenly got his own joke and slapped his thigh in merriment.

Cora stared balefully at him. "Herbert, when you were my paper boy, you always left my paper right out in the rain, instead of tucking it behind the shutter. Your police work is as sloppy. Bonnamy, you'd better keep an eye on this situation. I don't like it."

"Really, Cora —" I began.

My wife, my beloved, betrayed me by interrupting to murmur, "It's really a very pleasant place to my middle-western taste. I feel more at home than I do in the finest historic house."

"Mavis!" Cora could hardly believe her ears.

"You lamb!" Rosemary hugged her. "You could stay here, our first guests, practically living in the pool. After Joe changes the water."

It was so decided, by the two young women. Mavis, I think, was a little concerned for the Stannards, but felt their troubles would be cleared up in a day or two. So why not stay that long? I was in no position to argue. An inexperienced husband seldom is.

In the interim we were active — bringing our car and bags from the place where they were parked near Cora's, settling into the guest room, having a supper of sorts — but we were there beside the pool again when dusk closed in. It was one of those mauve-to-deep-purple dusks that sometimes make an Alexandria eve-

ning magical. So magical the cop on guard looked, when he stood still, rather like an ornamental statue against the now solid black of the box hedge. More, atmosphere alone cannot do.

The maid was escorting someone to the terrace. It was Dr. Hazlitt again, his pupils big as an owl's in the dimming light, his laughter very like an owl's hooting.

"Had to tell you. Funniest thing in my time as Coroner. The old girls won't like it. Not a bit they won't. Because your fancy modern pool wasn't responsible for McGhee's death." He hooted again. "You know what I found? Hidden in the hair over his left ear?"

"The Kohinoor diamond," Cora said, annoyed.

"Better than that, Cora. The old girls will have a fit. You, too, Cora. I found a bullet hole. McGhee had a bullet in his brain, a most remarkable bullet." He wagged a merry finger at her. "You know what kind? A hand-molded Eighteenth Century bullet — a real antique."

The Stannards, Mavis, and I burst into delighted laughter. Cora glared at all of us. "Preposterous!" I think she began, then, to be uneasy.

"I agree, I agree," the doctor rubbed his hands in pleasure, "with your estimate. But I'm a gun collector myself and I saw instantly what it was."

Rosemary gloated, "Killed by an antique, and we don't own one of any description. Oh, my beautiful, functional new homestead! Not an old gun in it."

"Houseful of 'em next door," Hazlitt said. "Every kind of piece, big and small, *and* bullet molds with sample bullets, crucibles, lead ingots, powder and ball, powder horns and flasks — the finest collection in Northern Virginia. Even a sundial gun in the garden."

"What's that?" I asked.

"A little salute gun — use only powder in it, enough for a good bang — that goes off at high noon when the sun is in position for a burning glass to focus its rays on a fuse that runs to the gun's touch-hole."

"Couldn't that have been turned on McGhee some way when the murderer wasn't anywhere near the scene of the crime?"

"The barrel isn't rifled. Only saw one that was. Carter's is good only for powder. Anyway, how you going to get McGhee to sit still in exactly the right spot until the sun gets ready to fire, eh?" He dismissed my idea. "I always wanted one of those gadgets. Julian had one in his shop some months back and I was dickering for it, when a Texas tourist with a wad bought it at Julian's price. Fellows like that ruin collecting for a poor man like me."

"I'd still like to examine it," I insisted.

"Come along. But you don't know guns and you never met McGhee, did you? As I told you earlier, he was one of those busy men. So busy they never have time for anything important."

The cop on watch had to bow to the Coroner's authority and allow us to slip through the hedge. I almost ran to that intriguing sundial, but found its barrel had not been fouled — or cleaned either. There were the crumbled fragments of a dead leaf in there, and plenty of the gritty grime the power plant's smokestacks waft down on old Alexandria. But I swore the odor of powder still clung to the burning glass. The doctor, sniffing, was half-inclined to agree with me when we heard a muffled report.

"Gunfire!"

"More likely backfire," Cora said. "You're all getting jittery."

But she ran with the rest of us back into the Stannards' garden and through their house to the front door. Of course, I would bark my shin on a marble seat in the Carter garden. It sat in a niche cut in the hedge and I didn't see it. So I lagged behind the others who had all halted at the big front door and were craning down at something lying at their feet. None of them paid the slightest attention to the maid shrieking in the exact middle of that Grand-Central-size living-room, but her bawling kept me from hearing what they were saying, so not until I saw it, did I know what lay there.

Slumped very dead on the Stannards' front stoop was a man in a rumpled linen suit, a brief-case beside him. From a hole in his forehead, a very small hole, the blood trickled gently down his face.

The doctor quickly squatted to see if there was any life in the man. "Gone that fast." Hazlitt pushed his glasses back up on his nose. He was sweating so profusely they had slid down when he stooped. "Old friend, old friend," he said and patted the dead man's leg with moving affection.

"Not of mine!" Rosemary's voice shrilled so, that Joe put a quieting arm around her. "Dead men I never saw before all around my house. In back, in front —"

"Take it easy, girl."

"Strange men would be bad enough, but strange dead men —"

"Not strange to me," Hazlitt said sadly. "It's Archibald Stainer, the lawyer. Known him since I was a kid. We grew old together, playing chess regularly, playing golf, duffers at both games, so we enjoyed ourselves. Hey!" He darted suddenly toward the far side of the Carter House which ran to the corner, yelling back at us, "Murderer couldn't get far. Scatter and look for him. Didn't hear a car."

Joe scrambled into his convertible with me beside him and we cruised a two-block radius turning a spotlight on the sidewalks, into passageways between houses, down alleys. Not a soul moved in that area. The shot was so muffled, it had not, thank goodness, drawn the crowd I would have expected in Alexandria. So there were no hordes of people with whom the murderer could mingle. There was also no visible murderer.

When we finally pulled up before Joe's door again, Mavis and Cora were bravely on guard by the body, Rose-

mary in the house telephoning for the police. Dr. Hazlitt had not yet returned.

Cora's teeth were chattering in that hot night. "Praise God you're back. I keep thinking the murderer has his gun pointed right at me, through a chink in those shutters." She motioned toward the dark Carter Mansion.

"Bullet looks to be too small a caliber to do you much harm unless you get it squarely through the head," Joe said in awkward kindness.

Instinctively, Cora ducked.

Rosemary, in a kind of daze, stood behind us. She asked plaintively, "What was he doing at our door? We had no business with him. We don't know him, do we, Joe?"

"Rosemary, listen to me." I gripped her shoulder to get her attention. "I don't think he *was* at your front door. He was at Carter's." The two houses, like most of those in the old part of Alexandria, were built with their façades flush with the sidewalk in London town-house style. They had a common wall between them and their stoops were side by side at street level, the Stannards' door being on the right side of their house, Carter's on the left. "A person shot while standing at Carter's door might very well topple sidewise onto your front step."

"He could have, couldn't he?" Rosemary clung happily to the idea.

Dr. Hazlitt trotted up, puffing, just as the police car pulled in at the curb. Across the street another car halted fast and its occupants in high curiosity ran across to us almost before the police could climb out of their conveyance. It was Julian and his diminutive blonde, chatting as she came and not at all winded.

"I told Julian we ought to stop back on our way home from the movies — the most wonderful picture with that wicked James Mason giving me the most delightful shivers, though I wouldn't exactly want him around in real life, preferring polite southern boys like Julian — and seeing he's George Carter's best friend and practically promised to look after things at the house I thought it was simply his duty to come by and see if anybody else had been killed and I declare —" she let out a belated little shriek — "if somebody hasn't been killed again! Oh, Julian!" She buried her face in his shirt front.

"Nobody," he corrected her absently, "can be killed 'again.' Only once." His smoothly muscled physique seemed to shrivel as he stared down at Stainer. He shook his head as if to make the pathetic corpse vanish from his view. But it lay irrevocably there on the flat stone.

The homicide man was saying to Dr. Hazlitt, "Getting snappy in your old age, Doc. Arriving on foot before we telephone you."

"I've been here all the time. Out in the garden with the Stannards and their friends when we heard the shot. They're in the clear."

"Fine, fine!" the lieutenant said. "Leaves us no suspects at all. Young

Carter's in Warrenton where he's been since noon. Went to a wedding right after he banked McGhee's check for the Carter house and contents. So McGhee actually owned the joint. Stainer handled the legal end of it for him. Maybe he can give us a lead."

"No, he can't," the little Coroner said sharply. "Didn't they tell you who's dead?"

"Mrs. Stannard reported a strange man dead on her doorstep. It's not —" The lieutenant looked to see and grasped the bad news fast. "Old Stainer. That's just fine." He thereupon stated at length how fine it was, swearing with eloquence while he wiped his face with his handkerchief.

"You idiots!" Cora denounced us all. "Standing there on big lead feet while the murderer is hiding right in that house, listening to every word. I can *feel* someone listening!"

My own skin had for some minutes been crawling in a way that has given me sound warning in other cases I've investigated. I'm aware that it's a most unscientific tool for a detective to use, so I try to ignore it. But as Cora spoke, I felt with unpleasant conviction that someone was listening, whether in or out of the house, I couldn't say.

"See if Corbett's still on duty back there and give him help if he needs it," the homicide man instructed one of his subordinates. Then, as the remaining policemen and Dr. Hazlitt moved toward the Carter front door, I pushed Mavis and pulled Cora back against the Stannard house, and Joe shielded Rosemary with his own stocky body. Julian left Mary Jane Wayne to shift for herself while he followed the cops.

"That's funny," he called back to us. "There's a key in the lock!"

It was carefully powdered for prints and showed only a fragment of one which they speedily identified as Stainer's. Then the lieutenant and Hazlitt both tried to use the key to unlock the door. They tried with trying persistence, while my nerves drew tauter and tauter. Julian also volunteered. "I'm used to old hardware." But he likewise failed. I wished we had Shane with us. He's really expert at manipulating locks.

"Must be the wrong key," Julian excused his failure. "There used to be dozens of old keys around the place. Maybe George turned over the wrong one."

"Any other way to get into that house?"

"Back door and side door."

I wanted to yell at them, "Break down that one, if necessary. Smash in its hand-carved paneling as you would an ordinary door. Or break one of those beautiful old sidelights and reach through to turn the knob. What if they are amethyst glass? Hurry! Hurry!"

But no, they elected to try the side door. That was on the far side and gave on the cross street. Julian warned them, and a good thing, too. "If there's any monkey business about old guns in this mess, better

try the back door. There's a jamb gun on the side entrance. It might be loaded."

"What in time is a jam gun?" I had an idiotic image of a new gadget for spraying marmalade on toast.

Julian and the Coroner both started to explain, but the young antique dealer *cum* decorator deferred respectfully to the old gun collector. Hazlitt said, "A jamb gun was a mid-Nineteenth Century device for protecting a house — a small percussion gun that screwed onto the door jamb and fired in the face of anyone attempting to enter illegally."

"And I," Mavis said, "thought ours was the gadget century."

"My dear girl, the Eighteenth Century had dozens!" Julian protested. "My favorite is the shoofly chair." While we all followed cautiously in the wake of the authorities, he explained, "It's a low rocker equipped with a mechanism that waves paper streamers over the head of the occupant as he rocks. They chase the flies away."

"I could use a gadget," I said, "for brushing bullets away." My mind was puzzled as well as worried. Why didn't Hazlitt think to give warning of that jamb gun? He was well acquainted with the Carter gun collection.

They broke in the back door without rousing any gunfire and found the jamb gun indeed loaded and cocked — and wiped clean of fingerprints. But more than the gun was wiped. Every floor in that house had been gone over with a dust mop and every piece of furniture shone, though they said the house had been unoccupied for weeks. Months, in fact.

"I declare I just can't imagine George Henry Lee Carter going around with a dust mop to pretty the house for someone that wanted to buy it, especially for a crude creature like that Ham McGhee because George Henry was just brought up by his Mama and his Aunt Martha to think any kind of menial work was below a Carter, even for a million dollars, and George Henry was a Carter if he was anything and not inclined to pay any mind to the house if it fell down around his head." The voice was the voice of Mary Jane Wayne.

"Don't be silly." Julian stood frowning at the dustless dining-room floor. "George didn't clean it. He wouldn't so much as pay to have it cleaned. The last time I was here it was gray with dust and I said I thought he ought to have my Mamie in for a day anyway, but McGhee was driving such a hard bargain George swore he wouldn't lay out five dollars on the place. Probably didn't have the five anyway."

Gingerly, their guns out, the police searched the Mansion, opening closet doors with a sudden jerk — "Mady had them built in when the house was done over," Cora was saying apologetically, "not in period, really" — swinging doors smartly shut to make sure no one lurked behind them, ransacking the Stygian cellar and the musty attic. They found no one folded

up in a trunk or thrust down a barrel. In the hall stood several big cardboard boxes of papers, waiting to be collected by the "Society." They were the only things in the place the mysterious duster had not bothered to brush off.

The heat seemed to hit Cora suddenly. At any rate, she began to search in drawers and cupboards for our murderer. It gave me the creeps to see her yank out a desk drawer, turn it over, and scrutinize the bottom, as if the murderer might be flattened out and pasted down there. She turned out drawers in a pair of chests, in the sideboard, and in the console in the hall, though that last drawer wasn't a foot square nor more than three inches high. She flung wide the doors of a secretary and frowned at its shining interior of stacked drawers and ranked pigeonholes. I was glad the rest of our party had followed the cops upstairs and only Mavis and I witnessed this madness.

Cora pointed an indignant finger at the secretary's innards. "You see that?" she demanded.

"I don't see anything startling."

"Then you don't know much about antiques." She sniffed, and when the others finally came downstairs, Cora yanked me by the arm and muttered, "Come with me to the cellar. I won't brave that gloomy place alone, but I have to look for something there."

Trusting the police search had been thorough when they started from the bottom and worked up, I led the way through those catacombs, ducking under low brick archways and dodging around a half-dozen vast, empty wine vats. I got cobwebs on my face, a smudge of dirt on my best gabardine suit, and a second wicked crack on the shin from a protruding board, all so Cora could peer into an empty barrel in the farthest reaches of that black pit and exclaim, "I thought so!"

"Is there something missing?"

"Nothing that wouldn't fill a barn," she asserted mysteriously.

Upstairs, Dr. Hazlitt was intently helping the police go through the Carter gun collection in search of a weapon fired recently. They would probably be at it all night, since the doctor took time to exclaim over and explain about each and every weapon. The homicide man — whose name was suitably Haggard, Cora had told me — was talking to our friend the window fancier and a vociferous old fellow.

The old fellow shouted, "Nobody went by me. Not by me. I'm watchman there and I *watch*. I been watchman at Jake more'n twenty year, and my word is as good as my bond. You know that, Lieutenant. Last few days I been watching that alley especially. Tonight I kin swear nobody went along it, not so much as a rat!"

The guard at the pool was equally emphatic. No one had slid past him or tossed a weapon into the pool. He had had presence of mind not to follow us when we ran through the Stannards' house, but had stayed at his post with more will-power, I think, than he knew he had in him. The far side of

the Carter Mansion, as I have explained, was the street side and Joe and I could report no one had run along that cross street.

Haggard was disgusted. "Fine, fine! Now it's established there was no murderer here. Stainer shot himself and then disposed of the gun."

"Unless," I offered, "your murderer is still hidden in that box hedge. It's big enough to conceal a man — and an arsenal of weapons." Before I was done, three policemen ran out of there to frisk the hedge.

Julian Maxon and Cora both turned angrily on me. My ex-landlady said, "I never heard anything so idiotic."

Julian shook his head. "Now those oafs will go crashing through that boxwood and simply ruin it. And you know how slowly box grows."

"I didn't, until now."

"What does he know?" the young antique dealer irritably asked Cora.

"Not much, beyond a man named Shane who really is a detective. Frank just trots around after Shane, like a cross between Dr. Watson and Old Dog Tray."

Haggard had been listening. "We could use a really smart joe, if there's one around." He turned to say to the doctor, "Look, Doc, could you tear yourself away from those guns long enough to do the PM? We don't know for certain he has an old bullet in him, too."

"*Very* small bore," Hazlitt said, and put his head down. "I can't do the one on Stainer, Lieutenant," he mumbled. "Get the Assistant Coroner to do that one, will you? Too much for me."

The men all seemed embarrassed by this display of feeling, and to change the subject, I said, "To whom it may concern, I can report Shane is attending a conference in Washington."

Cora had kicked off her shoes to ease tired and heat-swollen feet. Hurriedly, she pulled her slippers back on again and went to the nearest mirror to inspect her face and hair. Shane has that effect on women of all ages. He is always so immaculately turned out, they feel impelled to match his perfection. Then and only then, they think, can they strike a warm spark in his cool gray eyes. Actually, though, he likes to see a pretty woman a little wind-blown and rumpled.

"Why didn't you say hours ago that Shane was around?" Cora demanded of me. "He'd have this all cleared up by now."

"He's not that good," I told Haggard. "She just thinks so because he's handsomer and suaver than we are — and a lot older, too, may I add? A college professor who dresses like a diplomat and thinks like a dick. Should I call him?"

"What can we lose?" Haggard shrugged. "This thing is way out of my line. Give me a simple knifing and I do all right."

"You're doing all right," I insisted.

"I'm not!" Cora asked the lieutenant politely, "Will you let the Bonnamys walk me home to get cleaned up? I can't face an all-night session in this dirty dress."

"You can't face Shane, you mean," I said.

"Cora primping for a man!" Rosemary was astonished and delighted. "He must be something."

"You," Cora warned her, "will have your compact and lipstick out two minutes after he gets here, and Joe won't mind. That's how good Shane is." With that, she hauled us out of there, saying almost before we were through the door, "I can tell Shane the motive, and hand him a suspect, but he'll have to figure out how the two murders were done. Because my suspect wasn't there."

"Ssh!" Her reckless statement made my hair stand up. "Don't say things like that out loud, Cora. Do you want a hand-molded Eighteenth Century bullet in you before Shane can get here? Your voice carries farther than you realize. Good Lord!" I looked nervously behind us and it seemed to me every sizable tree trunk concealed a skulking murderer.

In old Alexandria there are street lights only at the corners, though the blocks are long and heavily shadowed by trees. Besides, the corner light is usually a single dim fixture swinging high over the middle of the crossing. Not an antique lighting system, but nearly so. It is particularly inadequate where pavements are old uneven brickwork and the gutters cobblestones laid by Hessian prisoners during the Revolution. Picturesque but precarious footing. Mavis, unused to such going, tripped twice. Since I was peering over my shoulder for someone padding after us, I didn't catch her quickly enough the second time, and her ankle took a bad twist. Fortunately, it wasn't sprained.

When a car roared up beside us, I jerked unmanfully. But it was only Julian Maxon and Mary Jane in his convertible, top down. He was taking her home with the full and understandable consent of the cops. "Can I drop you off?"

"We're there, after all, Julian." Cora's door wasn't twenty feet away.

"Can I run over to Washington for your friend, so we can get the mastermind speedily to work? I've got to do something. That's a mess back there."

"Shane can take a cab," I said. "You go back and defend the hedge." He gave me an insulted glare and trundled his car away from there.

Certainly I was not distinguishing myself for wit, sense, or quickness this evening. I let my bride wrench her ankle, Maxon ruffle me over the boxwood, and Cora beat me to a solution, if an incomplete one, of a double murder that happened almost before my eyes. I was also bothered by a vague sense that someone had dropped a remark revealing guilty foreknowledge, but I couldn't think who.

"He looks too well in swim trunks," I said petulantly. I'm somewhat scrawny. "And is a stronger man than I am to endure that Mary Jane Wayne."

"He is also an authority on old furniture and can back up what I have to tell Shane — if he'll do it. He's devoted to George and besides it might

cost him half his customers to say anything against a Carter. I don't know —"

"Furniture!" The woman was obsessed with the subject.

When we had finally located Shane and bullied him on his way to help us, she amplified her statement. "That house," she said darkly, "is full of reproductions." From her look, a murderer in the house was a minor matter in comparison. "When Mady died, they were originals — incredible rarities, some of them. The secretary was a Philadelphia piece with a fretted bonnet, spiraled flame finials, and a bust of Washington carved out of wood on the center pediment. The General actually autographed it with a stylus. In absolutely original condition, which means," she informed me irritably, "that a good part of the interior was unfinished. That thing there now is a modern piece." That explained her dramatic flinging wide of the secretary doors. "Have you," she asked us, "any idea what the original secretary would be worth to certain collectors?"

"No," I said meekly.

"Eight to ten thousand."

"Dollars?" Mavis asked incredulously.

"Of course! There were a pair of signed Goddard chests that somehow got down here from New England, a console Adam specifically designed for that house when George Henry Lee Carter —"

"The One, we presume."

"Who else? — was in London and met the great architect. The Sheraton sideboard, the Chelsea bird dessert service, the Sully miniatures — Heaven knows what all."

"What," I wanted to know, "was in the barrel in the basement?"

"Amelung glass, that's all!" Cora's indignation was mounting. "A complete set in the same pattern as the one presented to the Masonic lodge here when Washington was a member. Twelve dozen glasses!"

It had been a big barrel. "Worth, at a rough estimate?"

"An ordinary piece of Amelung brings twenty-five dollars. These were a distinctive pattern, worth at least forty apiece. You figure it out. But there must be fifty thousand dollars in antiques missing from that house."

Mavis whistled. "How could anyone heist all that?"

"Piece by piece," Cora said, suddenly vague.

"You can't stick a highboy under one arm and saunter out of a house."

"No."

"It must have been an inside job."

"Yes."

"How long a time was McGhee dickering with young Carter?"

"A month, six weeks, I don't know."

"During a period when people wouldn't pay much attention to trucks pulled up. They'd say, 'You know, settling Mady's estate must be a complicated business'; and think no more of it. Or they might assume building materials or furniture were being delivered to the new Stannard house.

They were just finishing their place."

"Yes." She refused to say more.

Well, they stick together, those old Virginians, and George Henry Lee Carter was the fourth of that name. Compunction had at last caught up with Cora and made her so unhappy that she forgot Shane was on the way, kicked off her slippers again, and paced the library in her stocking feet, hugging herself in a gesture of acute misery. "Such a nice boy," she muttered once. Later she revealed the crux of her worry by saying, "Caught in a fraud. A cheat."

"I don't see how anyone can steal from himself," Mavis complained.

"That's not quite the situation." I began explaining, since Cora was not in the mood. "Cora seems to be afraid the best pieces were still in the house when McGhee bid on it. The fellow didn't really know antiques, and thought it safest to buy them by the historic houseful. Then, on the assumption McGhee would never notice the difference, first-rate reproductions were substituted before he could take possession. But some way he caught on, and threatened legal action the minute he walked into that house. He went out to call Stainer right away about it, and then came back to the house for some reason. When, we don't know precisely, or why. But before noon, I have a reason for insisting. After McGhee was killed, Stainer, too, came to the house to check up on something he knew before informing the police of his suspicions. That's about it, isn't it?"

"Don't talk about it."

But when Shane appeared, at his distinguished best in a raw silk suit the very gray of his hair and mustache, she talked about it, prolixly and sadly. After we had recovered from the shock of his necktie. Speechless, Mavis pointed to it, and Shane put a surprised hand to his tie knot.

"What's so startling about it? Handsome but restrained, I thought."

"The coincidence is too much."

"How can a necktie be coincidental?"

It was, though, being a hand-blocked job in a pattern of old pistols and fowling pieces, steely gray against an old-blue ground. Everyone that night was jolted by Shane's necktie, including the murderer.

"I came," Shane said, "because Bonnamy hinted Cora might be in some danger, since she knew too much. Nothing else would draw me into your quaint mess." That thawed Cora. "Hand-molded Eighteenth Century bullets, for St. Christopher's sake! Now, talk, Cora my love, and talk fast to save your life and my valuable time."

When she was done, and I had also reported my observations and surmises, Shane nodded. "You suspect some sort of antique booby-trap, less obvious than the jamb gun, but on that order?"

I argued, "The fact the jamb gun was readied shows the killer thought in those terms. Some way I think he used that sundial."

"Could be," Shane agreed. "He

also seems to think in substitutions. So he may have substituted a more accurate and useful barrel for the one that belonged in the Carter gadget. Then, if he could arrange for McGhee to put himself in the line of fire —"

I immediately recalled the marble chair, Roman in outline, that I had half-fallen over. Wasn't it in line with that toy cannon?

Shane continued, "— and afterward restore the original barrel. He had hours. You didn't examine it until nearly dark and McGhee was shot at one, if the sundial was used."

"One? It's a noonday gun."

"By sun- time, not daylight saving." He grinned at catching me up. "We'll see if anyone is so smart he has an alibi for one o'clock, but not twelve because he doesn't need it. He's all set to point out the basic fact I just stated when and if the police get suspicious of that sundial. I'm more interested in Stainer's death. There's another Eighteenth Century booby-trap I happen to know about. It might well be found in a really complete gun collection. Come, children. Cora!"

She was slumped in a low chair. "I can't go."

"And I can't let you out of my sight. Besides, you're a big enough girl to have learned not to start what you can't finish. Here, take my arm."

Dr. Hazlitt and the Stannards were still at the Carter Mansion, and Julian Maxon had returned — in company with a newcomer, a dark-skinned young man with girlish eyelashes and a heavy jaw. He was stuck on the protesting phrase, "Now, look here, Haggard —" when we entered. Cora spoke to him, but he was so upset he didn't hear.

Shane and Haggard withdrew for a brief conference. The homicide man returned to ask, "What time did you leave for Warrenton, Carter?"

"Around eleven thirty."

"Where were you at noon exactly?"

"Looking over some horses. Bred by a friend of mine — has a place on the Warrenton road. Mighty pretty Arabians."

Julian warned his friend, "You don't have to answer, George, without your attorney present."

"Don't worry about me, boy," George assured him. "I'm okay for sure."

"You were with your Warrenton acquaintance at noon, then?" Haggard asked.

"Well, no. I didn't bother him. Only pulled up to his fence for a look. Wedding wasn't until two. I had some time. Planned to stop at the bridegroom's to give him a hand, tie his cravat. Got a knack for that. I was there at one — at his place, I mean."

The misery in Cora's eyes deepened. She asked him suddenly, "George, you notice anything different about that secretary there?"

This time he heard her. "Papa's desk?" She might have been asking an authority on Arabians to judge a giraffe. "Looks all right," he said with a vague wave at it, "except somebody's knocked off the General's

bust. Maybe it was loose. Pretty old. Probably around." It was casual enough to be convincing but it didn't make Cora or Julian happier.

"Don't talk too much," Julian warned him again. George nodded.

Shane was standing by a tall Palladian window watching the three policemen with flashlights search the hedge, looking like overgrown fireflies. He asked Haggard, "Could everyone but the Bonnamys adjourn next door under guard? I'd like to go over this house with you, and not entertain a crowd by my antics. Not that I won't miss you," he smiled warmly at Rosemary.

Her face was remarkably fresh and velvety for the late hour. She must have fixed it as Cora predicted.

"Come along, all, and I'll rustle up some food." Her beckoning gesture was an uncanny repetition of the one she had made at the pool — how many hours ago? "You wield your magnifying glass and gather up the tobacco crumbs fast, Mr. Holmes," she urged Shane, "and join us. I'm starving. Aren't you?"

"Ravenous," Shane agreed, with a smile that said he'd like to eat *her*. She actually blushed, Cora snorted, and they all piled out of there. The women would not have been flattered to see the relief on Shane's face, until he noticed the little doctor, still busy with the cases and drawers of guns.

"You go with them, will you, Doctor? I know so little about firearms, you would make me self-conscious in my inspection of them."

That I would like to witness. Shane is as likely to suffer self-consciousness as a tiger yawning in the face of his zoo audience.

"But I do know locks," he muttered when the doctor had departed. "Is there a screwdriver around here? I want to examine that one." That one was a big iron box lock on the heavy front door. Locks are Shane's passion, picking them his favorite pastime. He collects tortuously delicate medieval ones in wrought iron. This Carter lock was a bulky colonial job. "Stainer was standing precisely in front of it, by Bonnamy's reasoning, which isn't bad. Your search," he told Haggard, "makes it improbable there was anyone human around to wield one of those hand guns. So let's look at that lock."

In no time he had it off the door. "Aah!" He held it with such tenderness and satisfaction it might have been his first born son delivered with a big gold nugget in each clenched baby fist.

"What j'find, Prof?" Haggard and the rest of us crowded around him.

"What I was betting I'd find there. Odds not too bad, considering the Carter gun collection, and our suspicion that Stainer walked into a booby-trap connected to the front door. Saw one like this in a museum once. Isn't that a killer?"

"Could certainly be," Haggard said. "How does it work?"

The lock was a snub-nosed little flintlock gun, smaller than the so-called garter or boot gun popular in

the roaring 1840's. Shane said this was an earlier item, built into and so connected with the lock that any attempt to pick it would cause the gun to fire at the intruder through an inconspicuous opening above the keyhole. If the intruder squatted or stooped to do the delicate job of picking, he'd get a bullet in the head.

"Using the wrong key," Shane explained, "would trip the mechanism just as effectively as picking it. It might take a little longer, long enough to cause Stainer to stoop over to see why the key didn't work, and then bang — Fired recently, all right. Smell it." Haggard smelled and nodded.

"We can get a ballistics check on it."

Mavis pulled my sleeve. "Let's get out of here," she urged. "The house is loaded!"

"Wait a second and we'll go with you," Shane murmured. "I want to make a little test. Nothing elaborate." His teeth glittered in a grim smile. "Any old keys around?"

"Big ring full of 'em hanging by the kitchen door."

"We'll pick one of a size to fit this lock, making sure, however, that it won't work. Then I want the one Stainer was handed, the one that killed him."

A bedewed cop came in from the garden. "This what you want, chief?" He handed Haggard the barrel of a miniature cannon. "Found it in the hedge like that fellow said." He nodded at me suspiciously. Shane and the lieutenant in turn flashed a light into the cannon's mouth and nodded.

"From what Bonnamy told me," Shane said, "we may be able to persuade Hazlitt to identify this." Mavis and I stared at each other. What words of mine made him suspect Hazlitt of all people? Silently, we followed the law over to the Stannards.

Our waiting friends were eating enormous sandwiches and playing poker. These commonplace activities — as much as the spare, gleaming modernity of the Stannard living-room — made me feel a thousand miles away from the Carter Mansion.

"Eggs, cheese, and tomatoes in this filling," Rosemary said. "I'm keeping a batch warm for you. Lucky you were so quick. You couldn't have solved it in that time, however. Not even you," she told Shane.

"Part of it, my pretty. Come outside and I'll show you." He moved toward the door, adding, over his shoulder that, "Stainer died simply because he had the wrong key." Agog, they all followed him.

Haggard had his crew of cops turn all their lights on the Carters' big front door. "First," Shane stepped into the circle of light, "we want to demonstrate that anyone with the right key can unlock that door without danger to life or limb. Here, Maxon, you're an innocent bystander. You go through the first part for us. Then I'll handle the more dangerous half of this demonstration myself — the part where Stainer's key is used."

George Carter's friend reluctantly took the key Shane offered him. "This the right key, George?"

The swarthy Carter said, "I guess so. All those old keys look alike to me." That might be the line of defense he'd use for giving Stainer the wrong one. He'd find it harder explaining how he happened to load and set the booby-trap lock *and* the jamb gun on the side door, just in case Stainer got impatient in a hurry.

Maxon nervously put the key in the lock and turned it as gently as if it were made of glass. He had volunteered to try the lock an hour or so ago, but he was oddly frightened now.

"Give it a good twist," Shane urged genially. "Those old locks work pretty stiffly."

"Doesn't seem to be the r-r-right key," Maxon protested.

"Certainly it is. I tested it just now myself. You can't unlock any door standing way over to one side that way, boy." Shane gave him a shove in the small of the back that practically plastered him against the keyhole. The key jiggled in the lock and Maxon screamed. In terror, he flung himself away from the door, and leaned, shaking against the brick house wall. "They set it and tried to kill me! They tried to kill me!"

"Stoop over and open that door, the way Stainer did, being old and near-sighted," Shane ordered remorselessly.

"No, I won't! I won't!" The big husky was crying like a frantic child.

"There you are, Haggard. I think you'll find he's been slipping stuff out of that house ever since Mrs. Carter died. To buyers in other states, so there was never anything in his shop for long. He thought George wouldn't notice substitutions and George never did. But Maxon kept working his little gold mine even after McGhee became interested in the place, sure that crude Yankee wouldn't notice either. McGhee apparently stumbled on some written reference to a piece of Carter furniture, a piece he remembered seeing when he made his original offer. Was that an old cabinetmaker's bill you managed to ruin when you rescued it, Maxon?"

"Tried to kill *me!*" Maxon said in an outraged tone, his eyes closed.

"Your trick gun wasn't loaded."

"You —" Maxon's eyes sprang wide open and in rage he leaped at his tormentor. Shane held him off with surprising ease, and shoved him against the wall.

"That is, not loaded with anything except your fingerprints. You couldn't wear gloves while you were setting that thing. Too awkward. So you took them off to work and tried afterwards to wipe the lock clean. But you missed two prints."

"That's all you know, mastermind." Maxon laughed scornfully. He was still a little hysterical. "I wore gloves, thin silk ones. So there are no prints. You can't trick me with lies."

"The only way I could hope to catch you, Maxon. You're smart," Shane flattered with deadly intent.

"I don't understand yet how you managed to get McGhee to set himself up as a clay pigeon after he caught onto you. How did he?"

"McGhee catch up with me?" Maxon laughed at the notion. It was an unpleasant sound in the night. The barrage of flashlights had begun to draw a crowd, but the quality of that laugh kept the onlookers unnaturally silent. Expansively, Maxon went on, "He believed George was sneaking the stuff out and selling it through innocent me. Tried to bully me into turning George in. My best friend. So I had to kill him. He'd have spoiled everything. I advised him to watch the house from one o'clock on, if he wanted to nab George removing a last few things on the quiet. I told him there was only room for one man to hide — in that niche in the garden, but he could yell over to the Stannards for witnesses. I impressed it on him he'd have to catch George red-handed before witnesses, since it was only his word against a Carter's. He fell for it, too."

Maxon was grotesquely sure of himself, even now.

Dr. Hazlitt, in a broken voice that did not disturb the spell, asked, "Why did you have to kill Stainer, Julian? That summer when you were a crazy adolescent and got into trouble, he helped you, remember? Remember?"

"Only the gravest necessity, I assure you, Doctor." The polite apology was shocking in this connection. "Unfortunately, McGhee told his lawyer I knew something of his mysterious investigation at the Carter house. The whole thing was that odious McGhee's fault. You see that, don't you? I respected Mr. Stainer. Really. When he telephoned — I was dressing for my date — I simply had to tell him I thought he ought to make a quiet investigation of the house himself when the police weren't around. He knew the Carter house well and he could tell if anything was amiss. I said I couldn't in honor help him further, beyond giving him a key I'd had around since before Mady died. I discovered the gunlock when I did the house over. Put it in working order, too. So I simply slipped over and set it on my way to pick up Mary Jane. That lock's a museum piece, but I'll wager George never knew it was there. You really should have more appreciation for your heritage, George Henry. Such lovely old things!"

"You fool," George Henry Lee Carter IV said. "Let's get out of here. I can't stand any more. I've always hated that house and all the junk in it!"

"Why, George Carter, what a thing to say!" Rosemary, astonishingly, was the one who reproved his blasphemy. "It's perfectly beautiful." She stood looking at the lacy fanlight and sidelights that framed the rich paneling of the front door. Then her eyes dropped to that extra hole in the ornate key escutcheon, the hole that was in effect the mouth of a gun, pointing straight at her. With a shudder, she qualified her praise. "But so lethal!"

THE HEAVY SUGAR

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

GEE, the coffee in this dump is sure rank!" Tom Keogh thought to himself, putting down the cup and running a dubious tongue about the lining of his mouth. The stuff tasted as if they'd lowered one bean on a thread into the whole boiler, held it there a minute, then pulled it out again. And if he didn't like it he could leave it there and go somewhere else. They didn't care.

Which was why he sat there nursing it, with both hands around the hot cup. There wasn't any place else he could go, whether he liked it or not. This mug of so-called java had taken his last nickel. The jitney was still in his pocket, the etiquette of cafeterias being what it is, but that punched-out 5 on his check meant it didn't belong to him any more.

Outside it was raw and drizzling. In here there was steam heat — a little of it over in the corner by the radiator, where he was. As long as he could make the coffee last he could stay.

He took another gulp, and this time the flavor was that of an old inner-tube soaked in boiling water. It was scalding hot, which was all you could say.

"That guy over there," he told himself dully, "doesn't seem to mind it. He's going back for more."

The only other customer in the place looked too well-dressed to be drinking terrible coffee in a joint like this. But he had emptied his first cup hastily and gone back to the counter for another. He left the first one where it was, wet spoon sticking up out of the hefty sugar bowl that each greasy table was provided with. When he came back again with the fresh cup he sat down at a different table.

Keogh, watching idly, saw him plunge his spoon into the new sugar bowl, stir it around vigorously, and bring up a little.

"He wants his sugar from underneath, to be sure no dust has gotten on it," Keogh thought, and quit watching for a while. He had his own troubles to think about.

An abrupt movement brought his eyes back that way again in less than two minutes. The guy was on his way back to the counter for a third cup! The second one stayed on the table, still about a quarter full, to judge by the steam threading up from it.

"Maybe his sense of taste is shot!" Tom Keogh thought. On the way back to a table, the fellow shot a glance over him, as if to see whether he was being watched or not. Keogh dropped his eyes. He wasn't afraid to be caught watching, but people don't like to be stared at. He didn't himself.

When he looked again, the other

had chosen still a third table to go to with his new cup. Again he stirred up the contents of the sugar bowl until it threatened to overflow the edges.

This time Keogh watched him closely when he put the cup to his lips. He gulped as though he couldn't get rid of it quickly enough, but there was no real enjoyment on his face. A wry expression, like the one on Keogh's own, accompanied the act.

"Why, he doesn't really want to drink it; he's only pretending to!" Keogh exclaimed to himself. And in addition, he saw, the man was beginning to look worried, tense.

A minute later he saw this peculiar coffee fiend move his cup out beyond the edge of the table, look to see if the counterman was watching, and then deliberately tilt it and let most of the liquid trickle noiselessly to the floor. The counterman went back behind the steam kitchen just then. The night manager, up front by the cash register, had his face buried in a paper and wasn't giving attention to anybody unless they tried to get out the door without paying.

The man with the coffee cup slipped quickly out of his seat and moved to a fourth table, cup and all, this time without getting a refill. Again he churned the sugar bowl hectically, as though he had a gnawing sweet tooth. But the worry on his face was beginning to look like dismay.

Keogh got it finally, just about as quickly as any one else would have, barring a professional detective.

"He isn't interested in drinking coffee!" he told himself knowingly. "He's looking for something in those sugar bowls, working his way around the room table by table!"

He didn't care much for sugar himself. He'd only been interested in getting something warm inside him when he first sat down. He'd just scraped a little sugar lightly off the top of the bowl. Now he picked up his spoon a second time and gripped it purposefully. No reason why he shouldn't join in the treasure hunt himself, and try to find out what the fellow was after.

Maybe it was only a love note left for him by some sweetie with a jealous husband, using a sugar bowl for a post office. The other customer didn't look like a ladies' man, though, and there were better ways than that.

Maybe it was something else, something that wouldn't be any use to him, Keogh, even if he did find it — a little packet of cocaine, for instance. The guy didn't have that pasty look, though. Ugly and tough and healthy described him better. And then again, maybe it wasn't even in here, whatever it was. Maybe this wasn't the place where it was hid at all. Still, there was nothing like taking a crack at it for oneself.

He folded back the metal flap in the lid of the bowl. Waiting until he was sure the other guy wasn't looking at him, he spaded his spoon deeply in. It hit the bottom. He stirred surreptitiously, as he'd seen the other do. The grains of sugar swirled, coruscated under the light, gleamed, twinkled,

all but sparkled. Wait — they had sparkled, here and there!

Little lumps showed up, a whole coil of them. He dredged one out with the tip of his spoon, and all the rest came after it. Sugar rolled off, the lumps caught fire one by one, and he was holding a necklace of priceless diamonds dangling in the air!

For just a split second the light got to it, in all its glory, and he forgot to breathe in or out. Then instinctively he whipped it out of sight into his lap and crouched protectively forward above it, hiding it with the upper part of his body.

He knew enough not to take time off even to stuff it into his pocket. He just had time to slap down the flap of the bowl, before the searching man looked over at him. Had he seen him fish the diamonds out? Keogh looked sleepily down at the floor, seemed to be drowsing over his coffee. The other fellow moved again. Now he was just one table away, facing Keogh.

"He has a gun on him," Keogh thought. "Ten to one he has. He didn't come after a thing like that without one. If he catches on I've already found it, he'll use it on me first, and ask for his trinket back later. If I get up and try to walk out, he may suspect what happened. But if I wait, he'll run out of tables — and then he'll be sure!"

It was hot, of course. Either smuggled or stolen. And it was pretty easy to guess what must have happened. The other had had the necklace on him earlier in the day — no longer ago than that, for the sugar in these bowls was renewed about once every twenty-four hours.

He'd found out he was being shadowed by dicks along the mangy avenue outside. He had to get rid of the gems in a hurry, knowing he was apt to be pinched and caught red-handed with them at any moment. Afraid that if he jumped into a cab or car he'd be overhauled and searched before he could get to some place he'd be safe, he'd popped in here, the first doorway that offered itself, and cached the necklace in one of the sugar bowls in the instant he had before they sized him up through the glass front.

Then when they'd made their pinch and hauled him away, he was clean. They'd had no evidence on which they could hold him, so he'd got himself sprung almost at once. Making good and sure he wasn't tailed a second time, he'd come back here to get his loot. It was a desperate expedient, but not as bad as dropping the diamonds down a sidewalk grating or letting them be found on him.

He'd had to hide the thing in such a hurry, with his eyes on the plate-glass front, that he probably wasn't sure now just which table it had been. Or else he thought the bowls had gotten transposed during the course of the day's hash-slinging. Right now he must be sweating blood!

But Keogh would be doing more than sweating it. He would be bleeding from a couple of bullet punctures if he didn't get out of here pretty

fast, he knew. He'd located the bulge now, under the guy's left arm. It was not very noticeable, but it wasn't just made by a pack of old letters, either!

As for turning the necklace back, walking up to the guy and saying, "Here, I found this and you seem to be hunting for it. I'm hard up. Is it worth forty or fifty bucks to you —" He wasn't that much of a fool.

He might get the fifty, sure, on loan for about five minutes. Then he'd get a couple of slugs in addition at the first dark corner he came to after leaving, just as insurance that he really kept his mouth shut. No, thanks!

The other man had finished dredging the tureen at the table where he was, and Keogh's was the next in line. Fortunately, the counterman had showed up again, and the hunter didn't seem to want to make the move without any excuse. It was easy to see the people in this place weren't in on it with him, and he didn't want to arouse their curiosity or suspicion.

By now he apparently couldn't stomach any more of their putrid coffee, so this time for an excuse he got up and went over to the water filter. And when he came back, it was going to be to Keogh's table.

The riskiest place to carry the diamonds would be the safest in the long run, Tom Keogh decided quickly. Pockets were a dead give-away, and it would take too long to put them in his sock. The water ran out of that cooler into the glass awfully fast, and the outfit was some kind of polished metal that reflected the whole room behind the fellow's back almost as well as a mirror. Keogh couldn't make any suspicious moves. The necklace was bunched up in Keogh's lap, and he had one hand sheltering it sidewise from observation. He gathered it into the hollow of that hand, then tucked it in and folded his fingers down over it without moving another muscle of his body.

Then he yawned, as if coming out of his lethargy. He brought his arms up, elbows out, and stretched in his chair. He kept the backs of his hands turned toward the gunman at the filter. Then he opened his clenched fingers a little, with his hands up in full sight. Not much, but enough to guide the string of jewels in the right direction.

His cuff was baggy and shapeless, as wide open as a firemen's net. He felt the thing go wriggling down his wrist like a cold, rough-edged little snake, and his sleeve swallowed it. It fell all the way down to the crook of his arm, bringing up against his biceps.

He got a good grip on the bottom of his cuff with that same hand, doubling it back on itself and tucking it shut tight around his wrist. Then he brought his arms down again, and yawned.

The necklace dropped right back down his sleeve again, of course, but it couldn't get out. There wasn't any slack left in the cloth now, the way he was holding it. The jewels stayed

in. The awkward position of his fingers was barely noticeable, and then only if you looked closely down at the hand. Most people carry their fingers curving loosely inward a bit anyway, not stretched out stiffly like an Egyptian bas-relief.

The hard guy was coming toward the table with his glass of water. Tom Keogh scraped his chair back, picked up his check with his free hand and sauntered aimlessly toward the cashier. He put the check down, reached in his pants and dug out his last nickel, dropping it on top of the slip of cardboard. The cashier, interrupted halfway down Walter Winchell's column, gave him a dirty look for staying that long on a five-cent check and banged the coin into the till.

Out on the sidewalk, Keogh turned his head slightly and glanced back in. This time the guy was *not* messing the sugar bowl at the table Keogh had just left. Instead he was staring intently at it as if something about it seemed to show it had already been searched.

Keogh struck a quicker gait, but had hardly gotten started when the voice behind him stopped him with a sickening fear. He'd only got one doorway down the street, but luckily that was a good dark one.

"Just a minute, buddy! Hey, you! Take it easy!"

There was a feline softness about the voice, almost a purr, that was somehow more menacing than the loudest shout. The fellow stood revealed for a moment outside the lighted cafeteria doorway, as Keogh turned, then suddenly was standing next to him, without seeming to have moved at all.

"Trouble you for a light, buddy?" he asked, still purring.

Keogh knew better than to run for it. He tapped his pocket half-heartedly. "Didn't they have one in there?"

"Couldn't say, buddy, didn't ask them," was the answering drawl. "Lemme help you look, I'm good at finding things. Just move back a little closer into this doorway, out of the drafts."

There was a maddening quality about that smooth, silky tone of voice. Perhaps it was intentional, to provoke men to their deaths. Keogh, goaded, would have grappled with him then and there, but the gun had come out.

"What is this, a holdup?" he asked bitterly. "I haven't anything on me. Why don'tcha pick some one that ——"

The other's pronunciation became even slower and softer.

"Ju-ust relax, buddy. Don't say anything you'll be sorry for. There's nothing to get excited about."

Keogh didn't argue the point. The other had him now with his back pressed flat against the closed doorway behind him. The gunman held his gun hand back a little, and hidden close up against his own body. You couldn't have noticed what was going on from a yard away.

He threw a quick look up one way, then down the other, but too quickly for Keogh to take advantage of it.

Keogh wasn't in a chancey mood, anyway. Diamonds don't cure bullet wounds.

With his free hand the guy started in at Keogh's outside breast pocket and worked his way all over him. He didn't miss a seam. Keogh was holding his cuff in now by no more than three fingers, letting the others hang stiffly downward. Every second the stones felt as though they were going to come slipping out of their own weight and clash to the pavement beside him. They were bunched there right at the mouth of his cuff, held in only by the slightest of pressure.

"Hunh!" the guy laughed shortly, when not even an Indian-head penny had shown up anywhere in Keogh's clothes. "You're sure flat, all right!" he said, with contempt.

He backed away a step. "Now bend down, undo your kicks, and step out of them!" he ordered.

Keogh did so, desperately hanging on to his cuff and only using two fingers of that hand to do the unlacing. The other didn't seem to notice in the darkness. He snatched up one shoe, then the other, shook them out, tossed them back.

"All right, stick your leg up against the side of the doorway and hoist up the bottom of your pants!" he snapped, crisply now.

He examined the top of Keogh's sock, feeling for bulges. Then he repeated with the other leg. He wasn't missing a trick. The sweat stood out on Keogh's forehead like raindrops.

The stick-up guy stood there for a full minute, swearing deep down in his throat. He searched every spot but the right one — Keogh's bare left hand. Keogh took a chance, just to see if the other would give himself away.

"What is it y' think I've got?" he asked querulously.

But the searcher was too cagy to be tripped. "I'm an anatomy student and I just wanted to see what makes you tick!" he snarled. He was probably remembering that there were still a couple of tables in there with sugar bowls he hadn't searched. And somebody else might walk in while he was standing out here.

"Keep your mouth shut about this if you know what's good for you!" he warned, and turned to go back to the cafeteria.

At that instant the laws of gravity finally had their way. The heavy jewelry at last found the outlet it had been looking for. There was a prismatic flash at Keogh's wrist. The diamonds trickled down over his hand like a jet of water and fell at his feet, glittering even in the faint illumination from the corner arc light. Instantly he put one stockinged sole over the necklace and blotted it out of sight.

The tough guy, still within arm's length, turned and looked back over his shoulder. "Here, mooch," he said jeeringly. "Just to prove that wasn't a holdup." And he flipped a quarter at Keogh. His own footsteps just now must have covered the slight sound the necklace made in falling, for he seemed not to have heard it.

The coin, though, fell far more noisily, and went rolling out of reach. The other went back to the cafeteria without waiting to see Keogh pick it up. Which was a good thing, for Keogh couldn't have moved without uncovering what lay under his foot.

Sweat dripped from his bent-down face onto the sidewalk as he crouched, shoveled on his shoes, scooped the stones into his pocket, and made tracks away from there, without bothering to look for the coin that only a few short minutes before would have been such a life-saver to him.

He was remembering that, although he'd got away with it just now, there were still those two other guys inside — the counterman and the cashier — either of whom might possibly have seen him take something out of the sugar bowl and might mention it if this guy asked them when he went in again. A thing that didn't occur to him until too late was that the quarter he had left lying on the sidewalk would be a dead giveaway if the guy came out looking for him a second time, and spotted it there. Broke, without a red cent on him, and he left two-bits lying there without even stopping to pick it up? A sure sign he'd had those diamonds on him and wanted to get away in a hurry!

Keogh got away from that side of the street, cutting across it diagonally to the next corner. Just before turning up the nearest side street he looked back, from behind the shelter of an empty glass show case on the corner. The hard egg had already come outside again, much faster than he'd gone in.

So one of them had already told him! Maybe they'd only seen Keogh messing up the sugar in his bowl, but that was all the other needed to know.

Keogh saw him stoop and pick something up. The quarter! And now he knew that he'd betrayed himself after all, in spite of the marvelous run of luck he'd had until now. That quarter had been lying in full sight. Keogh couldn't have helped finding it if he'd looked at all.

Now the man with the gun knew beyond the shadow of a doubt who had found those diamonds!

Keogh didn't linger there to watch what his next move would be. He lit down the side street as if devils pursued him, hugging the shadow of the building line, his breath rattling like dry leaves, until he'd put blocks between them. His pursuer must have turned the other way for there wasn't a sign of his being followed.

But the fellow knew what Keogh looked like now. That was the worst of it! He'd be on the look-out for him, and Keogh might run into him when he least expected it. From tonight on his life would be a hunted, haunted misery, with never a moment's peace.

If he kept the necklace, they'd be after him until they got it back. And if he turned it over to the police, they'd still be after him anyway, until they got even with him. Asking the police for protection wouldn't be any good. They didn't worry their heads about drifters like him. Even if

they offered it to him, he couldn't spend the rest of his life sleeping in some precinct-house basement.

And furthermore, if he went near them with these jewels, they might implicate him in the theft. Certainly they'd never believe his story of finding a necklace like that in a hash-house sugar bowl. Nobody would. They'd take him for a go-between who was double-crossing the rest.

Without money, friends, influence, anything to back him up, he'd have a hell of a time clearing himself — and he might not be able to at all. He was beginning to wish he'd never found the thing. For a moment he was tempted to drop it in an ash can. But that wouldn't do any good either. He was stuck with it, and he had to stay with it, come what might.

He trudged along, taking a precautionary look behind him at every crossing, skulking slowly Bowery-ward. Misguided people think that there is a sort of bird-like freedom of movement that goes with destitution and vagrancy. They're entirely wrong. A man with a dollar or two in his pockets has the run of the entire city, no matter what the time of night. No cop can tell him where to go or where not to, provided he minds his business. But a down-and-outer is severely restricted to a few neighborhoods if he wants to avoid questioning and detention after dark.

The parks are closed to him, the police clearing them after midnight. Upon the better thoroughfares like Fifth, Madison and Park avenues, he is liable to be picked up for vagrancy or panhandling. Even on the less savory ones like Third, Sixth and Ninth he is apt to be run in as a suspicious character. There remain only a few refuges for the homeless in New York, in the early-morning hours. Those are the subways, the flop-houses for those who have the price, and the Bowery.

Keogh didn't have a nickel to get into the subway. Anyway, sleepers were being rounded up even there as an aftermath of several recent lush-murders. So there was only the Bowery left, and the Bowery was an old friend of his. He had tramped it many a night.

He knew just where to go, even at this hour, to raise two-bits on the metal links that joined these stones he had found — enough to enable him to hole up in a room in one of the twenty-five-cent "hotels." That would get him off the streets before they caught up with him. He was sure the links must be silver, at the very least. Maybe they were even gold silvered over, or even platinum. He knew better than to show the stones themselves. That was asking for swift and sudden death, on the Bowery.

When Keogh was opposite City Hall Park, he cut across from the West Side, where the thing had happened, and plunged into the blackness under the sheltering El pillars of Park Row. A few blocks north was the Bowery. But he had to find some way of loosening the stones from their

setting before he reached it. Too many prying eyes might be watching up there.

He stopped outside the wire-mesh grating of the powerhouse of the Third Avenue El, on the west side of Park Row. The attendant on the early-morning shift there knew him by sight and had exchanged a word or two with him before now, when he came close to the grating to get a moment's breath of air and found Keogh standing on the other side of it watching the machinery.

Keogh called to him. "Say, Mac, have you got a small pair of pliers I could borrow for a minute? Give 'em right back to you."

"What d'you want with 'em?" the machinist asked suspiciously.

Keogh thought fast. "There's a nail in my shoe killing me," he said. "I can't stand it any more. Just gimme something so I can break it off short."

The mechanic dug a small pair of wire-cutters out of his overalls and passed them through the grating. "Don't walk off with them now," he warned, "if that's what you're thinking of, because you won't get anything on them."

"I'll be back with them in a jiffy." Keogh limped artistically out of sight into the nearest doorway. He took out of his pocket a folded newspaper that he'd picked from a trash can, spreading it across his lap. There was hardly any light to see by, but he couldn't risk doing this where it was any brighter.

He had to feel the links with the tips of his fingers, hardly able to see them. The stones were fortunately all hung from one main chain that fastened at the back of the neck. The metal, silver or whatever it was, was soft and the clippers severed it easily.

Even so, it was almost a half hour before he showed up in front of the lighted powerhouse grating once more to give them back. The machinist's expression showed plainly that he'd been thinking the worst in the meantime.

"What'd you do, try to trade 'em in for a shot of 'smoke'?" he wanted to know sullenly. "Now don't come around here no more, understand?"

But Keogh didn't intend to, if he could help it. All he wanted was a sanctuary, to get in out of the open for a while, where they couldn't find him. Those denuded links of gleaming metal carefully collected in a scrap of newspaper in his pocket would be a means toward that. The loosened diamonds, wrapped up in another piece of paper, were in his other pocket. Once he got into some kind of a room, he could think of a better hiding place for them.

He went walking up Park Row with almost enough wealth in his shabby coat to have bought the street out, and went into the Federal Bar. Unfortunately the pawnshops weren't open now, but they knew him there in the Federal. He wasn't a drinker, but they'd let him sit in the back until closing time more than once on a cold night.

There were only two or three glassy-eyed barflies left at the bar at this hour, but he didn't want even them for an audience. He went all the way to the end and signaled the barman.

The latter sensed a touch, or an attempt to promote a free drink. "Whaddya want?" he asked without moving.

"I wanna show you something," Keogh answered in as low a voice as would serve his purpose. Even so, the three barflies, glassy-eyed though they were, turned and gandered down at him to see what it was.

Keogh turned his back to them when the barman had joined him and nervously took the wad of newspaper out of his pocket. He was under a strain, trying too hard not to let the barflies see, and worrying too much about whether the barman would let him have fifty cents on what he was going to show him. Without realizing what he was doing, he had opened the wrong package! The barman, snapping from professional boredom to electrified incredulity, had a glimpse of fifteen or more loosely massed diamonds in the hollow of the newspaper before Keogh quickly bunched it up again.

The barman's eyes were like half moons. "Wait a minute; what was that again? Lemme see; don't be in such a hurry!"

But Keogh, his face pale at the ghastly blunder, had already crammed them back in his pocket. He didn't attempt to take the other package out now. The least spiffed of the barflies took a tentative step up toward him, to see what had made the bartender goggle so.

Keogh backed away toward the door. "Look real, don't they?" he stammered. "Just glass — found 'em in an ash can just now. Well, so long!"

"Lemme have a closer look. I can tell you if they're glass or not," the barman said craftily. Then as Keogh turned and bolted out he called after him futilely, "C'mon, have a drink on the house! What's your rush?" Hoping to get him cockeyed and roll him if the stones turned out to be real!

Keogh hurried away from the place, cursing himself. Now he *had* to get off the streets in a hurry. He hadn't kidded that barman any. Unlike pearls, it isn't very hard to tell real diamonds from glass, even at a brief glance. The fellow would talk his head off within the next few hours, to any one that came into the place. And the wrong guy might just happen to come in!

Keogh plunged into the next dive, a block up, the Silver Flash. He was known in there, too. The place was empty under the pair of dismal, icy-white reflectors that gave it its name. This time he didn't make any mistake in opening the right package, but his hands were shaking so he could hardly unfold the paper. A man could have all the wealth of Golconda on him and still remain as broke and homeless as ever, he was finding out.

The new barman studied the links

and remained unimpressed. "What good are these to me?" he asked. And then, "Where'd you get 'em?"

"A guy gave 'em to me," Keogh improvised. "Lemme have fifty cents on 'em just until morning. They're silver," he added desperately.

"How do I know they're silver? I ain't in the loan business, anyway." The barman handed the outspread paper back.

The owner had come out from the back while they were talking. He picked up one of the pieces now and looked at it, with a sort of remote professional interest, as though he had once been a jeweler himself or a jeweler's assistant. Then he looked more closely, taking the whole paperful under the light to study them better.

When he came back he said to the bartender, with crafty casualness, "Naw, it's not silver, but give him fifty cents anyway, Joe." They exchanged a look, and the bartender punched the register. The owner had just seen *14K* stamped on the back of one of the links and knew it was white gold.

Keogh, outside with money in his hand, took a deep breath. Now at last sanctuary was within reach! And none too soon. He was giving them — by them he meant the gang involved in the original theft, for, of course, there were more of them implicated than just that one tough who had held him up outside the cafeteria — credit for sense enough to know where to come looking for him.

He hadn't had a cent on him, so the Bowery was the logical place to search for him. But now he could get in out of the open, until morning at least, so let them look! For thirty-five cents he could get a room all to himself.

He went into the nearest lighted doorway that had a sign, "Rooms for Men," over it and got one. He wasn't shown up, just handed a key and told where to find it. He climbed the stairs, the pounding of his heart slowly quieting. The lights were out in the second-floor "reading room," with its long bare tables and benches, like a meeting house, and its two or three newspapers that passed from hand to hand through the dragging, hopeless hours of the day and evening. But he stepped in and found one of the papers, taking it up to his room to see if he could find any mention of the necklace in it.

The story would have been hard to miss. It was right on the front page — "Daring Jewel Robbery in Broad Daylight." At nine yesterday, the day that had ended a few hours ago at midnight, a rich dame had been held up in her West End Avenue apartment, and she and her maid had been tied up and stacked in a closet.

But the details didn't interest him as much as the words — "a diamond necklace valued at $25,000." That was it, sure! But he nearly fell over at sight of the figures staring him in the face like that, in cold print.

Keogh suddenly got all weak and wobbly, his hands became cold and

his knees started to shake. He'd thought vaguely until now in terms of a thousand or two dollars, but the realization that he'd been carrying around twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of diamonds half the night nearly paralyzed him with terror. For long minutes he just sat there on the edge of the crummy bed, panting and perspiring.

All his carefully built-up reasons for not turning the find over to the police collapsed. Let them implicate him. Anything was better than this suspense! The longer he held onto the jewels, the deeper they'd implicate him, anyway. He should have gone right to the nearest station house with them when he'd found them. Now he'd broken the necklace up and sold the settings. But maybe they wouldn't be too hard on him as long as he gave the stones themselves back.

What good would keeping them do him, anyway? If he tried to sell them, he'd probably be arrested in the act, or within a few hours. And he couldn't keep the things hidden around him indefinitely, skulking, afraid of every shadow. That bartender already knew he had them. Pretty soon half the Bowery would know.

With a sudden decision he jumped up, unlocked the door, and ran down the stairs. He had fifteen cents left. He'd tell the cops about it over the phone and then wait for them to come and get him. That took less courage than going to them himself.

There wasn't any phone in the place, and he had to go out on the streets to look for one. That was his undoing. He failed to notice the long, ominous black car parked directly in front of the Federal, the first bar he'd gone into. The Federal's customers didn't usually drive up in cars like that. But his mind was on finding one of those little blue-and-white enamel disks that signify a pay station inside the premises, few and far between on the Bowery, and he missed the significance of the car's presence.

He turned up the other way and finally found a phone in an all-night one-arm joint. It was just his luck it had to be on the open wall, not in a booth at all. And there were a couple of guys within earshot. But it was the only one for blocks around, and he had no choice. He shrank from the idea of hunting up a cop on the beat and telling him. It might be an hour before he located one, and then the cop might turn around and say that he'd caught Keogh with the stones and take all the credit to himself.

Keogh dropped his nickel in and made a protective funnel around the mouthpiece with his hand, to keep what he had to say from those in the room. He asked for Spring 7-3100. He supposed that was the way you did it; he'd never called the police before.

A voice answered, "Police Headquarters," and he took a deep breath, afraid to go on, but even more afraid not to, now that he'd gone this far. He said, "Uh — I wanted to tell you

about that necklace that was stolen from that lady. You know — that diamond one worth twenty-five thousand dollars?"

Another voice got on the wire abruptly, a more authoritative voice. "What about it?" the new voice demanded brusquely, sapping the little self-confidence he had left.

"I — I think I got it," he quavered.

"You think you've got it! Who are you?"

He had visions of cops taking off by plane to land on his neck, while he was kept talking at the phone and the call was being traced.

"My name's Keogh." He hadn't used his given name in so long he actually forgot it for a moment in his excitement! "I — Has it got fifteen diamonds in it? I found it in a sugar bowl up on Eighth Avenue."

He was sweating again, all over, profusely. That sounded terrible. They'd never believe it. They'd arrest him, sure!

"I'm — I mean, I'll be in a room on the third floor front of the Little America Hotel, here on the Bowery." And then, supreme inanity, "Should I wait there for you?"

The voice grew crushingly ironic. "Maybe you'd better."

He hung up and went out. He had forebodings of what his immediate future was going to be like, yet in one way he was strangely relieved. He'd got the damn thing off his mind at last. In five or ten minutes he wouldn't have to worry what to do with it or where to hide it, any more. Even if the cops held him for it, at least those others couldn't get to him.

The inscrutable black car had moved when he got back in sight of his lodgings. It wasn't in front of the Federal any more. Now it was outside the Silver Flash. But he hadn't noticed its position clearly enough the first time to be aware of the change. It never occurred to him that he was in a position to watch himself being traced. To his harassed gaze it was just a car, maybe belonging to some slumming party going the rounds bar by bar.

He turned in at the lighted doorway and started climbing. The second-floor "reception desk" — a board across an open alcove — was vacant and dark now, but that wasn't surprising, considering the hour. He went past it and on up to the third floor.

It was when he got outside the door of his room that something cold came over him. First it was just a sixth sense, with nothing to base it on. Then a couple of the other senses came quickly to support that feeling. His eyes saw a three-sided line of light outlining the warped door. He was sure he'd put the light out when he left just now, for they bawled you out in these places if you didn't. And his ears caught a subdued murmur of voices that rose to a snarl.

"He wouldn't leave it around in here any place. You could look all night and not find it! He must 'a' lamped us coming and powdered with it all over again."

"You heard what that bartender said, din'cha? He saw him come in here! He'll be back. And then there are ways of finding out ——"

But Keogh didn't wait to hear any more. Those weren't the cops in that room, and that was all he cared about! His decision to go out and phone them had saved him from immediate capture, but now he had to flee again. Was there to be no end to this hobgoblin nightmare?

He started backing down the stairs, his heart hammering in his chest, afraid at first even to turn and face the other way for fear of making the steps creak under him. His breath labored in his throat. He would have groaned aloud if he hadn't known the least sound meant his death.

Halfway down he steadied himself against the wall and slowly pivoted, to finish the descent the natural way and get out. But at the turn of the stairs there seemed to be a deeper shadow than there had been the first time, and suddenly it moved, came out behind him, blocked him, spoke. That same soft, maddening purr fell again on his ears.

"Thought I saw you from the car. Reg'lar night owl, ain't you? Well, come on back up. We're gonna put you to bed!"

And the gun was out once more and urging him up ahead of it, boring into the middle of his back. This was the end, and Keogh knew it, and acted it, there in the dark. The first bartender had seen the stones, the second one the links, and now they had him dead to rights. As soon as they got the diamonds from him they'd shoot him.

Repeatedly, as he tottered up that short remaining flight to his doom, Keogh clasped both hands to the lower part of his face in mortal terror, and his jaws moved convulsively as if with hopeless prayers for mercy that he knew it was useless to utter.

A few steps more and, "I've got him," purred the silk-voiced killer outside the door. A sudden square of orange opened noiselessly to swallow the two of them, then was blotted out again.

The blast of gunfire that would signal Keogh's end was a strangely long time coming. Eight minutes passed, and then ten, and the short, sharp, barking coughs of an automatic that would mean they had found the diamonds and had no more use for Keogh, alive, did not come. And then, when the gunfire did come at last, it seemed more prolonged and violent than was necessary to finish off just one helpless man.

One bullet, one muffled explosion from a gun muzzle jammed cruelly into his ear, would have been enough for that. But there was more than one shot, many of them, and they didn't come from within the room itself, but from up and down those long, narrow stairs, shattering the sleeping lodging house awake from top to bottom.

And the shots came from two directions simultaneously, streaking downward from the top of the stairs and

hurtling upward from the bottom, while yellow flashes winked and blinked in the darkness and the booming echoes of the shots rolled back and forth along the corridors.

In the first burst of fiery venom a policeman crumpled in the street entryway, and seconds later the body of a man came hurtling, turning, twisting down from above to join it, like something dropped from the sky down a long chute. He was dead by the time he hit the last step.

There was a deep snarl from below, a sudden rush of heavy feet up the stairs, and the firing went up a flight, retreating along the corridor that led past the room Keogh had hired. The feet came after it, gaining on it. Not a door in the whole ramshackle building opened. Iron bedsteads clashed as bodies ducked blindly under them.

A detective suddenly flattened out at the very top of the stairs, as they went up that last flight one by one, but over his prostrate, bleeding form there passed such a withering hail of light flashes, all going the same way, that nothing could have lived in that dead-end corridor afterward.

The one they stumbled over hadn't. Then they were outside Keogh's room door, which was open again. But before the foremost of them could get to it, a soft feline voice on the other side of it caterwauled, "Y' don't get *me!*" and a single, final gunshot exploded somewhere inside the room.

The soft-voiced one was folded neatly across the foot of the bed, like a clothespin, when they came in and ringed up around him.

"He didn't muff," somebody said sourly. "He should 'a' done it the day he was born!"

There was somebody else in the room, too — Keogh, his eyes pleading with them for release, lashed to the head of the bed with strips torn from a pillow-case. His shirt had been pulled down from his shoulders without being taken off. There were cigarette ashes all over one shoulder, as though he'd tried to smoke without the use of his hands. Somebody slashed the bonds with a pocketknife, and he folded up and groaned.

"Who are you?" a cop asked.

"I'm the guy that phoned you," he said faintly.

They straightened him up again. "What'd they do to you?"

He winced, lifted one elbow, and a cigarette butt dropped out of his armpit, where it had adhered.

"The works, huh?" some one said.

"They held my arm down tight." He showed them a blister the size of a quarter. But he kept writhing, doubling up and straightening out again.

"It can't hurt *that* much," one of the detectives said skeptically.

An ambulance had come for the two of their own who had been hurt. The doctor came in to take a look at Keogh after he'd looked at them.

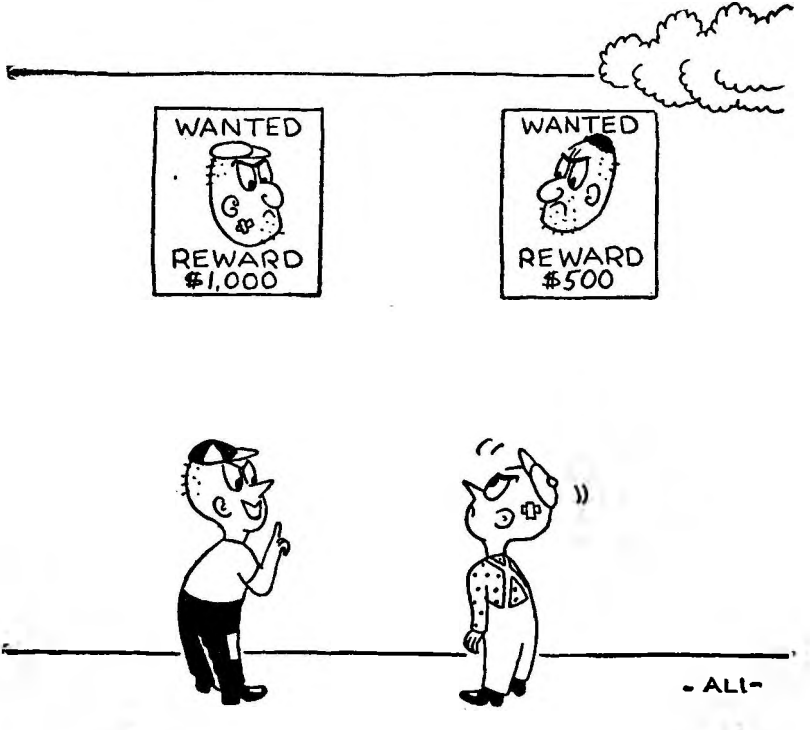
Keogh kept squirming on the floor while they were trying to question him. One of the detectives was getting sore. "Will ya stay still a minute and and answer?" he snarled. "Ya said

ya had 'em! The insurance company's offered a reward, and so has the woman they belonged to. You stand to collect $5,000 if you hand 'em over of your own free will. Now don't make me get rough with ya!"

"I wanna hand 'em over!" protested Keogh weakly, "but how can I? I had to hide 'em and I — oooh!" he groaned then, unable to continue.

The doctor squatted down to examine him. Keogh groaned something into his ear. The doctor got up again.

"One of you run out and buy a bottle of citrate of magnesia," he directed. "No wonder he's got the bends! This man's got fifteen assorted diamonds in his stomach!"



It was inevitable that G. K. Chesterton, one of the most brilliant plot inventors of all time, would tilt his 'tec typewriter at the always challenging problem of the "locked room"; and it was equally inevitable that Chesterton would come up with a unique variation and a terribly ingenious solution. You will find all that and homicide too in "The Tower of Treason," which might have been called "The Coat of the Hundred Stones."

Imagine a high stone monastery tower — sheer wall and dead drop — a hundred holy diamonds kept in a casket of steel, in the centre of the roof garden on that inaccessible height — watched by the brethren who sleep only in rotation, and especially by the old Abbot himself who hardly sleeps at all, except for a few hours just before and after sunset, and even then he sleeps beside the casket which no man may handle but himself, and with his hand on his heavy old gun — yes, guarded by the old Abbot himself, who has dedicated his life to the protection and preservation of those holy gems, and who has "made rigid the scheme of defense till I really do not think that loss or leakage from that treasure would be physically possible."

Yet, the diamonds keep disappearing!

You recognize the hand of the Master when out of a clear sky the detective (a typical Chestertonian conception — a hermit!) asks rather absently: "Does he wear slippers as well as a smoking-cap?" And when the detective continues by asking three "pretty obvious" questions — "Did he ever carry a pickaxe? Did you ever hear anything like a bell? Is he fond of birds?" — you know you are reading in the great classic tradition of Edgar A. Poe and A. Conan Doyle.

THE TOWER OF TREASON

by G. K. CHESTERTON

At a certain moment, just before sunset, a young man was walking in a rather extraordinary fashion across a wild country bearded with gray and wintry forests. In the solitude of that silent and wooded wilderness he was walking backwards. There was nobody to notice the eccentricity; it could not arrest the rush of the eagles over those endless forests where Hungarian frontiers fade into the Balkans; it could not be expected to arouse criticism in the squirrel or the hare. Even the peasants of those parts might possibly have been content to explain it as the vow of a pilgrim, or some other wild religious exercise; for it was a land of wild religious exercises. Only a little way in front of him (or rather, at that instant, behind

him), the goal of his journey and many previous journeys, was a strange half-military monastery, like some old chapel of the Templars where vigilant ascetics watched night and day over a hoard of sacred jewels, guarded at once like the crown of a king and the relic of a saint. Barely a league beyond, where the hills began to lift themselves clear of the forest, was a yet more solitary outpost of such devotional seclusion; a hermitage which held captive a man once famous through half of Europe, a dazzling diplomatist and ambitious statesman, now solitary and only rarely visited by the religious, for whom he was supposed to have more invisible jewels of a new wisdom. All that land, that seemed so silent and empty, was alive with such miracles.

Nevertheless, the young man was not performing a religious vow, or going on a religious pilgrimage. He had himself known personally the renowned recluse of the hermitage on the hill, when they were both equally in the world and worldly; but he had not the faintest intention of following his holy example. He was himself a guest at the monastery that was the consecrated casket of the strange jewels; but his errand was purely political and not in the least consecrated. He was a diplomatist by profession; but it must not be lightly inferred that he was walking backwards out of excessive deference to the etiquette of courts. He was an Englishman by nationality; but he was not, with somewhat distant reverence, still walking backwards before the King of England. Nor was he paying so polite a duty to any other king, though he might himself have said that he was paying it to a queen. In short, the explanation of his antic, as of not a few antics, was that he was in love; a condition common in romances and not unknown in real life. He was looking backwards at the house he had just left, in an abstracted or distracted fashion, half hoping to see a last signal from it or merely to catch a last glimpse of it among the trees. And his look was the more longing and lingering on this particular evening, for an atmospheric reason he would have found it hard to explain; a sense of pathos and distance and division hardly explained by his practical difficulties. As the sunset clouds were heavy with a purple which typifies the rich tragedy of Lent, so on this evening passion seemed to weigh on him with something of the power of doom. And a pagan of the mystical sort would certainly have called what happened next an omen; though a practical man of the modern sort might rather have hinted that it was the highly calculable effect of walking backwards and being a fool. A noise of distant firing was heard in the forest; and the slight start he gave, combined with a loop of grass that caught his foot, threw him sprawling all his length; as if that distant shot had brought him down.

But the omens were not all ended; nor could they all be counted pagan. For as he gazed upwards for an in-

stant, from the place where he had fallen, he saw above the black forest and against the vivid violet clouds, something strangely suitable to that tragic purple recalling the traditions of Lent. It was a great face between outstretched gigantic arms; the face upon a large wooden crucifix. The figure was carved in the round but very much in the rough, in a rude archaic style, and was probably an old outpost of Latin Christianity in that labyrinth of religious frontiers. He must have seen it before, for it stood on a little hill in a clearing of the woods, just opposite the one straight path leading to the sanctuary of the jewels, the tower of which could already be seen rising out of the sea of leaves. But somehow the size of the head above the trees, seen suddenly from below after the shock of the fall, had the look of a judgment in the sky. It seemed a strange fate to have fallen at the foot of it.

The young man, whose name was Bertram Drake, came from Cambridge and was heir to all the comforts and conventions of skepticism, further enlivened by a certain impatience in his own intellectual temper, which made him more mutinous than was good for his professional career; an active, restless man with a dark but open and audacious face. But for an instant something had stirred in him which is Christendom buried in Europe; something which is a memory even where it is a myth. Rising, he turned a troubled gaze to the great circle of dark gray forests, out of which rose in the distance the lonely tower of his destination; and even as he did so he saw something else. A few feet from where he had just fallen, and risen again to his feet, lay another fallen figure. And the figure did not rise.

He strode across, bent down over the body and touched it, and was soon grimly satisfied about why it was lying still. Nor was it without a further shock; for he even realized that he had seen the man before, though in a sufficiently casual and commonplace fashion: as a rustic bringing timber to the house he had just left. He recognized the spectacles on the square and stolid face; they were horn spectacles of the plainest pattern, yet they did not somehow suit his figure, which was clothed loosely like an ordinary peasant. And in the tragedy of the moment they were almost grotesque. The very fixity of the spectacles on the face was one of those details of daily habit that suddenly make death incredible. He had looked down at him for several seconds, before he became conscious that the deathly silence around was in truth a living silence; he was not alone.

A yard or two away an armed man was standing like a statue. He was a stalwart but rather stooping figure, with a long antiquated musket slung aslant on his shoulders; and in his hand a drawn sabre shone like a silver crescent. For the rest, he was a long-coated, long-bearded figure with a faint suggestion, to be felt in some figures from Russia and Eastern Eu-

rope generally, that the coats were like skirts and that the big beard had some of the terrors of a hairy mask; a faint touch of the true East. Thus accoutred, it had the look of a rude uniform; but the Englishman knew it was not that of the small Slav state in which he stood; which may be called, for the purpose of this tale, the kingdom of Transylvania. But when Drake addressed him in the language of that country, with which he himself was already fairly familiar, it was clear enough that the stranger understood. And there was a final touch of something strange in the fact that the brown eyes of this bearded and barbaric figure seemed not only sad but even soft, as with a sort of mystification of their own.

"Have you murdered this man?" asked the Englishman sternly.

The other shook his head; and then answered an incredulous stare by the simple but sufficient gesture of holding out his bare sabre immediately under the inquirer's eyes. It was an unanswerable fact that the blade was quite clean and without a spot of blood.

"But you were going to murder him," said Drake. "Why did you draw your sword?"

"I was going to ——" and with that the stranger stopped in his speech, hesitated, and then suddenly slapping his sabre back into the sheath, dived into the bushes and disappeared, before Drake could make a movement in pursuit of him.

The echoes of the original volley that had waked the woods had not long died away on the distant heights beyond the tower; and Drake could now only suppose that the shot thus fired had been the real cause of death. He was convinced, for many causes, that the shot had come from the tower; and he had other reasons for rapidly repairing thither besides the necessity of giving the fatal news to the nearest human habitation. He hurried along the very straight and strictly embanked road that was like a bridge between the tower and the little hill in front of the crucifix; and soon came under the shadow of the strange monastic building, now enormous in scale though still simple in outline. For though it was as wide in its circle as a great camp, and even bore on its flat top a sort of roof garden large enough to allow a little exercise to its permanent guards and captives, it rose sheer from the ground in a single round and windowless wall; so high that it stood up in the landscape almost like a pillar rather than a tower. The straight road to it ended in one narrow bridge across a deep but dry moat, outside which ran a ring of thorny hedges, but inside which rose great grisly iron spikes; giant thorns such as are made by man. The completeness of its enclosure and isolation was part of an ancient national policy for the protection of an ancient national prize. For the building, and the men in it were devoted to the defense of the treasure known as the Coat of the Hundred Stones, though there were now rather less

than that number to be defended. According to the legend, the great King Hector, the almost prehistoric hero of those hills, had a corslet or breastplate which was a cluster of countless small diamonds, as a substitute for chain mail; and in old dim pictures and tapestries he was always shown riding into battle as if in a vesture of stars. The legend had ramifications in neighboring and rival realms; and therefore the possession of this relic was a point of national and international importance in that land of legends. The legend may have been false; but the little loose jewels, or what were left of them, were real enough.

Drake stood looking at that sombre stronghold in an equally sombre spirit. It was the end of winter, and the gray woods were already just faintly empurpled with that suppressed and nameless bloom which is a foreshadowing rather than a beginning of the spring, but his own mood at the moment, though romantic, was also tragic. The string of strange events he had left in his track, if they had not arrested him as omens, must still have arrested him as enigmas. The man killed for no reason, the sword drawn for no reason, the speech broken short also for no reason — all these incidents affected him like the images in a warning dream. He felt that a cloud was on his destiny; nor was he wrong, so far at least as that evening's journey carried him. For when he reentered that militant monastery of which he was the guest, a new catastrophe befell him. And when next day he again retraced his steps on the woodland path along which he had been looking when he fell, and when he came again to the house towards which he had looked so longingly, he found its door shut against him.

On the day following he was striding desperately along a new path, winding upwards through the woods to the hills beyond, with his back both to the house and the tower. For something, as has been hinted, had befallen him in the last few days which was not only a tragedy but a riddle; and it was only when he reviewed the whole in the light, or darkness, of his last disaster, that he remembered that he had one old friend in that land, and one who was a reader of such riddles. He was making his way to the hermitage that was the home — some might almost say the grave — of a great man now known only as Father Stephen, though his real name had once been scrawled on the historic treaties and sprawled in the newspaper headlines of many nations. There is no space here to tell all the activities of his once famous acumen. In the world of what has come to be called secret diplomacy he was something more than a secret diplomatist. He was one from whom no diplomacy could be kept secret. Something of his later mysticism, an appreciation of moods and of the subconscious mind, had even then helped him; he not only saw small things, but he saw them as large things, and

largely. It was he who had anticipated the suicide of a cosmopolitan millionaire, judging from an atmosphere and the fact that he did not wind up his watch. It was he also who had frustrated a great German conspiracy in America, detecting the Teutonic spy by his unembarrassed posture in a chair when a Boston lady was handing him tea. Now, at long and rare intervals, he would become conscious of such external problems; and, in cases of great injustice, use the same powers to track a lost sheep, or recover the little hoard stolen from the stocking of a peasant.

A long terrace of low cliffs or rocks hollowed here and there ran along the top of a desolate slope that swept down and vanished amid the highest horns and crests of the winter trees. When this wall faced the rising of the sun, the stone shone pale like marble; and in one place especially had the squared look of a human building, pierced by an unquestionably human entrance. In the white wall was a black doorway, hollow and almost horrible like a ghost; for it was shaped in the rude outline of a man, with head and shoulders, like a mummy case. There was no other mark about this coffin-like cavity, except just beside it a colored ikon of the Holy Family, drawn in that extreme decorative style of Eastern Christianity, which makes a gaily painted diagram rather than a picture. But its gold and scarlet and green and sky-blue glittered on the rock by the black hole like some fabled butterfly from the mouth of the grave. But Bertram Drake strode to the gate of that grave and called aloud, as if upon the name of the dead.

To put the truth in a paradox, he had expected the resurrection to surprise him, and yet he was surprised unexpectedly. When he had last met his famous friend, in evening dress in the stalls of a great theatre in Vienna, he had found that friend pale and prematurely old, and his wit dreary and cynical. He even vaguely remembered the matter of their momentary conversation, some disenchanted criticism about the drop-scene or curtain, in which the great diplomatist had seemed a shade more interested than in the play. But when the same man came out of that black hole in the bleak mountains he seemed to have recovered an almost unnatural youth and even childhood. The colors had come back into his strong face; and his eyes shone as he came out of the shadow, almost as an animal's will shine in the dark. The tonsure had left him a ring of chestnut hair, and his tall bony figure seemed less loose and more erect than of old. All this might be very rationally explained by the strong air and simple life of the hills; but his visitor, pursued and tormented by fancies, felt for the moment as if the man had a secret sun or fountain of life in that black chamber, or drew nourishment from the roots of the mountains.

He commented on the change in the first few greetings that passed between them; and the hermit seemed

willing, though hardly able, to describe the nature of his acceptance of his strange estate.

"This is the last I shall see of this earth," he said quietly, "and I am more than contented in letting it pass. Yet I do not value it less, but rather I think more, as it simplifies itself to a single hold on life. What I know, with assurance, is that it is well for me to remain here, and to stray nowhere else."

After a silence he added, gazing with his burning blue eyes across the wooded valley: "Do you remember when we last met at that theatre and I told you that I always liked the picture on the curtain as much as the scenes of the play? It was some village landscape, I remember, with a bridge, and I felt perversely that I should like to lean on the bridge or look into the little houses. And then I remembered that from almost any other angle I should see it was only a thin, painted rag. That is how I feel about this world, as I see it from this mountain. Not that it is not beautiful, for after all a curtain can be beautiful. Not even that it is unreal, for after all a curtain is real. But only that it is thin, and that the things behind it are the real drama. And I feel that when I shift my place, it will be the end. I shall hear the three thuds of the mallet in the French theatres; and the curtain will rise. I shall be dead."

The Englishman made an effort to shake off the clouds of mystery that had always been so uncongenial to him. "Frankly," he said, "I can't profess to understand how a man of your intellect can brood in that superstitious way. You look healthy enough, but your mind is surely the more morbid for it. Do you really mean to tell me it would be a sin to leave this rat-hole?"

"No," answered the other, "I do not say it would be sin. I only say it would be death. It might conceivably be my duty to go down into the world again; in that case it would be my duty to die. It would have been my duty at any time when I was a soldier; but I never should have done it so cheerfully. Now, if ever I see my signal in the distance, I shall rise and leave this cavern, and leave this world."

"How can you possibly tell?" cried Drake in his impatient way. "Living alone in this wilderness you think you know everything, like a lunatic. Does nobody ever come to see you?"

"Oh, yes," replied Father Stephen with a smile. "The people from round here sometimes come up and ask me questions; they seem to have a notion that I can help them out of their difficulties."

The dark vivacity of Drake's face took on a shade of something like shame, as he laughed uneasily and answered.

"And I ought to apologize for what I said just now about the lunatic. For I've come up here on the same errand myself. The truth is, I have a notion that you can help me out of *my* difficulties."

"I will do my best," replied Father

Stephen. "I am afraid they have troubled you a good deal, by the look of you."

They sat down side by side on a flat rock near the edge of the slope, and Bertram Drake began to tell the whole of his story, or all of it that he needed to tell.

"I needn't tell you," he began, "why I am in this country, or why I have been so long a guest in that place where they keep the Coat of the Hundred Stones. You know better than anybody, for it was you who originally wanted an English representative here to write a report on their preservation, for the old propaganda purpose we know of. You probably also know that the rules of that strange institution put even a friendly, and I may say an honored, guest under very severe restrictions. They are so horribly afraid of any traffic with the outside world that I have had to be practically a prisoner. But the arrangements are stricter even than they were in your visiting days; ever since Paul, the new Abbot, came from across the hills. I don't think you've seen him; nobody's seen him outside the monastery; and I couldn't describe him any more than I could describe you. But while you, somehow, still seem to include all kinds of things, like the circle of the world, he seems to be only one thing, like the point that is the pivot of a circle. He is as still as the centre of a whirlpool. I mean, there seems to be direction and a driving speed in his very immobility; but all pointed and simplified to a single thing: the guarding of the diamonds. He has repaired and made rigid the scheme of defense till I really do not think that loss or leakage from that treasure would be physically possible. Suffice it to say for the moment that it is kept in a casket of steel, in the centre of the roof garden, watched by the brethren who sleep only in rotation, and especially by the old Abbot himself who hardly sleeps at all, except for a few hours just before and after sunset. And even then he sleeps sitting beside the casket, which no man may handle but himself, and with his hand on his heavy old gun, an antiquated blunderbuss enough, but with which he can shoot very straight for all that. Then sometimes he will wake quite softly and suddenly; and sit looking up that straight road to where the crucifix stands, like an hoary old white eagle. His watch is his world; though in every other way he is mild and benevolent, though he gave orders for the feeding of the poor for miles around, yet if he hears a footstep or faint movement anywhere in the woods around, except on the road that is the recognized approach, he will shoot without mercy as at a wolf. I have reason to know this, as you shall hear.

"Anyhow, as I said, you know that the rules were always strict, and now they're stricter than ever. I was only able to enter the place by being hoisted up by a sort of crane or open-air lift, which it takes several of the monks together to work from the top;

and I wasn't supposed to leave the place at all. It is possible that you also know, for you read people so rapidly like pictures rather than books, that I am a most unfortunate sort of brute to be chained by the leg in that way. My faults are all impatience and irreverence; and you may guess that in a week or two I might have felt inclined to burn the place down. But you cannot know the real and special reason that made my slavery intolerable."

"I am sorry," said Father Stephen; and the sincerity of the note again stilled Drake's impatience.

"Heaven knows it is I who should be sorry; I have been greatly to blame," he said. "But even if you call what I did a sin, you will see that it had a punishment. In one word, you are speaking to a man to whom no one in this country will speak. A monstrous accusation rests upon me, which I cannot refute, and have only some faint hope that you may refute for me. Hundreds in that valley below us are probably cursing my name, and even crying out for my death. And yet, I think, of all those scores of souls looking at me with suspicion, there is only one from whom I cannot endure it."

"Does he live near here?" inquired the hermit.

"She does," replied the Englishman.

An irony shining in the eyes of the anchorite suggested that the answer was not quite unexpected; but he said nothing till the other resumed his tale.

"You know that sort of château that some French nobleman, an exiled prince I believe, built upon the wooded ridge over there beyond the crucifix — you can just see its turrets from here. I'm not sure who owns it now; but it's been rented for some years by Dr. Amiel, a famous physician, a Frenchman. He is supposed to have high humanitarian ideals, including the idealization of this small nationality here, which, of course, suits our Foreign Office very well. Perhaps it's unfair to say he's only 'supposed' to be this; and the plain truth is I'm not a fair judge of the man, for a reason you may soon guess. But apart from sentiment, I think somehow I am in two minds about him. It sounds absurd to say that like or dislike of a man could depend on his wearing a red smoking-cap. But that's the nearest I can get to it; bareheaded and just a little bald-headed, he seems only a dark, rather distinguished-looking French man of science, with a pointed beard. When he puts that red fez on, he is suddenly like a Turk; and I see all Asia sneering and leering at me across the Levant. Well, perhaps it's a fancy of the fit I'm in; and it's only just to say that people believe in him, who are really devoted to this people or to our policy here. The people staying with him now, and during the few weeks I was there, are English and very keen on the cause, and they say his work has been splendid. A young fellow named Woodville, from my own college, who has traveled a lot, and written some

books about yachting, I think. And his sister."

"Your story is very clear so far," observed Father Stephen with restraint.

Drake seemed suddenly moved to impetuosity. "I know I'm in a mad state and had no right to call you morbid; and it's a state in which it's awfully difficult to judge people. How is it that two people, just a brother and sister, can be so alike and so different? They're both what is called good-looking; and even good-looking in the same way. Why on earth should her high color look as clear as if it were pale, while his offends me as if it were painted? Why should I think of her hair as gold and look at his as if it were gilt? Honestly, I can't help feeling something artificial about him; but I didn't come to trouble you with these prejudices. There is little or nothing to be said against Woodville; he has something of a name for betting on horses, but not enough to disturb any man of the world. I think the reputation has rather dogged his footsteps in the shape of his servant, Grimes, who is much more horsy than his master, and much in evidence. You see, there were few servants at the château, even the gardening being done by a peasant from outside; an unfortunate fellow in horn spectacles who comes into this story later. Anyhow, Woodville was, or professed to be, quite sound in his politics about this place; and I really think him sincere about it. And as for his sister, she has an enthusiasm that is as beautiful as Joan of Arc's."

There was a short silence, and then Father Stephen said dreamily: "In short, you somehow escaped from your prison, and paid her a visit."

"Three visits," replied Drake, with an embarrassed laugh, "and nearly broke my neck at the end of a rope, besides being repeatedly shot at with a gun. I'll tell you later on, if you want them, all the details of how I managed to slip out and in again during those sunset hours of Abbot Paul's slumbers. They really resolved themselves into two; the accidental discovery of a disused iron chain, that had been used for the crane or lift, and the character of the old monk who happened to be watching while the Abbot slept. How indescribable is a man, and how huge are the things that turn on his unique self as on a hinge! All those monks were utterly incorruptible, and I owed it to a sympathy that was almost mockery. In an English romance, I suppose, my confederate would have been a young mutinous monk, dreaming of the loves he had lost; whereas my friend was one of the oldest, utterly loyal to the religious life, and helping me from a sort of whim that was little more than a lark. Can you imagine a sort of innocent Pandarus, or even a Christian Pan? He would have died rather than betray the holy stones; but when he was convinced that my love affair was honorable in itself, he let me down by the chain in fits of silent laughter, like a grinning old

goblin. It was a pretty wild experience, I can tell you, swinging on that loose iron ladder like dropping off the earth on a falling star. But I swung myself somehow clear of the spikes below, and crept along under the thick wood by the side of the road. Even as I did so, came the crack and rolling echoes of the musket on the tower; and a tuft, from a fir tree spreading above me, dropped detached upon the road at my right. A terrible old man, the Abbot. A light sleeper."

Both men were gazing at the strange tower that rose out of the distant woods as Drake, after a pause, renewed his narrative.

"There is a high hedge of juniper and laurel at the bottom of the garden of Dr. Amiel's château. At least, it is high on the outer side, rising above a sort of ledge of earth on the slope, but comparatively low when seen from the level garden above. I used to climb up to this ledge in that late afternoon twilight, and she used to come down the garden, with the lights of the house almost clinging about her dress, and we used to talk. It's no good talking to you about what she looked like, with her hair all as yellow light behind the leaves; though those are the sort of things that make my present position a hell. You are a monk and not — I fear I was going to say, not a man; but at any rate not a lover."

"I am not a juniper bush, if the argument be conclusive," remarked Father Stephen. "But I can admire it in its place; and I know that many good things grow wild in the garden of God. But, if I may say so, seeing that so honorable a lady receives such rather eccentric attentions from you, I cannot see that you have much reason to be jealous of Dr. Amiel, as you seem to be, even if he is so base and perfidious as to wear a smoking-cap."

"What you say was true until yesterday," said Drake. "I know now that until yesterday I was in paradise. But I had gone there once too often; and on my third return journey a thunderbolt struck me down, worse than any bullet from the tower. The old Abbot had never discovered my own evasion; but he must have had miraculous hearing when he woke, for every time I crept through the thicket, as softly as I could, he must have heard something moving, and fired again and again. Well, the last time, I found the spectacled peasant who worked for Dr. Amiel; he was lying dead, a little way in front of the cross, and a foreign-looking fellow with a drawn sabre standing near him. But the strange thing was that the sabre was unstained and unused, and I was eventually convinced that one of the Abbot's shots must have killed the poor peasant in the goggles. Revolving all these things in growing doubt, I returned to the tower, and saw an ominous thing. The regular mechanical lift was lowered for me; and when I reentered the place, I found that all my escapades had been discovered. But I found something far worse.

"When all those faces were turned upon me, faces I shall never forget, I knew I was being judged for something more than a love affair. My poor old friend, who had connived at my escape, would not have been so much prostrated for the lesser matter; and as for the Abbot, the form of his countenance was changed, as it says in the Bible, by something nearer to his own lonely soul than all such lesser matters. Well, the truth of this tragedy is soon told. For the last week, as it appeared, the hoard of the little diamonds had dwindled — no man could imagine how. They were counted by the Abbot and two monks at certain regular intervals; and it was found that the losses had occurred at definite intervals also. Finally, there was found another fact; a fact of which I can make no sense; yet a fact to which I can find no answer. After each of my secret visits to the château, and then only, some of the diamonds had disappeared.

"I have not even the right to ask you to believe in my innocence. No man alive in the whole great landscape we are looking at believes in my innocence. I do not know what would have happened to me, or whether I should have been killed by the monks or the peasants, if I had not appealed to your great authority in this country; and if the Abbot had not been persuaded at last to allow the appeal. Dr. Amiel thinks I am guilty. Woodville thinks I am guilty. His sister I have not even been able to see."

There was another silence, and then Father Stephen asked rather absently: "Does he wear slippers as well as a smoking-cap?"

"Do you mean the doctor? No. What on earth do you mean?"

"Nothing at all, if he doesn't. There's no more to be said about that. Well, it's pretty obvious, I suppose, what are the next three questions. First, I suppose the woodman carried an axe. Did he ever carry a pickaxe? Did he ever carry any other tool in particular? Second, did you ever happen to hear anything like a bell? About the time you heard the shot, for instance? But that will probably have occurred to you already. And third, amid such plain preliminaries in the matter, is Dr. Amiel fond of birds?"

There was again a shadow of irony in the simplicity of the recluse; and Drake turned his dark face towards him with a doubtful frown.

"Are you making fun of me?" he asked.

"I believe in your innocence, if that is what you mean," replied Father Stephen, "and believe me, I am beginning at the right end in order to establish it."

"But who could it be?" cried Drake in his rather irritable fashion. "I'll tell the plain truth, even against myself, and I'd swear all those monks were really startled out of their wits. And even the peasants near here, supposing they could get into the tower, which they can't — why, I'd be as much surprised to hear of them desecrating the Hundred Stones as if

I heard they'd all suddenly become Plymouth Brethren this morning. No; suspicion is sure to fall on the foreigners, like myself; and none of the others round here have a case against them, as I have. Woodville may have a few racing debts; but I'd never believe this about *her* brother, little as I happened to like him. And as for Dr. Amiel ——" And he stopped, his face darkening with thought.

"Yes, but that's beginning at the wrong end," observed Father Stephen, "because it's beginning with all the millions of mankind, and every man a mystery. I am trying to find out who stole the stones; you seem to be trying to find out who wanted to steal them. Believe me, the smaller and more practical question is also the larger and more philosophical. To the shades of possible wanting there is hardly any limit. It is the root of all religion that anybody may be almost anything if he chooses. The cynics are wrong, not because they say that the heroes may be cowards, but because they do not see that the cowards may be heroes. Now you may think my remark about keeping birds very wild and your remark about betting on horses very relevant, but I assure you it is the other way round; for yours dealt with what might be thought, but mine with what could be done. Do you remember that German Prime Minister who was assassinated because he had reduced Russia to starvation? Millions of peasants might have wanted to murder him; but how could a moujik in Muscovy murder him in a theatre in Munich? He was murdered by a man who came there because he was a trained Russian dancer, and escaped from there because he was a trained Russian acrobat. That is, the highly offensive statesman in question was not killed by all the Russians who may have wanted to kill him; but the one Russian who *could* kill him. Well, you are the only approximate acrobat in this performance and, apart from what I know about you, I don't see how you could have burgled a safe inside the tower merely by dangling at the end of a string outside it. For the real enigma and obstacle in this story is not the stone tower, but the steel casket. I do not see how *you* could have stolen the jewels. I don't see how *anybody* could have stolen them. That is the hopeful part of it."

"You are pretty paradoxical today," growled his English friend.

"I am quite practical," answered Father Stephen serenely. "That is the starting point, and it makes a good start. We have only to deal with a narrow number of conjectures about how it could just conceivably have been done. You scoffed at my three questions just now which I threw off when I was thinking rather about the preliminary approach to the tower. Well, I admit they were very long shots — indeed, very wild shots; I did not myself take them very seriously, or think they would lead to much. But they had this value: that they were not random guesses about the spiritual possibilities of everybody

for a hundred miles round. They were the beginnings of an effort to bridge the real difficulties."

"I am afraid," observed Drake, "that I did not realize that they were even that."

"Well," the hermit went on patiently, "for the first problem of reaching the tower it was reasonable to think first, however hazily, of some sort of secret tunnel or subterranean entrance, and it was natural to ask if the strange workman at the château, who afterwards died so mysteriously, was seen carrying any excavating tools."

"Well, I did think of that," assented Drake, "and I came to the conclusion that it was physically impossible. The inside of the tower is as plain and bare as a dry cistern and the floor is really solid concrete everywhere. But what did you mean by that second question about the bell?"

"What I confess still puzzles me," said Father Stephen, "even in your own story, is how the Abbot always heard a man threading his way through a thick forest so far below, so that he invariably fired after him, if only at a venture. Now, nothing would be more natural to such a scheme of defense than to set traps in the wood, in the way of burglar alarms, to warn the watchers in the tower. But anything like that would mean some system of wires or tubes passing through the wall into the woods, and anything of that sort I felt in a shadowy way, a very shadowy way indeed, might mean a passage for other things as well. It would destroy the argument of the sheer wall and the dead drop, which is at present an argument against you, since you alone dared to drop over it. And, of course, my third random question was of the same kind. Nothing could fly about the top of that high tower except birds. For I infer that the vigilant Paul was not too absent-minded to notice any large number of airplanes. Now, it is not in the least probable — it is, indeed, almost wildly improbable — but it is not *impossible*, that birds should be trained either to take messages or to commit thefts. Carrier pigeons do the former, and magpies have often done the latter. Dr. Amiel, being both a scientist and a humanitarian, might very well be a naturalist and an animal-lover. So if I had found his biological studies specializing wholly on the breeding of carrier pigeons, or if I had found all the love of his life lavished on a particular magpie, I should have thought the question worth following up, formidable as would have been the difficulties still threatening it as a solution."

"I wish the love of his life *were* lavished on a magpie," observed Bertram Drake bitterly. "As it is, it's lavished on something else, and will be expected, I suppose, to flourish in the blight of mine. But much as I hate him, I shouldn't like to say of him what he is probably saying of me."

"There again is the mistaken method," observed the other. "Probably he is not morally incapable of a

really bad action; very few people are. That is why I stick to the point of whether he is materially capable. It would be quite easy to draw a dark suspicious picture both of him and Mr. Woodville. It is quite true that racing can be a raging gamble and that ruined gamblers are capable of almost anything. It is also true that nobody can be so much of a cad as a gentleman when he is afraid of losing that title. If we were talking about Amiel or about Woodville, instead of about you and about the diamonds, I could trace a thousand mystery stories in the matter. I could take your hint about the scarlet smoking-cap, and say it was a signal and the symbol of a secret society; that a hundred men in a hundred smoking-caps were plotting everywhere, as many of them really are; I could show a conspiracy ramifying from the red cap of Amiel as it did from the *Bonnet Rouge* of Almereyda; or I could catch at your idle phrase about Woodville's hair looking gilded and describe him as a monstrous decadent in a golden wig, a thing worthy of Nero. Very soon his horse-racing would have all the imperial insanity of charioteering in the amphitheatre, while his friend in the fez would be capable of carrying off Miss Woodville to a whole harem full of Miss Woodvilles, if you will pardon the image. But what corrects all this is the concrete difficulty I defined at the beginning. I still do not see how wearing either a red fez or a gilded wig could conjure very small gems out of a steel box at the top of a tower. But, of course, I did not mean to abandon all inquiry about the suspicious movements of anybody. I asked if the doctor wore slippers, on a remote chance in connection with your steps having been heard in the wood, and I should like to know if you ever met anybody else prowling about in the forest."

"Why, yes," said Drake, with a slight start. "I once met the man Grimes, now I remember it."

"Mr. Woodville's servant," remarked Father Stephen.

"Yes. A rat of a fellow with red hair," Drake said, frowning. "He seemed a bit startled to see me too."

"Well, never mind," answered the hermit. "My own hair may be called red, but I assure you I didn't steal the diamonds."

"I never met anybody else," went on Drake, "except, of course, the mysterious man with the sabre and the dead man he was staring at. I think that is the queerest puzzle of all."

"It is best to apply the same principle even to that," replied his friend. "It may be hard to imagine what a man could be doing with a drawn sword still unused. But, after all, there are a thousand things he might have been doing, from teaching the poor woodman to cut timber without an axe to cutting off the dead man's head for a trophy and a talisman, as some savages do. The question is whether felling the whole forest or filling the whole country with howling head-hunters would necessarily have got the stones out of the box."

"He was certainly going to do something," said Drake in a low voice. "He said himself, 'I was going to —' and then broke off and vanished. I was very profoundly persuaded, I hardly knew why, that there was something to be done to the dead man which could not be done till he was dead."

"What?" asked the hermit, after an abrupt silence; and it sounded somehow like a new voice from a third person suddenly joining in the conversation.

"Which could not be done till he was dead," repeated Drake.

"Dead," repeated Father Stephen.

And Drake, still staring at him, saw that his face, under its fringe of red hair, was as pale as his linen robe, and the eyes in it were blazing like the lost stones.

"So many things die," he said. "The birds I spoke about, flying and flashing about the great tower. Did you ever find a dead bird? Not one sparrow, it is written, falls to the ground without God. Even a dead bird would be precious. But a yet smaller thing will serve as a sign here."

Drake, still gazing at his companion, felt a growing conviction that the man had suddenly gone mad. He said helplessly, "What is the matter with you?" But Father Stephen had risen from his seat and was gazing calmly across the valley towards the west, which was all swimming with a golden sunlight that here and there turned the tops of the gray trees to silver.

"It is the thud of the mallet," he said, "and the curtain must rise."

Something had certainly happened which the mind of Bertram Drake found it impossible at the moment to measure, but he remembered enough of the strange words with which their interview had opened to know that in some way the hermit was saying farewell to the hermitage and to many more human things. He asked some groping question, the very words of which he could not afterwards recall.

"I see my signal at last," said Father Stephen. "Treason stands up in my own land as that tower stands in the landscape. A great sin against the people and against the glory of the dead is raging in that valley like a lost battle. And I must go down and do my last office, as King Hector came down from these mountains to his last battle long ago, to that Battle of the Stones where he was slain and his sacred coat of mail so nearly captured. For the enemy has come again over the hills, though in a shape in which we never looked for him."

The voice that had lately lingered with irony and shrewdness over the details of detection had the simplicity which makes poetry and primitive rhetoric still possible among such peoples. He was already marching down the slope, leaving Drake wavering in doubt, being uncertain, to tell the truth, whether his own problem had not been rather lost in this last transition.

"Oh, do not fear for your own story," said Father Stephen. "The

Battle of the Stones was a victory."

As they went down the mountainside, Drake followed with a strange sense of traveling with some immobile thing liberated by a miracle, as if the earth were shaken by a stone statue walking. The statue led him a strange and rather erratic dance, however, covering considerable time and distance, and the great cloud in the west was a sunset cloud before they came to their final halt. Rather to Drake's surprise, they passed the tower of the monastery, and already seemed to be passing under the shadow of the great wooden cross in the woods.

"We shall return this way tonight," said Father Stephen, speaking for the first time on their march. "The sin upon this land tonight lies so heavy that there is no other way. *Via Crucis.*"

"Why do you talk in this terrible way?" broke out Drake abruptly. "Don't you realize that it's enough to make a man like me hate the cross? Indeed, I think by this time I really do. Remember what my story is, and what once made these woodlands wonderful to me. Would you blame me if the god I saw among the trees was a pagan god, and at any rate a happy one? This is a wild garden that was full, for me, of love and laughter; and I look up and see that image blackening the sun and saying that the world is utterly evil."

"You do not understand," replied Father Stephen quite quietly. "If there are any who stand apart merely because the world is utterly evil, they are not old monks like me; they are much more likely to be young Byronic disappointed lovers like you. No, it is the optimist much more than the pessimist who finally finds the cross waiting for him at the end of his own road. It is the thing that remains when all is said, like the payment after the feast. Christendom is full of feasts, but they bear the names of martyrs who won them in torments. And if such things horrify you, go and ask what torments your English soldiers endure for the land which your English poets praise. Go and see your English children playing with fireworks, and you will find one of their toys is named after the torture of St. Catherine. No, it is not that the world is rubbish and that we throw it away. It is exactly when the whole world of stars is a jewel, like the jewels we have lost, that we remember the price. And we look up, as you say, in this dim thicket and see the price, which was the death of God."

After a silence he added, like one in a dream: "And the death of man. We shall return by this way tonight."

Drake had the best reasons for being aware of the direction in which their way was now taking them. The familiar path scrambled up the hill to a familiar hedge of juniper, behind which rose the steep roof of a dark mansion. He could even hear voices talking on the lawn behind the hedge, and a note or two of one which changed the current of his blood. He stopped and said in a voice heavy as stone:

"I cannot go in here now. Not for the world."

"Very well," replied Father Stephen calmly. "I think you have waited outside before now."

And he composedly entered the garden by a gate in the hedge, leaving Drake gloomily kicking his heels on the ledge or natural terrace outside, where he had often waited in happier times. As he did so, he could not help hearing fragments of the distant conversation in the garden; and they filled him with confusion and conjecture, not, however, unmingled with hope. It seemed probable that Father Stephen was stating Drake's case and probably offering to prove his innocence. But he must also have been making a sort of appointment, for Drake heard Woodville say: "I can't make head or tail of this, but we will follow later if you insist." And Father Stephen replied with something ending with "the cross in half an hour."

Then Drake heard the voice of the girl, saying: "I shall pray to God that you may yet tell us better news."

"You will be told," said Father Stephen.

As they redescended towards the little hill just in front of the crucifix, Drake was in a less mutinous mood; whether this was due to the hermit's speech or the words about prayer that had fallen from the woman in the garden. The sky was at once clearer and cloudier than in the previous sunset, for the light and darkness seemed divided by deeper abysses; gray and purple cloudlands as large as landscapes now overcasting the whole earth and now falling again before fresh chasms of light; vast changes that gave to a few hours of evening something of the enormous revolutions of the nights and days. The wall of cloud was then rising higher on the heights behind them and spreading over the château; but the western half of heaven was a clear gold, where the lonely cross stood dark against it. But as they drew nearer, they saw that it was in truth less lonely, for a man was standing beneath it. Drake saw a long gun aslant on his back; it was the bearded man of the sabre.

The hermit strode towards him with a strange energy and struck him on the shoulder with the flat of his hand.

"Go home," he said, "and tell your masters that their plot will work no longer. If you are Christians, and ever had any part in a holy relic, or any right to it in your land beyond the hills, you will know you should not seek it by such tricks. Go in peace."

Drake hardly noticed how quickly the man vanished this time, for his eye was fixed on the hermit's finger which seemed idly tracing patterns on the wooden pedestal of the cross. It was really pointing to certain perforations, like holes made by worms in the wood.

"Some of the Abbot's stray shots, I think," he remarked. "And somebody has been picking them out of the wood strangely enough."

"It is unlucky," observed Drake,

"that the Abbot should damage one of your own images; he is as much devoted to the relic as to the realm."

"More," said the hermit, sitting down on the knoll a few yards before the pedestal. "The Abbot, as you truly say, has only room for one idea in his mind. But there is no doubt of his concern about the stones."

A great canopy of cloud had again covered the valley, turning twilight almost to darkness; and Stephen spoke out of the dark.

"As for the realm, the Abbot comes from the country beyond the hills, which hundreds of years ago went to war about ——"

His words were lost in a distant explosion. A volley had been fired from the tower.

With the first shock of sound Stephen sprang up and stood erect on the little hillock. The world had grown so dark that his attitude could hardly be seen, but as minute followed minute in the interval of silence, a low red light was again gradually released from the drifting cloud, faintly tracing his gray figure in silver and turning his tawny hair to a ring of dim crimson. He was standing quite rigid with his arms stretched out, like a shadow of the crucifix. Drake was striving with the words of a question that would not come. And then there came anew a noise of death from the tower; and the hermit fell all his length crashing among the undergrowth, and lay still as a stone.

Drake hardly knew how he lifted the head on to the wooden pedestal; but the face gave ghastly assurance, and the voice in the few words it could speak was like the voice of a new-born child, weak and small.

"I am dying," said Father Stephen. "I am dying with the truth in my heart."

He made another effort to speak, beginning "I wish ——" and then his friend, looking at him steadily, saw that he was dead.

Bertram Drake stood up, and all his universe lay in ruins around him. The night of annihilation was more absolute because a match had flamed and gone out before it could light the lamp. He was certain now that Father Stephen had indeed discovered the truth that could deliver him. He was as clearly certain that no other man would ever discover it. He would go blasted to his grave because his friend had died only a moment too soon. And to put a final touch to the hideous irony, that had lifted him to heaven and cast him down, he heard the voices of his friends coming along the road from the château.

In a sort of tumbled dream he saw Dr. Amiel lift the body on to the pedestal, producing surgical instruments for the last hopeless surgical tests. The doctor had his back to Drake, who did not trouble to look over his shoulder, but stared at the ground until the doctor said:

"I fear he is quite dead. But I have extracted the bullet."

There was something odd about his quiet voice, and the group seemed suddenly, if silently, seething with

new emotions. The girl gave an exclamation of wonder, and it seemed of joy, which Drake could not comprehend.

"I am glad I extracted the bullet," said Dr. Amiel. "I fancy that's what Drake's friend with the sabre was trying to extract."

"We certainly owe Drake a complete apology," observed Woodville.

Drake thrust his head over the other's shoulder and saw what they were all staring at. The shot that had struck Father Stephen in the heart lay a few inches from his body, and it not only glittered but sparkled. It sparkled as only one stone can sparkle in the world.

The girl was standing beside him and he appreciated, through the turmoil, the sense of an obstacle rolled away and of a growth and future, and even in all those growing woods the promise of the spring. It was only as the tail of a trailing and vanishing nightmare that he appreciated at last the wild tale of the treason of the foreign Abbot from beyond the hills, and in what strange fashion he loaded his large-mouthed gun. But he continued to gaze at the dazzling speck on the pedestal and saw in it, as in a mirror, all the past words of his friend.

For Father Stephen the hermit had died indeed with the truth in his heart; and the truth had been taken out of his heart by the forceps of Dr. Amiel; and it lay there on the pedestal of the cross, like the soul drawn out of his body. Nor did it seem unnatural, to the man staring at it, that the soul looked like a star.

Here is the third in a series of short riddle stories which derive from folklore — from the folk-tales of all ages and all nations. The first two were called "Chinese Puzzle" and "Indian Sign." Now we bring you "Turkish Delight" — about Nasr-ed-Din ("The Victory of the Faith") whose antics have amused and titillated the Turks for five and a half centuries.

As teacher and prayer-leader, Nasr-ed-Din enjoyed the dignified title of "Hoja" — Elder, Master — but his pranks and quips have made him the unofficial jester of Turkey. The Hoja, however, did not jest for jesting's sake alone: under the smile was satire, under the chuckle was shrewd social commentary. The Hoja poked fun at tyrants, exposed the stupidity and cupidity of judges, burst the bubbles of bureaucracy, and bared the inanities of the common people — and always got away with it.

Fifty years ago, the Sultan actually banned the Hoja tales as being subversive. But the "Young Turks," taking power in 1908, gleefully lifted the ban and arranged for the first appearance in print of all 380 tales of the Hoja. To this day, in his native land, the Hoja's name is a byword, and his tomb near Akshehir is a goal for pilgrimage.

TURKISH DELIGHT: *The Measure of Justice*

re-told by MARK RONDY

JEMAL-ED-DIN, weary and parched of throat, rejoiced over the final case of the day. Especially since he had thought of a way to handle the Hoja. The fellow had sat in court all afternoon, munching loudly on gumdrops and pointing out flaws in Jemal-ed-Din's judgments. You could not, of course, expel the Hoja. Emperor Tamerlane himself enjoyed the Hoja's clowning, and the townsfolk adored him. Besides, he could turn tables on you in the most unexpected manner; so it was generally wise to let him be.

But now indeed came a thought from Allah! Defendant and plaintiff approached the cadi's desk — one a short stocky man, grim, dark, and dirty, with a money-bag in his hand, the other a tall, complacent gentleman. One of them had sent promises to Jemal-ed-Din, but the Hoja could not know that. He would be fooled into helping render judgment — Jemal-ed-Din's way!

Jemal-ed-Din requested the plaintiff to state his name and his charge.

The gentleman bowed slightly. "I am Bedi-ud-Din. This man agreed to cut fifty loads of wood for a noble — for a hundred gold coins. I offered to be his partner. He agreed. Now, after the wood has been cut and delivered, and payment made, he holds the bag and refuses to give me my share."

The other man, who had been slowly purpling during this speech, clenched a huge fist. "Cadi," he blurted out, "he's a swindler! He's trying to rob me!"

"State your name properly, defendant," said Jemal-ed-Din sternly, "and then your case."

"My name's Ahmet Ago, and *I* did all the work!"

"Not so, Cadi," cut in the other. "I did my share, and so I claim my share of the money."

Ahmet Ago bellowed like a bull. "A lie, Cadi! It was *I* who chopped, *I* who bundled, *I* who loaded the donkey, *I* who drove him, *I* who unloaded him — fifty different times! *He* did nothing!"

"Not so," repeated Bedi-ud-Din. "I helped him quite a bit."

"How?" shouted Ahmet Ago hotly. "Tell us how!"

"Certainly," said Bedi-ud-Din. "I grunted fiercely for him, Cadi, every time he swung the axe. I groaned heavily for him every time he lifted a load. I cursed and complained for him every time the donkey balked or the load slipped. I encouraged him constantly, cheered him up. He was lucky to have a partner like me!" He waved a trim, well-kept hand. "It's clear, Cadi, that I did my share."

"He's crazy!" roared Ahmet Ago.

"Not so, Cadi! Didn't I save him the breath required for grunting, groaning, talking to himself? Because of me, didn't he have more strength and energy for chopping and tying and so forth? Isn't there more to work than heaving with muscles? Certainly there is, and I supplied it!"

Ahmet Ago unleashed a string of bitter curses, the audience buzzed, and Jemal-ed-Din congratulated himself for being able to put the Hoja into such a predicament.

"Nasr-ed-Din Hoja!" he called. "As the wisest man among us —"

"Allah forbid," murmured the Hoja modestly.

"— I'd like your help in rendering judgment in this case."

The Hoja came forward.

"The plaintiff," Jemal-ed-Din continued, "was certainly a partner of the defendant. You agree?" The Hoja nodded sagely. "And he did do a part of the work." The Hoja nodded again. "According to the letter of the law, then, we must find in his favor. The question is — what is his share?"

He signaled the Marshal of the Court, who wrenched the money-bag from Ahmet Ago's hand.

"You're all mad, mad!" screamed Ahmet Ago.

"Not so," said the Hoja, apparently in unconscious mimicry of Bedi-ud-Din. "The court of Jemal-ed-Din is one of justice, not madness. . . . If you please, Cadi, I'll apportion the coins."

Jemal-ed-Din kept a straight face, and said, "That is what I had in mind, Hoja. Do so!"

The Hoja called for a money-tray, and turned to Bedi-ud-Din. "You hold the tray," he said. "I myself will count out the coins for you."

Ahmet Ago lifted an arm, then

shrugged fatalistically and stood still. Bedi-ud-Din, all smiles, held out the tray for the Hoja. The Hoja pried the bag open, extracted a coin, tossed it onto the tray.

"It rings true . . . Not so?" said the Hoja.

Bedi-ud-Din hastened to agree. "It certainly does, Hoja!"

The Hoja took a second coin, dropped it onto the tray, raised bushy eyebrows to Bedi-ud-Din, waited for his nod. Then the Hoja kept repeating his actions.

Ahmet Ago clenched his teeth, and groaned. Jemal-ed-Din, uneasy, wondered at the Hoja's smiling calm. You could never trust the scamp.

Methodically the Hoja kept on, tilting his head with each coin, and gazing contentedly at the beaming Bedi-ud-Din. When the Hoja had counted out fifty of the hundred coins, Ahmet Ago held out his hand. But the Hoja frowned and motioned him off. Ahmet Ago burst into frenzied lamenting.

"Sh!" the Hoja rebuked him. "Don't interrupt the count. Quiet!"

Ahmet Ago closed his eyes, and sagged limply. Jemal-ed-Din began to consider whether he had done well. Giving *all* the coins to Bedi-ud-Din —!

With the last coin, the Hoja turned the bag inside out, showing its emptiness to Bedi-ud-Din.

"You are satisfied?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, Hoja!"

"And you, Cadi? I have maintained the high standards of justice and equity of your court?"

Jemal-ed-Din, eyeing the golden pile on the money-tray, licked his lips and nodded. Hoja took the tray and tipped the coins back into the bag. Then he retied it and thrust it into Ahmet Ago's hands.

"The coins," he said, "have now been equally divided."

A hubbub rose from the audience. The Hoja waited imperturbably, a grin bubbling over at one corner of his mouth.

"What kind of equal division is that, you fool?" cried Jemal-ed-Din hoarsely.

"You gave *him* all the coins!" Bedi-ud-Din screamed above the noise. "*I* got nothing!"

EDITORS' NOTE: *How did the Hoja divide the coins equally by giving them all to Ahmet Ago? You now have all the facts necessary to see through the Hoja's trick. If the answer keeps escaping you, you will find it below, printed upside-down. . .*

"Not so," countered the Hoja. "You heard me drop the coins on the tray, didn't you? *That* was your payment." Bedi-ud-Din opened his mouth, but no sounds emerged. "It is only the letter of the law, as the Cadi said: you contributed the *spunos* of work, so, in return, you received the *punos* of money . . . Not so?"

Harry Kemelman has some interesting and introspective theories on 'tec technique. In his philosophy, "the detective story is based in large part on the idea that it is essentially an artificial form — artificial in the same sense that rhyme is an artificial form of poetry. The detective story's function is to entertain rather than to imitate life. (If there is a large city police system where the amateur detective so common in fiction is tolerated, it is only because nature tends to copy art.)

"Perhaps the action type of detective story was an attempt to introduce realism [Editors' Comment: A provocative and stimulating thought!]. The net result, however, was to establish a different form. The action story really belongs to a different genus — the adventure story. Just as we make a legitimate distinction between a short story and a story that is short, so we should make a distinction between a detective story and a story whose hero happens to be a detective. In the former, the interest is primarily on the solution of the problem; in the latter, the interest is primarily on the hero's adventures, and the solution is used only to round off the story. For that reason, I suppose, the best action stories are of novel length, and it is worth noting that the solution-chapter of the action story is usually the dullest part of the book."

Mr. Kemelman has much more to say about what makes the detective story tick, and we will bring you more of his concrete criminological criticism in the near future — as editorial prefaces to more of Mr. Kemelman's detective stories (and we use those two words advisedly, for that is precisely what Mr. Kemelman himself writes — the detective story). We do not say that we agree with all of Mr. Kemelman's ideas, but whether we do or not, we think that he is perpetuating the purest form of the detective story, in the Poesque philosophy, with emphasis on ratiocination and revelation, the two bridged by logical deduction in which the reader is invited to participate, and with the author playing absolutely fair with the reader from first word to last.

THE STRAW MAN

by HARRY KEMELMAN

IT WAS my turn to be host to the County Attorneys' Club. It is purely a social organization and calls for little more than a good dinner and an evening of shop talk afterwards, largely pleasant bragging about the interesting cases we had handled since the last meeting.

Fairfield County is a quiet, orderly community where little that is sensa-

tional comes our way. Hence, when it came my turn to tell of a clever bit of pleading or of some abstruse legal point which had enabled me to break up a vicious racket, I had nothing that could interest that company and perforce fell back on an account of Nicky Welt's logical reconstruction of a crime and my own meager activities in the case of "The Nine Mile Walk."[1]

They heard me out politely, although their attitudes indicated that they thought I was dramatizing the facts a bit in order to improve my story. When I had finished, Ellis Johnston, who as attorney for Suffolk, the most populous county in the commonwealth, was dean of our little company, nodded perfunctorily and said, "That's all very well. Sometimes you get a hunch like that and it works out. But where you have hundreds of cases a year, you can't rely on hunches to solve most of them. You've got to use plain, down-to-earth routine, just plugging away at every little fact you've got until you squeeze out the truth. It's not inspiration but perspiration that solves criminal cases."

The others nodded sycophantically.

"Now here's something that will show you what I mean," he continued. From his inside breast pocket he brought forth a large wallet from which he extracted a square of glossy paper. He tossed it on the table and we all left our seats to look at it. It was a photostat of a ransom note of the type which has become all too familiar these days — little blocks of newsprint pasted onto a blank sheet of paper to spell out the message:

Fifty Thousand dollars IN ***SMALL USED*** **bills** or GLORIA will **Never** be seen ***again.*** **The Same** IF **YOU** Communicate WITH **the** POLICE. ***Further*** *Instructions* WILL be telephoned.

It was a common enough note, except for one thing: in each block of newsprint, highlighted by the black powder which the police photographer had used, was a clear, unsmudged fingerprint.

Johnston sat back and watched us as we bent over the paper. He was a square, thick-set man with fleshy lips and a determined jaw. And although he owed his position more to politics than to legal ability, he was considered a first-rate man at his job.

"It's routine to test for fingerprints," he remarked, "but we could see these even without dusting. Those squares of paper are not ordinary wood-pulp newsprint. They were cut from glossy-paper magazines like *Life* and *The Saturday Evening Post*, which show fingerprints nicely. Now here's my point. We don't sit down and moon over why a man who goes to such elaborate precautions to conceal his identity should then ruin it all by leaving his fingerprints. In the hundreds of cases that come through our hands we find that criminals are continuously pulling boners like that. In the present case it may be an oversight, or maybe it's just plain swank. We see a lot of that, too. It's almost

[1] *EQMM* for April, 1947.

characteristic of the criminal mind. But whatever it is, we don't let it sidetrack us. We've got a routine, see? And it's routine — with the whole department working together — that solves cases, not inspiration or hunches or the sort of moonbeam inferences your friend the professor used," he added for my benefit.

"We get many cases like this," he went on, "a lot more than the public thinks. The public thinks that kidnapings are rare and that they happen only when they hit the headlines. But actually it's not an uncommon crime at all. Like blackmail, the criminal has every advantage and that tends to make it a pretty common crime. In most cases, the victim pays off within a day or two and that's the end of it. Most of the time they don't even notify the police after it's over — afraid of retaliation of some sort.

"And that's what happened here. Dr. John Regan got that message, paid off two days later, and got his daughter, Gloria, back. The kidnapers had kept her doped up and so she could tell us nothing. She and her father had gone to *The Silver Slipper*, a night club and gambling joint. Her father had been called away to answer the telephone. When he got back, the waiter told him that his daughter had met some friends and had gone on to another club with them. There was nothing unusual in that. He stayed on, spent a couple of hours in the gambling rooms upstairs, and then went on home alone. The letter came in the mail the following morning. Later that day, he got a telephone message telling him where to leave the money and where to pick up his daughter. The kidnapers were true to their word, and the following day he got his daughter back."

"And then he called your office, I suppose," I said.

Johnston shook his head. "As a matter of fact, he didn't. This is one of those cases we ordinarily would not have heard of. Even when we did get into it, Dr. Regan was less than cooperative. His point was that he had made a bargain and that he had to live up to it. That's nonsense, of course, but I suppose he didn't like to say that he was afraid. And we couldn't put pressure on him. He's an important man in our town — trustee of a couple of charities, serves on civic committees, that sort of thing. And he's rich. I don't mean the sort of wealth that a fashionable doctor would have. As a matter of fact, he hasn't practised for years, except maybe on his older brother Philip who had a bad heart and who lived with him. His money comes from real estate. He owns a lot of property in the city. Well, a man like that, you can't push around.

"A private detective, name of Simes, who runs the local office for National Investigation, gave us the tip and brought us the note." He gestured toward the photostat on the table. "Philip Regan, the older brother, had called him in. He was not supposed to do any detecting, just to act as go-between and handle the

transfer of the money. The idea was, I suppose, that if the doctor himself should try to handle the matter, he might be doublecrossed — pay out money and get nothing in return except maybe a demand for more money. It turned out that it wasn't necessary. The kidnaper called the doctor who followed their instructions and got his daughter back. When I asked him why he hadn't had Simes handle it, he said that he had never intended to and had engaged him only because his brother had been so uneasy.

"Well, the daughter was back and Dr. John Regan wanted to drop the whole matter. But the next day his brother Philip had another heart attack, and died. Simes was bothered by the whole business. There was nothing wrong about the death, mind you. Philip Regan was about sixty and had had a coronary condition for years. He was apt to go at any time. I suppose the excitement of the kidnaping, and the girl coming back all doped up, may have caused it. But Simes was uneasy about concealing the kidnaping, and the death of his client on top of that made him even more uneasy. It was probably just a coincidence, he thought, but on the other hand, there might be some connection. He got in touch with his New York office and they told him to report it to us. The fact that he had dealt with Philip and not with the doctor made it a little easier for him. He was not obligated to follow the doctor's wishes in the matter since, strictly speaking, he wasn't the one who had engaged him.

"Of course, we checked into Philip's death, but there was nothing there that concerned us. He had been suffering from a bad heart for a long time. He did nothing — just hung around the house, puttering in the garden in old clothes, gossiping with passers-by over the fence. In the summer he'd sometimes take a few of the neighbor's kids and go fishing. He was a harmless old coot." He brushed aside the idea with an impatient gesture of the hand. Then he smiled a shrewd, self-satisfied smile. "But, naturally, we have to investigate all kidnapings."

He was back in his armchair and spread his hands. "There you have the whole picture. Now what are we doing about it? Well, one thing we're *not* doing is trying to fathom why the kidnaper put his prints on the message. As I said, criminals are always making mistakes like that. If they didn't make mistakes of some kind, we could never hope to catch them. We just went right ahead with our routine. We sent copies of those prints down to Washington, on the off chance that they had them on file. They didn't, of course — that was too much to hope for. But we weren't disappointed. You see, when you work on a routine, you know that most of your leads won't amount to anything. It doesn't matter. Sooner or later, one of them does actually lead somewhere, and then you've cracked your case. We had a paper expert go over the message and determine what maga-

zines they had been cut from. You can't tell from the photostat, but just a casual inspection of the original showed that although they were all glossy stock, they came from different magazines. Then we set someone to trying to figure out which issue of each magazine was used. That wasn't too hard because all of those words were snipped from story heads — just tedious routine — and the printing on the reverse of each unit of type helped establish where each came from. When we found out that four different magazines had been used, all current issues, we sent men to call on every bookstore and magazine counter in the postal district from which the letter was mailed. The idea was that some clerk might remember someone coming in and buying a lot of magazines at the same time.

"Then we called in Blackie Venuti, who runs *The Silver Slipper*, and we grilled him. We wouldn't have been surprised if he had had something to do with it. He's been in some pretty dim activities, and we've had our eye on him for a long time. We didn't get anything out of him, because we haven't got a wedge to open him up with. But he gave us his reservation list, which in turn gave us the names of the people who were at his club that night.

"Of course, that story of Gloria having met some other people and gone off with them is phony. We figure that she may have been called out the way her father was, on the pretext of a telephone message. The waiter said she told him she was leaving and that that was all he told her father. I fancy her father assumed that she had met some people and gone on to another club with them. He was vague about just what the waiter did tell him, when we questioned him a second time. We're planning to question him some more. And we're going to question everyone who was at the club that night. The chances are that she slipped away during the floor show, when the place was pretty dark, but still somebody *may* have noticed her. But —" he held up a forefinger and looked around at us impressively, "one thing we know, and that is that if we can judge by past experience, someone will pop up who saw something or who can give us some sort of clue, and we'll follow that clue until we finally have a case."

He sat back with a self-satisfied air, and I felt that I had been properly squelched. I was going to explain that I had not offered my story as a workable method, when the doorbell rang and I remembered that it was Friday night, my regular evening for chess with Nicky, and that I had forgotten to cancel our appointment.

I hurried to answer the door myself. It was Nicky, of course. He wouldn't forget. He caught sight of the company and looked at me sharply out of his frosty blue eyes. I stammered apologies and then quickly added to mollify him, "We were just talking about you, Nicky. Won't you join us?"

Nicky, Professor Nicholas Welt,

Snowdon Professor of English Language and Literature at the university, was only a year or two older than I, but whether it was the fact that he had snow-white hair prematurely, while mine was barely gray at the temples, or because he had been a class or two ahead of me, he always treated me like an immature schoolboy, and for the life of me, I always felt like one when I was with him.

He heard me out politely enough, his little blue eyes glittering suspiciously at my company. But he was reserved as he shook hands with each of my guests, in acknowledgment of introductions. When he had made the rounds, Johnston said with a sly look at the rest of us, "Your friend has been telling us of your clever hunch, Professor, which enabled him to break a case. Perhaps you can give us a hand on another problem. What do you make of that little note on the table?"

I expected Nicky to take offense at the suggestion that he acted on hunches, and perhaps he did, for his thin lips were tightly compressed as though he had just bitten into a particularly sour lemon. But he said nothing and moved over to the table.

"That's a photostat," Johnston explained. "The original came to us a couple of days ago. It's not a practical joke. There actually was a kidnaping."

"It came to you with these fingerprints on it?"

"Yes. We dusted them in order to have them show up in the photostat. It wasn't too hard because those squares of paper are not newspaper but heavy, glossy-magazine stock."

"Indeed? Then that means that those prints are not on there by accident," said Nicky.

Johnston winked at the company and I felt sorry for Nicky.

"You know, Nicky, criminals are apt —" I began, but Johnston shut me up with a gesture of his hand.

"And why could it not have been an accident, Professor?" Johnston purred.

Nicky gave him the annoyed look that he usually reserved for me.

"The average newspaper," he began, in his martyred voice, "has so many more story captions from which a message could be formed than a magazine has that it would seem that the magazine stock was selected *purposely*. Obviously, because it does show fingerprints more clearly. These words are all from story headings because the writer wanted big type, but some of them have bits of the regular type showing. Inasmuch as the type faces are different, it would mean of course that several different magazines were used. I suppose that was necessary in order to get all the words needed for the message. It seems hardly likely that the criminal would go to the trouble of checking through several magazines where a single newspaper would have done just as well, if it were not that he wanted this particular type of paper. But there is additional evidence that this was not done in error, or through oversight. I am no expert, but it is plain that there are five different fingerprints here,

and they run in a regular sequence. These," he jabbed at the note with a lean forefinger, "are thumbprints, and each one is followed by four prints which represent the remaining fingers of the hand. Even to my untrained eye it appears plain that these prints are of one hand, and that the sequence from thumb to little finger was used over and over again until all the squares of paper had been used up." He looked around at each of us with that amused expression that I have always found so difficult to bear, and then said, "No, no, there is no likelihood of those prints being the result of an accident. They are there for a good reason."

"And what would be the reason for a man to take every precaution to conceal his identity by using printed words and then signing it with the one signature that he could never deny?" asked Johnston.

Nicky cocked a bushy white eyebrow at him. "Surely you can think of a reason," he said.

"Well, it might be intended as a blind to throw us off the track. It could be somebody else's prints," Johnston essayed. And then to bolster his own answer, he added, "It's not hard to lift prints, you know."

"And would it throw you off?" asked Nicky. "All five prints in regular sequence repeated over and over again? If you were able to identify the prints and if you caught the man, would any jury doubt his statement that he had been framed? And how could the writer of the note be certain that the man whose fingerprints he had stolen, as it were, did not have an iron-clad alibi? And even if he did not, wouldn't you be inclined to believe his protestations of innocence, at least to the point of inquiring who his enemies were, and thus be led perhaps to the real culprit?"

Parker of Barnstable County, down the Cape, waved his hand excitedly and Nicky nodded to him.

"Why couldn't the kidnaper have done it for just the reason you said? I mean when he gets caught, he says, 'I didn't do it. Do you think I'd be crazy enough to put my prints on the ransom note?' And so that lets him out, if you see what I mean —" Parker's voice trailed off uncertainly.

But Nicky nodded encouragingly at him. "You can see that it wouldn't do," he said gently, "for though you might suspect that the man was innocent, you would be duty-bound to investigate him and to try to make out a case against him. And how could he be sure that you would not find something, once attention were focused on him?"

I tried. "Suppose the kidnaper had something on somebody and was able to force him to leave his prints on the note."

It was only what I expected when he shook his head. "This is kidnaping. Next to murder, it is the worst crime in the calendar. If the man were identified and picked up by the police, he could hardly be expected to take the blame for so serious a crime. But even if he did, it would not end there. He

would have to show just how he committed the crime, where he kept the girl, what he did with the money. And of course he couldn't. Besides, if he had been forced to put his prints on the note because of some hold that the real culprit had on him, would not this in turn give him a hold on his tormenter?"

"Unless he were dead," Johnston interjected.

"Very good," said Nicky. "Force a man to put his prints on the ransom note and then put a bullet through his head and drop his weighted body in the river. An excellent idea, except that the original objection holds. The police would not believe it. If the criminal were planning some such thing, he would have only one print, or better still, only a partial print, appear on the note — so that the possibility of accident might be more readily believed. No, you are quite right in assuming *two* people were involved, but it is a partnership, a voluntary partnership, wherein one partner affixes his prints knowingly and willingly. It would be the logical thing to do if one partner had cause to fear the good faith of the other. For example, if he were afraid that as soon as the enterprise were completed his partner might inform the police, he could make sure of his continued silence in this way."

I'm afraid we all felt a little disappointed. Nicky had taken so high a hand with us that we had come to believe that he really had the answer. This was a complete let-down. Why, there were any number of objections to this theory. Johnston voiced one.

"Why would the partner be crazy enough to do it?"

"Because he is safe," Nicky shot back at him. "He is not a professional criminal. His fingerprints will not be found in any Bureau of Identification."

"Not good enough," said Johnston. "We start hunting and we find something. Just the shadow of a clue. With those prints, that would clinch it. It would be too dangerous."

"Unless, of course, he had every reason to believe that the note would never reach the police," Nicky suggested gently.

"How could he be sure of that?" Johnston demanded truculently.

"By having the letter addressed to his own home," said Nicky.

I don't suppose any of us caught the full implication of Nicky's suggestion.

"Suppose," Nicky went on, "a man with a rich father or brother or a doting aunt needs money badly. He's gambled more than he could afford to lose, or he has been living too high. Or say, he just wants a large sum of money with no strings attached. If he tries to borrow it from his moneyed relative, he will be refused, or he will be expected to pay it back in a certain specified time. But suppose he can go to this same relative and say, 'Dear Aunt Agatha, Gloria has been kidnaped and the kidnapers demand fifty thousand dollars.' Or suppose the note comes directly to Aunt Agatha who lives with him. Naturally, she would show him the note and in all

probability arrange for him to act for her in the matter. Now, how would he go about arranging it? He would seek out some criminal perhaps, and outline the plan, and offer him a large portion of the proceeds for sharing in the enterprise with him. Or perhaps the criminal suggests the idea to him in the first place. The criminal — I am not thinking of a petty thief in a sweater and a cap, but a promoter of crimes — what is the slang expression? a big shot — would want to make sure that after it was all over the respectable partner did not hand him over to the police. He would insist that the respectable partner implicate himself unmistakably. The fingerprint method suggests itself immediately."

"Why couldn't he just have the respectable one write out and sign a statement of his participation in the crime?"

"That would be a crazy thing to do," Nicky retorted. "He would be subject to blackmail for the rest of his life."

"Well, isn't he subject to blackmail this way, with his prints on the ransom note?" I asked.

Nicky looked at me in exasperation. "You forget that *he* received the note. He probably sealed the envelope and dropped it in the mailbox himself. It is addressed to himself or to his father or his rich aunt. It arrives at his residence like any other piece of mail. The moment the money is paid off, he destroys it."

"Can't he go to the police then and squeal on his confederate?"

"And how is he going to show that a demand was made for money?" Nicky replied tartly.

We all sat back, each running over in his own mind the composite picture that we could now construct from Johnston's original story and Nicky's deductive analysis of the ransom note.

The more I thought of it, the more convinced I was that Nicky was right. The two brothers living together in a big house. Philip the elder, poor and sick, beholden to his rich successful brother for his very shelter. His strange friends — had it been one of these who had first suggested the plan? Perhaps he did not think he was as sick as his doctor brother insisted. With a large sum of money, Philip could be free and independent. But had Dr. John suspected his brother's implication in the plot against him? Was that the reason Dr. John was now so uncooperative? But why had Philip called in the private detective? That flaw bothered me. Then I saw the whole picture. The doctor, an upright citizen who served on civic committees, had insisted on going to the police in spite of the threat in the note. Philip had been badly worried for a bit, but in the end he had persuaded John to call in a private detective instead. Later the doctor had become suspicious. Perhaps Philip had even confessed just before he died. And now the doctor was afraid to have the police investigate for fear they would uncover his brother's part in the business.

"There's just one little point,"

Nicky said, seeming to echo my thought aloud. "The partner who received the note was not likely to hand it over to the police. I am curious to know how it came into your hands."

"It doesn't hurt your theory any, our having the note," Johnston said, and proceeded to re-tell the story as he had originally given it to us. "My guess would be that the criminal partner is Blackie Venuti," he ended.

Nicky nodded. "Yes, I would say that was indicated. Gloria was last seen at his club. Venuti would have no fear of the trail leading back to him, since the whole business, in a sense, was faked. She might even have been held right there in the club all the time."

"We'll sweat it out of Venuti," said Johnston grimly. "Too bad we can't do the same to the respectable partner."

"And why not?" asked Nicky.

"Because as I told you, Philip Regan died yesterday."

"Or was murdered," said Nicky. "It would have been easy enough. The man had a bad heart. A sharp blow to the pit of the stomach would probably do it. If there was a mark, it could readily be explained as resulting from his having fallen against something during his heart attack."

"What do you mean, Professor?"

Nicky shrugged his shoulders. "You see two brothers. Dr. John dresses well and goes to night clubs and serves on civic committees, and all the rest of it. And Philip is sick and lounges around in bathrobe and slippers, unshaven, puttering around the garden. You immediately assume that Dr. John is the rich one, and Philip the poor one." He looked around our little company and his eyes came to rest on Eccles of Norfolk County, a tall, lean, leathery man of sixty-five. Addressing him, he said, "If you had a million dollars, what would you do?"

Eccles smiled. "I'd go fishing nearly every day."

Nicky nodded approvingly. "Precisely. I imagine that's how Philip Regan felt. He had plenty of money and he could do as he liked. So he pampered himself. He dressed when he felt like it, and he didn't shave when he didn't want to. And he could afford to have his younger brother give up his medical practice and dance attendance on him. And John was so addicted to the fleshpots that for the sake of fine clothes and motor cars and plenty of spending money and social prominence, he was willing to serve as a male nurse to his elder brother. I don't suppose Philip was an easy taskmaster. He was a sick man, for one thing. I fancy he indulged in will-shaking on occasion, threatening to cut off his younger brother without a penny. So Dr. John Regan gambled — in the hope of achieving a certain amount of independence — and lost."

"But we know that John is the one who has the money," Johnston insisted. "He owns scads of real estate in Boston. And it's all his. We looked him up. He is listed in the registry of deeds as owning real estate valued at more than two million dollars."

"No doubt," Nicky conceded. "But I'll wager that somewhere — in the house itself probably, in a good strong safe — Philip had a deed for every piece of property that Dr. John Regan had registry-title to. Our realty law is hopelessly out of date, and for any number of good reasons it is worthwhile to keep one's holdings in a straw name. Dr. John was the straw man in Philip's real-estate transactions. And as you know, Mr. Johnston, the prime requisite of a straw man is that he have no attachable assets of his own. Unless you can get Dr. John to confess, you may never find out exactly what happened, but you can make a pretty good guess. John had lost heavily at Venuti's gambling tables and was deep in debt. Was Venuti pressing him for payment? Did Venuti suggest the scheme?" He shrugged his shoulders. "It makes no great difference. The note was prepared and Philip received it the next day. Since Gloria is John's daughter, and only a niece to Philip, Philip could not go to the police over his brother's objections, but he could insist on bringing in a private detective. Maybe Philip began to suspect something. Maybe he noticed the prints and on his own initiative compared them with those of his brother John — they could readily be found on the furniture around the house. I suppose he made the mistake of telling John that he knew the truth, and intended to notify the police."

"But why couldn't it be the other way round, Nicky?" I demanded. "Why couldn't Philip have been the poor one, the culprit? Why couldn't things be as they appear — that John is the rich one and Philip the poor one? Why couldn't John have wanted to go to the police and been dissuaded by Philip? Why couldn't John's present lack of cooperation with the police be the result of his having learned of his brother's part in the kidnaping?"

Nicky's amused smile brought me to a halt.

"Because," he said, "it was Philip who dealt with the detective and gave him the note. If he had been the culprit, he would never have let the note out of his hands — at least, not without first erasing the prints."

There was silence for a moment. Then Johnston voiced our collective opinion. "It sounds right and tight, Professor, but how can we prove it?"

"You might have some difficulty with the murder," said Nicky. "But the kidnaping plot should be easy. Philip's lawyers would know the real owner of the real estate. The bank would have a record of the account from which the fifty thousand dollars were withdrawn. Dr. John will have to explain *his* fingerprints on the note. Venuti will talk when he realizes that you know the whole story and that he might be tied in with a murder. From here on, ordinary police routine should give the necessary legal proof."

He looked around questioningly when we all laughed — even Johnston.

GUESS WHO?

by TALBOT C. HATCH

A MAN of the common people, this one, but very, very astute. Yes, sir, he can dawdle (and, on occasion, waddle) through many and many a page, with cumbrous thoughts and cogitation galore, and come up at the denouement with as neat an unscrambling of the egg as ever any sleuth unscrambled. He's a big man, this one, and a strong one, but these are not even surface indications of his prowess. His little gray cells, however, are always in ferment and the things he can ponder on and the thoughts to which he can give cerebration are wondrous indeed.

You wouldn't think it to look at him. He towers over his fellowmen, a fact made possible by his good five-feet-eleven of bulky flesh that might well have been hewn from a block of granite. His shoulders are broad and powerful, and his thick and fleshy hands are like huge hams. His face is heavy, placid, and hard, and his drawn features and heavy jowls give no indication that underneath the bowler hat he wears lies a Machiavellian understanding of the contortions of the criminal mind that is at once the despair of the underworld and the envy of his fellow officials.

It may be a carefully cultivated trick of optics and, if so, it certainly is an achievement of monumental proportions, but it remains a fact that his eyes are so vague and dull as to seem to be devoid of intelligence, having so ponderous and impenetrable a stare — one so utterly stagnant as to seem empty — that the onlooker not infrequently is led to believe that he is a fool. In manner he is awkward, so much so that he can be likened to a *petit bourgeois* in surroundings to which he does not belong. All in all, not a likely looking fellow to be seeking out the rogues and malefactors that infest the traffic lanes of the world.

He usually wears an enormous, heavy overcoat of black that has a velvet collar and is a byword on the *Quai des Orfèvres*, where for more than twenty years he has maintained his office. When traveling he carries an ancient and shabby Gladstone bag and this suffices for his utmost needs.

He is an inveterate pipe smoker and whether it is his own or another's tobacco that he uses, a straight brier pipe is as much a part of him as any other feature of his face. An occasional cigarette or cigar he sometimes allows himself, but only when circumstances dictate that his much loved pipe would be objectionable to others. He indulges in beer and liquors but not to excess and beer is by far his preference. He gives his allegiance to the brews of his own country, although he allows that others may have

their points. Very definitely he is not of the cocktail generation — eschewing such concoctions as the spawn of fools.

If you know him at all, you know that he will never allow himself to be bothered with untimely questions. He'll look straight through you as if you weren't there at all, and then wander off muttering something that you can't hear and leaving you with the feeling of being completely crushed. If you arrive at the scene of a crime where he has remained to question and observe and try to probe into the status of the affair, his reply is a short and conclusive one: "You see, I never make deductions."

In a way, his methods of solving a crime are peculiar. He is not much given to material clues as such, but prefers to mix in with the lives of the people involved. He does not dash about collecting scraps of paper, bits of cigar ash, bottles that may have contained poison, finger- or footprints. These he justly considers the trivia of routine police procedure and is much more concerned with the mentalities of the persons connected with the crime. He likes to consider and weigh each fact separately. If it means delving twenty years backward into time, so much the better.

In a sense he is comparatively a newcomer to the ranks of fictional detectives for he first emerged from the French language in 1941. However, according to the record, he was born in St. Fiacre, France, in the latter years of the last century and by now must be in his mid-fifties. A full twenty of his years have been spent as an Inspector of the *Police Judiciaire* and he has been given credit and won acclaim for his capable handling of hundreds of cases of all kinds.

And now, as a final hint, much of his life is said to be based on the authentic career of one of the most famous detectives of France, a fact which may or may not be pertinent to the statement that in his own exploits he proves himself to be a most human and "living" character. Can you now *GUESS WHO?* No? Then we suggest you look at the solution below, printed upside down.

Inspector Maigret — brain-child of Georges Sim, better known as Georges Simenon, an author who has lived to see his books become so popular that they have been translated and published in seventeen countries of the world. Recently Charles Laughton played the part of Inspector Maigret in the movie *The Man on the Eiffel Tower*.

Watch next month for another Inspector Maigret story — *The Stronger Vessel* — never before published in the United States.

ELLERY QUEEN SELECTS . . .

Which are the twelve best detective short stories ever written? . . . You will recall that we asked a Blue Ribbon Jury of experts to select the crème de la *crime, the best of all time, among all the detective shorts written since "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" blazed the first 'tec trail and became an eternal light in lethal literature. This cross-sectional criticism evolved from the combined opinions of James Hilton, Howard Haycraft, John Dickson Carr, Anthony Boucher, Vincent Starrett, James Sandoe, August Derleth, Viola Brothers Shore, Lee Wright, Lew D. Feldman, Charles Honce, and (to fill out the jury to the required legal number) Ellery Queen. The proof of the panel's cross-sectional quality lies in the variety of fields represented — for the members of the jury are not only craftsmen, critics, connoisseurs, and editors, but also duly accredited representatives of bookdealers, book collectors, and book readers. The final verdict of the symposium, arrived at by a point-system of voting, nominated the following twelve short stories as* THE GOLDEN DOZEN *of crime, detection, and mystery:*

The Hands of Mr. Ottermole . . . by Thomas Burke
The Purloined Letter . . . . . by Edgar A. Poe
The Red-Headed League . . . . . by A. Conan Doyle
The Avenging Chance . . . . . by Anthony Berkeley
The Absent-Minded Coterie . . . . by Robert Barr
The Problem of Cell 13 . . . . . by Jacques Futrelle
The Oracle of the Dog . . . . . by G. K. Chesterton
Naboth's Vineyard . . . . . by Melville Davisson Post
The Gioconda Smile . . . . . by Aldous Huxley
The Yellow Slugs . . . . . by H. C. Bailey
The Genuine Tabard . . . . . by E. C. Bentley
Suspicion . . . . . by Dorothy L. Sayers

This month we bring you Dorothy L. Sayers's "Suspicion," the last of THE GOLDEN DOZEN. *It is peculiarly appropriate that this story be sponsored by your Editors, for it was Ellery Queen who introduced Miss Sayers's masterpiece to the American public. Seventeen years ago (it is almost impossible to believe it was that long ago) we purchased the story from original manuscript and published it in the October 1933 issue (Vol. 1, No. 1) of that ill-starred but noble experiment called "Mystery League" — a jumbo magazine, in contrast with the pocket-size periodicals now in favor, which was murdered by a blunt instrument after a mere four issues.*

Seventeen years ago we called "Suspicion" a "criminological gem . . . of fluid and technical perfection." After nearly two decades we have no reason whatever to modify our earliest critical opinion. Indeed, the story has become in the interim a recognized classic, and has earned Miss Sayers a small fortune in permission fees — from anthology reprints, radio and television adaptations, and many other sources.

Now, may we list our own all-time favorites? — although we feel constrained to make two provisos. First, these twelve best detective-crime short stories, although chosen after interminable pro-ing and con-ing, are subject to change without notice; second, we are deeply conscious of the absolute truth that we could compile another list — of 12 or 20 or even 100 — whose average quality could not be distinguished from the list below except by the most scientific use of calipers and magnifying glass. That much for the decisiveness of our detectival deliberations . . .

The Hands of Mr. Ottermole . . . by Thomas Burke
The Purloined Letter . . . . . by Edgar A. Poe
The Red-Headed League . . . . . by A. Conan Doyle
The Avenging Chance . . . . . by Anthony Berkeley
The Absent-Minded Coterie . . . . by Robert Barr
The Problem of Cell 13 . . . . . by Jacques Futrelle
The Honour of Israel Gow . . . . . by G. K. Chesterton
The Doomdorf Mystery . . . . . by Melville Davisson Post
The Red Silk Scarf . . . . . by Maurice Leblanc
Two Bottles of Relish . . . . . by Lord Dunsany
The Gutting of Couffignal . . . . . by Dashiell Hammett
Suspicion . . . . . by Dorothy L. Sayers

Miss Sayers once gave her own definition for good writing. She said that "the test of good writing is a simple one. If a sentence puzzles you, pull it to pieces. If it is good writing, then the harder you pull, the more tightly you will discover it to be woven together, and the more closely you examine it, the more meaning it will yield. But if it tumbles to bits easily — if you find its syntax dislocated, its epithets imprecise, its meaning vague or contradictory — then it is bad, and should be quickly thrown into the dustbin of oblivion; one should not keep rubbish lying about in the house of the mind." Test this definition, if you wish, in your reading of her own story . . .

So, farewell to THE GOLDEN DOZEN. *May we paraphrase Sir Walter Raleigh by saying that we have not feared to print the best, the truth has been our warrant . . .*

SUSPICION

by DOROTHY L. SAYERS

As the atmosphere of the railway carriage thickened with tobacco smoke, Mr. Mummery became increasingly aware that his breakfast had not agreed with him.

There could have been nothing wrong with the breakfast itself. Brown bread, rich in vitamin content, as advised by the *Morning Star's* health expert; bacon fried to a delicious crispness; eggs just nicely set; coffee made as only Mrs. Sutton knew how to make it. Mrs. Sutton had been a real find, and that was something to be thankful for. For Ethel, since her nervous breakdown in the summer, had really not been fit to wrestle with the untrained girls who had come and gone in tempestuous succession. It took very little to upset Ethel nowadays, poor child. Mr. Mummery, trying hard to ignore his growing internal discomfort, hoped he was not in for an illness. Apart from the trouble it would cause at the office, it would worry Ethel terribly, and Mr. Mummery would cheerfully have laid down his rather uninteresting little life to spare Ethel a moment's uneasiness.

He slipped a digestive tablet into his mouth — he had taken lately to carrying a few tablets about with him — and opened his paper. There did not seem to be very much news. A question had been asked in the House about Government typewriters. The Prince of Wales had smilingly opened an all-British exhibition of footwear. A further split had occurred in the Liberal party. The police were still looking for the woman who was supposed to have poisoned a family in Lincoln. Two girls had been trapped in a burning factory. A film star had obtained her fourth decree nisi.

At Paragon Station, Mr. Mummery descended and took a tram. The internal discomfort was taking the form of a definite nausea. Happily he contrived to reach his office before the worst occurred. He was seated at his desk, pale but in control of himself, when his partner came breezing in.

"'Morning, Mummery," said Mr. Brookes in his loud tones, adding inevitably, "Cold enough for you?"

"Quite," replied Mr. Mummery. "Unpleasantly raw, in fact."

"Beastly, beastly," said Mr. Brookes. "Your bulbs all in?"

"Not quite all," confessed Mr. Mummery. "As a matter of fact I haven't been feeling —"

"Pity," interrupted his partner. "Great pity. Ought to get 'em in early. Mine were in last week. My little place will be a picture in the

spring. For a town garden, that is. You're lucky, living in the country. Find it better than Hull, I expect, eh? Though we get plenty of fresh air up in the Avenues. How's the missus?"

"Thank you, she's very much better."

"Glad to hear that, very glad. Hope we shall have her about again this winter as usual. Can't do without her in the Drama Society, you know. By Jove, I shan't forget her acting last year in 'Romance.' She and young Welbeck positively brought the house down, didn't they? The Welbecks were asking after her only yesterday."

"Thank you, yes. I hope she will soon be able to take up her social activities again. But the doctor says she mustn't overdo it. No worry, he says — that's the important thing. She is to go easy and not rush about or undertake too much."

"Quite right, quite right. Worry's the devil and all. I cut out worrying years ago and look at me! Fit as a fiddle, for all I shan't see fifty again. *You're* not looking altogether the thing, by the way."

"A touch of dyspepsia," said Mr. Mummery. "Nothing much. Chill on the liver, that's what I put it down to."

"That's what it is," said Mr. Brookes, seizing his opportunity. "Is life worth living? It depends upon the liver. Ha, ha! Well now, well now — we must do a spot of work, I suppose. Where's that lease of Ferraby's?"

Mr. Mummery, who did not feel at his conversational best that morning, rather welcomed this suggestion, and for half an hour was allowed to proceed in peace with the duties of an estate agent. Presently, however, Mr. Brookes burst into speech again.

"By the way," he said abruptly, "I suppose your wife doesn't know of a good cook, does she?"

"Well, no," replied Mr. Mummery. "They aren't so easy to find nowadays. In fact, we've only just got suited ourselves. But why? Surely your old Cookie isn't leaving you?"

"Good lord, no!" Mr. Brookes laughed heartily. "It would take an earthquake to shake off old Cookie. No. It's for the Philipsons. Their girl's getting married. That's the worst of girls. I said to Philipson, 'You mind what you're doing,' I said. 'Get somebody you know something about, or you may find yourself landed with this poisoning woman — what's her name — Andrews. Don't want to be sending wreaths to your funeral yet awhile,' I said. He laughed, but it's no laughing matter and so I told him. What we pay the police for I simply don't know. Nearly a month now, and they can't seem to lay hands on the woman. All they say is, they think she's hanging about the neighbourhood and 'may seek a situation as cook.' As cook! Now I ask you!"

"You don't think she committed suicide, then?" suggested Mr. Mummery.

"Suicide my foot!" retorted Mr. Brookes coarsely. "Don't you believe it, my boy. That coat found in the

river was all eyewash. *They* don't commit suicide, that sort don't."

"What sort?"

"Those arsenic maniacs. They're too damned careful of their own skins. Cunning as weasels, that's what they are. It's only to be hoped they'll manage to catch her before she tries her hand on anybody else. As I told Philipson —"

"You think Mrs. Andrews did it?"

"Did it? Of course she did it. It's plain as the nose on your face. Looked after her old father, and he died suddenly — left her a bit of money, too. Then she keeps house for an elderly gentleman, and *he* dies suddenly. Now there's this husband and wife — man dies and woman taken very ill, of arsenic poisoning. Cook runs away, and you ask, did she do it? I don't mind betting that when they dig up the father and the other old bird they'll find *them* bung full of arsenic, too. Once that sort gets started, they don't stop. Grows on 'em, as you might say."

"I suppose it does," said Mr. Mummery. He picked up his paper again and studied the photograph of the missing woman. "She looks harmless enough," he remarked. "Rather a nice, motherly-looking kind of woman."

"She's got a bad mouth," pronounced Mr. Brookes. He had a theory that character showed in the mouth. "I wouldn't trust that woman an inch."

As the day went on, Mr. Mummery felt better. He was rather nervous about his lunch, choosing carefully a little boiled fish and custard pudding and being particular not to rush about immediately after the meal. To his great relief, the fish and custard remained where they were put, and he was not visited by that tiresome pain which had become almost habitual in the last fortnight. By the end of the day he became quite light-hearted. The bogey of illness and doctor's bills ceased to haunt him. He bought a bunch of bronze chrysanthemums to carry home to Ethel, and it was with a feeling of pleasant anticipation that he left the train and walked up the garden path of *Mon Abri*.

He was a little dashed by not finding his wife in the sitting room. Still clutching the bunch of chrysanthemums he pattered down the passage and pushed open the kitchen door.

Nobody was there but the cook. She was sitting at the table with her back to him, and started up almost guiltily as he approached.

"Lor', sir," she said, "you give me quite a start. I didn't hear the front door go."

"Where is Mrs. Mummery? Not feeling bad again, is she?"

"Well, sir, she's got a bit of a headache, poor lamb. I made her lay down and took her up a nice cup o' tea at half past four. I think she's dozing nicely now."

"Dear, dear," said Mr. Mummery.

"It was turning out the dining room done it, if you ask me," said Mrs. Sutton. " 'Now, don't you overdo

yourself, ma'am,' I says to her, but you know how she is, sir. She gets that restless, she can't abear to be doing nothing."

"I know," said Mr. Mummery. "It's not your fault, Mrs. Sutton. I'm sure you look after us both admirably. I'll just run up and have a peep at her. I won't disturb her if she's asleep. By the way, what are we having for dinner?"

"Well, I *had* made a nice steak-and-kidney pie," said Mrs. Sutton, in accents suggesting that she would readily turn it into a pumpkin or a coach and four if it was not approved of.

"Oh!" said Mr. Mummery. "Pastry? Well, I —"

"You'll find it beautiful and light," protested the cook, whisking open the oven door for Mr. Mummery to see. "And it's made with butter, sir, you having said that you found lard indigestible."

"Thank you, thank you," said Mr. Mummery. "I'm sure it will be most excellent. I haven't been feeling altogether the thing just lately, and lard does not seem to suit me nowadays."

"Well, it don't suit some people, and that's a fact," agreed Mrs. Sutton. "I shouldn't wonder if you've got a bit of a chill on the liver. I'm sure this weather is enough to upset anybody."

She bustled to the table and cleared away the picture paper which she had been reading.

"Perhaps the mistress would like her dinner sent up to her?" she suggested.

Mr. Mummery said he would go and see, and tiptoed his way upstairs. Ethel was lying snuggled under the eiderdown and looked very small and fragile in the big double bed. She stirred as he came in and smiled up at him.

"Hullo, darling!" said Mr. Mummery.

"Hullo! You back? I must have been asleep. I got tired and headachy, and Mrs. Sutton packed me off upstairs."

"You've been doing too much, sweetheart," said her husband, taking her hand in his and sitting down on the edge of the bed.

"Yes — it was naughty of me. What lovely flowers, Harold. All for me?"

"All for you, Tiddleywinks," said Mr. Mummery tenderly. "Don't I deserve something for that?"

Mrs. Mummery smiled, and Mr. Mummery took his reward several times over.

"That's quite enough, you sentimental old thing," said Mrs. Mummery. "Run away, now, I'm going to get up."

"Much better go to bed, my precious, and let Mrs. Sutton send your dinner up," said her husband.

Ethel protested, but he was firm with her. If she didn't take care of herself, she wouldn't be allowed to go to the Drama Society meetings. And everybody was so anxious to have her back. The Welbecks had been asking after her and saying that they really couldn't get on without her.

"Did they?" said Ethel with some animation. "It's very sweet of them to want me. Well, perhaps I'll go to bed after all. And how has my old Hubby been all day?"

"Not too bad, not too bad."

"No more tummyaches?"

"Well, just a *little* tummyache. But it's quite gone now. Nothing for Tiddleywinks to worry about."

Mr. Mummery experienced no more distressing symptoms the next day or the next. Following the advice of the newspaper expert, he took to drinking orange juice, and was delighted with the results of the treatment. On Thursday, however, he was taken so ill in the night that Ethel was alarmed and insisted on sending for the doctor. The doctor felt his pulse and looked at his tongue and appeared to take the matter lightly. An inquiry into what he had been eating elicited the fact that dinner had consisted of pig's trotters, followed by a milk pudding, and that, before retiring, Mr. Mummery had consumed a large glass of orange juice, according to his new régime.

"There's your trouble," said Dr. Griffith cheerfully. "Orange juice is an excellent thing, and so are trotters, but not in combination. Pig and oranges together are extraordinarily bad for the liver. I don't know why they should be, but there's no doubt that they are. Now I'll send you round a little prescription and you stick to slops for a day or two and keep off pork. And don't you worry about him, Mrs. Mummery, he's as sound as a trout. *You're* the one we've got to look after. I don't want to see those black rings under the eyes, you know. Disturbed night, of course — yes. Taking your tonic regularly? That's right. Well, don't be alarmed about your hubby. We'll soon have him out and about again."

The prophecy was fulfilled, but not immediately. Mr. Mummery, though confining his diet to Benger's food, bread and milk and beef tea skilfully prepared by Mrs. Sutton and brought to his bedside by Ethel, remained very seedy all through Friday, and was only able to stagger rather shakily downstairs on Saturday afternoon. He had evidently suffered a "thorough upset." However, he was able to attend to a few papers which Brookes had sent down from the office for his signature, and to deal with the household books. Ethel was not a business woman, and Mr. Mummery always ran over the accounts with her. Having settled up with the butcher, the baker, the dairy and the coal merchant, Mr. Mummery looked up.

"Anything more, darling?"

"Well, there's Mrs. Sutton. This is the end of her month, you know."

"So it is. Well, you're quite satisfied with her, aren't you, darling?"

"Yes, rather — aren't you? She's a good cook, and a sweet, motherly old thing, too. Don't you think it was a real brain wave of mine, engaging her like that, on the spot?"

"I do, indeed," said Mr. Mummery, with real approval.

"It was a perfect providence, her turning up like that, just after that wretched Jane had gone off without even giving notice. I was in absolute *despair*. It was a little bit of a gamble, of course, taking her without any references, but naturally, if she'd been looking after a widowed mother, you couldn't expect her to give references."

"N-no," said Mr. Mummery. At the time he had felt uneasy about the matter, though he had not liked to say much because, of course, they simply had to have somebody. And the experiment had justified itself so triumphantly in practice that one couldn't say much about it now. He had once rather tentatively suggested writing to the clergyman of Mrs. Sutton's parish but, as Ethel had said, the clergyman wouldn't have been able to tell them anything about cooking, and cooking, after all, was the chief point.

Mr. Mummery counted out the month's money.

"And by the way, my dear," he said, "you might just mention to Mrs. Sutton that if she *must* read the morning paper before I come down, I should be obliged if she would fold it neatly afterwards."

"What an old fuss-box you are, darling," said his wife.

Mr. Mummery sighed. He could not explain that it was somehow important that the morning paper should come to him fresh and prim, like a virgin. Women did not feel these things.

On Sunday, Mr. Mummery felt very much better — quite his old self, in fact. He enjoyed the *News of the World* over breakfast in bed, reading the murders rather carefully. Mr. Mummery got quite a lot of pleasure out of murders — they gave him an agreeable thrill of vicarious adventure, for, naturally, they were matters quite remote from daily life in the outskirts of Hull.

He noticed that Brookes had been perfectly right. Mrs. Andrews's father and former employer had been "dug up" and had, indeed, proved to be "bung full" of arsenic.

He came downstairs for dinner — roast sirloin, with the potatoes done under the meat and Yorkshire pudding of delicious lightness, and an apple tart to follow. After three days of invalid diet, it was delightful to savour the crisp fat and underdone lean. He ate moderately, but with a sensuous enjoyment. Ethel, on the other hand, seemed a little lacking in appetite, but then, she had never been a great meat eater. She was fastidious and, besides, she was (quite unnecessarily) afraid of getting fat.

It was a fine afternoon, and at three o'clock, when he was quite certain that the roast beef was "settling" properly, it occurred to Mr. Mummery that it would be a good thing to put the rest of those bulbs in. He slipped on his old gardening coat and wandered out to the potting shed. Here he picked up a bag of tulips and a trowel, and then, remembering that he was wearing his good trousers, de-

cided that it would be wise to take a mat to kneel on. When had he had the mat last? He could not recollect, but he rather fancied he had put it away in the corner under the potting shelf. Stooping down, he felt about in the dark among the flower pots. Yes, there it was, but there was a tin of something in the way. He lifted the tin carefully out. Of course, yes — the remains of the weed killer.

Mr. Mummery glanced at the pink label, printed in staring letters with the legend: "ARSENICAL WEED KILLER. *Poison*," and observed, with a mild feeling of excitement, that it was the same brand of stuff that had been associated with Mrs. Andrews's latest victim. He was rather pleased about it. It gave him a sensation of being remotely but definitely in touch with important events. Then he noticed, with surprise and a little annoyance, that the stopper had been put in quite loosely.

"However'd I come to leave it like that?" he grunted. "Shouldn't wonder if all the goodness has gone off." He removed the stopper and squinted into the can, which appeared to be half-full. Then he rammed the thing home again, giving it a sharp thump with the handle of the trowel for better security. After that he washed his hands carefully at the scullery tap, for he did not believe in taking risks.

He was a trifle disconcerted, when he came in after planting the tulips, to find visitors in the sitting room. He was always pleased to see Mrs. Welbeck and her son, but he would rather have had warning, so that he could have scrubbed the garden mould out of his nails more thoroughly. Not that Mrs. Welbeck appeared to notice. She was a talkative woman and paid little attention to anything but her own conversation. Much to Mr. Mummery's annoyance, she chose to prattle about the Lincoln Poisoning Case. A most unsuitable subject for the tea table, thought Mr. Mummery, at the best of times. His own "upset" was vivid enough in his memory to make him queasy over the discussion of medical symptoms, and besides, this kind of talk was not good for Ethel. After all, the poisoner was still supposed to be in the neighbourhood. It was enough to make even a strong-nerved woman uneasy. A glance at Ethel showed him that she was looking quite white and tremulous. He must stop Mrs. Welbeck somehow, or there would be a repetition of one of the old, dreadful, hysterical scenes.

He broke into the conversation with violent abruptness.

"Those Forsyth cuttings, Mrs. Welbeck," he said. "Now is just about the time to take them. If you care to come down the garden I will get them for you."

He saw a relieved glance pass between Ethel and young Welbeck. Evidently the boy understood the situation and was chafing at his mother's tactlessness. Mrs. Welbeck, brought up all standing, gasped slightly and then veered off with obliging readiness on the new tack. She accom-

panied her host down the garden and chattered cheerfully about horticulture while he selected and trimmed the cuttings. She complimented Mr. Mummery on the immaculacy of his gravel paths. "I simply *cannot* keep the weeds down," she said.

Mr. Mummery mentioned the weed killer and praised its efficacy.

"That stuff!" Mrs. Welbeck stared at him. Then she shuddered. "I wouldn't have it in my place for a thousand pounds," she said, with emphasis.

Mr. Mummery smiled. "Oh, we keep it well away from the house," he said. "Even if I were a careless sort of person —"

He broke off. The recollection of the loosened stopper had come to him suddenly, and it was as though, deep down in his mind, some obscure assembling of ideas had taken place. He left it at that, and went into the kitchen to fetch a newspaper to wrap up the cuttings.

Their approach to the house had evidently been seen from the sitting room window, for when they entered, young Welbeck was already on his feet and holding Ethel's hand in the act of saying good-bye. He manoeuvred his mother out of the house with tactful promptness and Mr. Mummery returned to the kitchen to clear up the newspapers he had fished out of the drawer. To clear them up and to examine them more closely. Something had struck him about them, which he wanted to verify. He turned them over very carefully, sheet by sheet. Yes — he had been right. Every portrait of Mrs. Andrews, every paragraph and line about the Lincoln Poisoning Case, had been carefully cut out.

Mr. Mummery sat down by the kitchen fire. He felt as though he needed warmth. There seemed to be a curious cold lump of something at the pit of his stomach — something that he was chary of investigating.

He tried to recall the appearance of Mrs. Andrews as shown in the newspaper photographs, but he had not a good visual memory. He remembered having remarked to Brookes that it was a "motherly" face. Then he tried counting up the time since the disappearance. Nearly a month, Brookes had said — and that was a week ago. Must be over a month now. A month. He had just paid Mrs. Sutton her month's money.

"Ethel!" was the thought that hammered at the door of his brain. At all costs, he must cope with this monstrous suspicion on his own. He must spare her any shock or anxiety. And he must be sure of his ground. To dismiss the only decent cook they had ever had out of sheer, unfounded panic, would be wanton cruelty to both women. If he did it at all, it would have to be done arbitrarily, preposterously — he could not suggest horrors to Ethel. However it was done, there would be trouble. Ethel would not understand and he dared not tell her.

But if by any chance there was anything in this ghastly doubt — how

could he expose Ethel to the appalling danger of having the woman in the house a moment longer? He thought of the family at Lincoln — the husband dead, the wife escaped by a miracle with her life. Was not any shock, any risk, better than that?

Mr. Mummery felt suddenly very lonely and tired. His illness had taken it out of him.

Those illnesses — they had begun, when? Three weeks ago he had had the first attack. Yes, but then he had always been rather subject to gastric troubles. Bilious attacks. Not so violent, perhaps, as these last, but undoubted bilious attacks.

He pulled himself together and went, rather heavily, into the sitting room. Ethel was tucked up in a corner of the chesterfield.

"Tired, darling?"

"Yes, a little."

"That woman has worn you out with talking. She oughtn't to talk so much."

"No." Her head shifted wearily in the cushions. "All about that horrible case. I don't like hearing about such things."

"Of course not. Still, when a thing like that happens in the neighbourhood, people will gossip and talk. It would be a relief if they caught the woman. One doesn't like to think —"

"I don't want to think of anything so hateful. She must be a horrible creature."

"Horrible. Brookes was saying the other day —"

"I don't want to hear what he said. I don't want to hear about it at all. I want to be quiet. I want to be quiet!"

He recognised the note of rising hysteria.

"Tiddleywinks shall be quiet. Don't worry, darling. We won't talk about horrors."

No. It would not do to talk about them.

Ethel went to bed early. It was understood that on Sundays Mr. Mummery should sit up till Mrs. Sutton came in. Ethel was a little anxious about this, but he assured her that he felt quite strong enough. In body, indeed, he did; it was his mind that felt weak and confused. He had decided to make a casual remark about the mutilated newspapers — just to see what Mrs. Sutton would say.

He allowed himself the usual indulgence of a whisky and soda as he sat waiting. At a quarter to ten he heard the familiar click of the garden gate. Footsteps passed up the gravel — squeak, squeak, to the back-door. Then the sound of the latch, the shutting of the door, the rattle of the bolts being shot home. Then a pause. Mrs. Sutton would be taking off her hat. The moment was coming.

The steps sounded in the passage. The door opened. Mrs. Sutton in her neat black dress stood on the threshold. He was aware of a reluctance to face her. Then he looked up. A plump-faced woman, her eyes obscured by thick horn-rimmed spectacles. Was there, perhaps, something hard about the mouth? Or was it just that she had lost most of her front teeth?

"Would you be requiring anything tonight, sir, before I go up?"

"No, thank you, Mrs. Sutton."

"I hope you are feeling better, sir." Her eager interest in his health seemed to him almost sinister, but the eyes, behind the thick glasses, were inscrutable.

"Quite better, thank you, Mrs. Sutton."

"Mrs. Mummery is not indisposed, is she, sir? Should I take her up a glass of hot milk or anything?"

"No, thank you, no." He spoke hurriedly, and fancied that she looked disappointed.

"Very well, sir. Good night, sir."

"Good night. Oh! by the way, Mrs. Sutton —"

"Yes, sir?"

"Oh, nothing," said Mr. Mummery, "nothing."

Next morning Mr. Mummery opened his paper eagerly. He would have been glad to learn that an arrest had been made over the weekend. But there was no news for him. The chairman of a trust company had blown out his brains, and the headlines were all occupied with tales about lost millions and ruined shareholders. Both in his own paper and in those he purchased on the way to the office, the Lincoln Poisoning Tragedy had been relegated to an obscure paragraph on a back page, which informed him that the police were still baffled.

The next few days were the most uncomfortable that Mr. Mummery had ever spent. He developed a habit of coming down early in the morning and prowling about the kitchen. This made Ethel nervous, but Mrs. Sutton offered no remark. She watched him tolerantly, even, he thought, with something like amusement. After all, it was ridiculous. What was the use of supervising the breakfast, when he had to be out of the house every day between half past nine and six?

At the office, Brookes rallied him on the frequency with which he rang up Ethel. Mr. Mummery paid no attention. It was reassuring to hear her voice and to know that she was safe and well.

Nothing happened, and by the following Thursday he began to think that he had been a fool. He came home late that night. Brookes had persuaded him to go with him to a little bachelor dinner for a friend who was about to get married. He left the others at eleven o'clock, however, refusing to make a night of it. The household was in bed when he got back but a note from Mrs. Sutton lay on the table, informing him that there was cocoa for him in the kitchen, ready for hotting up. He hotted it up accordingly in the little saucepan where it stood. There was just one good cupful.

He sipped it thoughtfully, standing by the kitchen stove. After the first sip, he put the cup down. Was it his fancy, or was there something queer about the taste? He sipped it again, rolling it upon his tongue. It seemed to him to have a faint tang, metallic

and unpleasant. In a sudden dread he ran out to the scullery and spat the mouthful into the sink.

After this, he stood quite still for a moment or two. Then, with a curious deliberation, as though his movements had been dictated to him, he fetched an empty medicine bottle from the pantry shelf, rinsed it under the tap and tipped the contents of the cup carefully into it. He slipped the bottle into his coat pocket and moved on tiptoe to the back door. The bolts were difficult to draw without noise, but he managed it at last. Still on tiptoe, he stole across the garden to the potting shed. Stooping down, he struck a match. He knew exactly where he had left the tin of weed killer, under the shelf behind the pots at the back. Cautiously he lifted it out. The match flared up and burnt his fingers, but before he could light another his sense of touch had told him what he wanted to know. The stopper was loose again.

Panic seized Mr. Mummery, standing there in the earthy-smelling shed, in his dress suit and overcoat, holding the tin in one hand and the match box in the other. He wanted very badly to run and tell somebody what he had discovered.

Instead, he replaced the tin exactly where he had found it and went back to the house. As he crossed the garden again, he noticed a light in Mrs. Sutton's bedroom window. This terrified him more than anything which had gone before. Was she watching him? Ethel's window was dark. If she had drunk anything deadly there would be lights everywhere, movements, calls for the doctor, just as when he himself had been attacked. Attacked — that was the right word, he thought.

Still with the same odd presence of mind and precision, he went in, washed out the utensils and made a second brew of cocoa, which he left standing in the saucepan. He crept quietly to his bedroom. Ethel's voice greeted him on the threshold.

"How late you are, Harold. Naughty old boy! Have a good time?"

"Not bad. You all right, darling?"

"Quite all right. Did Mrs. Sutton leave something hot for you? She said she would."

"Yes, but I wasn't thirsty."

Ethel laughed. "Oh! it was *that* sort of party, was it?"

Mr. Mummery did not attempt any denials. He undressed and got into bed and clutched his wife to him as though defying death and hell to take her from him. Next morning he would act. He thanked God that he was not too late.

Mr. Dimthorpe, the chemist, was a great friend of Mr. Mummery's. They had often sat together in the untidy little shop on Spring Bank and exchanged views on green-fly and club-root. Mr. Mummery told his story frankly to Mr. Dimthorpe and handed over the bottle of cocoa. Mr. Dimthorpe congratulated him on his prudence and intelligence.

"I will have it ready for you by this evening," he said, "and if it's

what you think it is, then we shall have a clear case on which to take action."

Mr. Mummery thanked him, and was extremely vague and inattentive at business all day. But that hardly mattered, for Mr. Brookes, who had seen the party through to a riotous end in the small hours, was in no very observant mood. At half past four, Mr. Mummery shut up his desk decisively and announced that he was off early, he had a call to make.

Mr. Dimthorpe was ready for him.

"No doubt about it," he said. "I used Marsh's test. It's a heavy dose — no wonder you tasted it. There must be four or five grains of pure arsenic in that bottle. Look, here's the mirror. You can see it for yourself."

Mr. Mummery gazed at the little glass tube with its ominous purple-black stain.

"Will you ring up the police from here?" asked the chemist.

"No," said Mr. Mummery. "No — I want to get home. God knows what's happening there. And I've only just time to catch my train."

"All right," said Mr. Dimthorpe. "Leave it to me. I'll ring them up for you."

The local train did not go fast enough for Mr. Mummery. Ethel — poisoned — dying — dead — Ethel — poisoned — dying — dead — the wheels drummed in his ears. He almost ran out of the station and along the road. A car was standing at his door. He saw it from the end of the street and broke into a gallop. It had happened already. The doctor was there. Fool, murderer that he was to have left things so late.

Then, while he was still a hundred and fifty yards off, he saw the front door open. A man came out followed by Ethel herself. The visitor got into his car and was driven away. Ethel went in again. She was safe — safe!

He could hardly control himself to hang up his hat and coat and go in looking reasonably calm. His wife had returned to the armchair by the fire and greeted him in some surprise. There were tea things on the table.

"Back early, aren't you?"

"Yes — business was slack. Somebody been to tea?"

"Yes, young Welbeck. About the arrangements for the Drama Society." She spoke briefly but with an undertone of excitement.

A qualm came over Mr. Mummery. Would a guest be any protection? His face must have shown his feelings, for Ethel stared at him in amazement.

"What's the matter, Harold, you look so queer."

"Darling," said Mr. Mummery, "there's something I want to tell you about." He sat down and took her hand in his. "Something a little unpleasant, I'm afraid —"

"Oh, ma'am!"

The cook was in the doorway.

"I beg your pardon, sir — I didn't know you was in. Will you be taking tea or can I clear away? And, oh, ma'am, there was a young man at the fishmonger's and he's just come from

Grimsby and they've caught that dreadful woman — that Mrs. Andrews. Isn't it a good thing? It's worritted me dreadful to think she was going about like that, but they've caught her. Taken a job as housekeeper she had to two elderly ladies and they found the wicked poison on her. Girl as spotted her will get a reward. I been keeping my eyes open for her, but it's at Grimsby she was all the time."

Mr. Mummery clutched at the arm of his chair. It had all been a mad mistake then. He wanted to shout or cry. He wanted to apologise to this foolish, pleasant, excited woman. All a mistake.

But there had been the cocoa. Mr. Dimthorpe. Marsh's test. Five grains of arsenic. Who, then — ?

He glanced around at his wife, and in her eyes he saw something that he had never seen before. . . .

Veronica Parker Johns bemoans her sparse output in the mystery field. She promises to be more prolific in the future, and we hope she is, but we cannot refrain from cautioning her: quantity is desirable, and sometimes economically mandatory — but in the last analysis, it is quality that stands trial.

Yes, Veronica Parker Johns has produced comparatively little in this speeded-up age, but those of you who have read her three books — HUSH, GABRIEL! *and* SHADY DOINGS *and especially,* THE SINGING WIDOW *— will ask Miss Johns not for a long series of assembly-line stories but for more of her special brand of slowly produced, patiently conceived studies in murder.*

In Miss Johns' "Bezique of Death" you will meet a certain Mr. J., a dolorous skeleton of a man with a face like a death mask. The meeting will take place on a noisome cargo ship between Ceylon and Bombay, and you won't forget that impassive passenger for a long time.

The background for Miss Johns' story was sopped up by her on a round-the-world cruise which she took at the impressionable age of seventeen. The actual physical counterpart of Mr. J. did not appear in Miss Johns' life until many years later, in wartime Halifax. He was a ship's doctor on a vessel very similar to the Princess Charlotte Anne — a jocular soul with no trace of harm in him, yet looking the part of a villain to a 'tec T. The creative change in his character, and the other pieces in the puzzle, came to Miss Johns in her own Connecticut garden while she was in the act of committing murder. Who said that tales of crime and detection do not derive from real life? If you dig deep enough, every plot idea and every character conception has its roots in what a writer has seen, or read, or heard, or done. The essential truth of this observation is in no way violated by the fact that Miss Johns was murdering Japanese beetles . . .

BEZIQUE OF DEATH

by VERONICA PARKER JOHNS

OF COURSE I assumed he was joking, in a nasty, macabre way. It was scarcely a subject for humor, but this was a humorless night and the setting was unsuitable for comedy.

I was standing on the top deck of the steamer *Princess Charlotte Anne* because there, if anywhere, there

might be a breeze. The *Princess* was noble in name only. She was a down-at-the-heels cargo ship, the seagoing equivalent of a one-and-a-half-ton truck which had suffered indignities at the hands of many owners. She reeked of curry and imponderables, but she offered the only means of my getting to Bombay at the time I wished to be there. My friends in Ceylon, who had reluctantly arranged the sailing, considered it folly for a woman alone, even for a woman of my not inconsiderable years. They cautioned me against speaking to strangers or stewards, stocked me with provisions, packed a delicious supper which included a thermos of Singapore gin-slings, and deposited me in my cabin, where they advised me to remain.

They were wise, perhaps, but not infinitely so. They could not foretell the excess of oppression I would feel in that tiny, boxlike space; and the smell, how could they guess at that? The amalgam, almost tangible, of the odors of old citrus fruits, rats, salt, something with an affinity to ether which had been used tentatively to clean the place, and the curry — the age-old, antediluvian curry. It was like being shut up in a coffin with offerings selected by an enemy, and I chose the open air.

The air was still; if we'd carried sail we'd not have been moving. As it was, we plowed through the night with effort, the engines straining, the vibration like the pounding of an aching temple. Below me, on the afterdeck, the off-watch crew members were massed. A hiccuping phonograph played *Tipperary* unceasingly, reminding me that it was a long, long way. In counterpoint, some of the sailors chanted to themselves — tunelessly, it seemed to my occidental ears.

As I watched, an enormous rat scuttled across the deck and, within seconds, a rifle cracked. The rat dragged itself a few inches and dropped; a sailor, with the gun under his arm, descended from the starboard railing and crossed over to the animal. He picked it up by the tail, babbling boastfully, and tossed it overboard. There was a murmur of approval from his wakeful associates, and a mutter of curses from those who were attempting to sleep. And then I heard the voice, a British one, at my elbow.

"Good shot," it said, but dolorously, not as one says, "Well bowled," at cricket. "But such trivial combat," it added.

I turned in amazement, having felt myself alone at this Olympian height, observing the microcosmic show below being put on solely for my benefit. The man beside me stepped a little bit more into the light and I caught my first glimpse of him.

He was scarcely more than a skeleton with paraffin-like skin stretched over it. He wore khaki shorts and a shirt with cut-off sleeves, from which his knees and elbows were bony protuberances. He removed a cigarette in a long holder from his thin-lipped mouth, and his face was a skull grinning at me. But his eyes — his eyes didn't go with him.

They were not moribund. They were quick and darting, like a fox's, like those of a juvenile delinquent who has secret and devious meanings for the things he does. There was no decay in them, rather an ever-eager questing; one could only hope that the mind behind them was a competent censor.

His name was Jemison, or Jamison — I wasn't quite certain which, because he threw it away in that dry-as-chaff voice. He lived on the outskirts of Colombo, and he was going to Bombay to sign some legal papers. He would head directly back to Ceylon, to something — he made me feel its magnetism — which held him there. He had an active distaste for civilization, and a bottle of Scotch in his cabin. Would I join him in his cabin for a drink, he asked.

"Not," I said, "if your cabin is anything like mine." I wasn't being coy. The way he looked at me I knew he didn't think of me as a woman, that all sex had ended within him. It was merely that, if his cabin duplicated mine, I could not bear the thought of entombment. We compared notes, decided his quarters were no better, and he left me momentarily, to return with the bottle, a carafe of boiled water, and two glasses. We sat in a lifeboat, believing that in view of the way the engines were heaving that might prove to be the safest place; at any rate, it was moderately comfortable, and the slight motion as it swung on its davits had the soporific effect of a summertime hammock. As I sipped his Scotch, which was of the best, his speech went on like a bedtime story.

He had been to the United States, he told me, had lived for a while in Connecticut. "Jolly spot," he said. "Trim little house, fine garden. I left when the Japanese invaded it."

"The Japanese?" I repeated, wondering if the man were mad. He'd already said that he'd lived in the East throughout the war. Had the on-sweeping hordes of our little yellow brothers unhinged him?

"Yes," he said. "They made lace-work of my roses."

Then I understood. He meant the beetles, those iridescent, gimcracky creatures which look like things sold in Japanese stores five for the penny, innocent-seeming and gaudy, but lethal to lovely flowers.

"Filthy little beggars," he went on. "Breeding constantly, and eating the while, deficient in morals and manners. They so upset me that eventually I spent all my time exterminating them. I'd put them into a Mason jar, I believe you call it, which was half-filled with water with an inch of kerosene on top. I used to count them, compulsorily. One day I killed three hundred and forty. You should have seen them fighting for air, scrambling all over their fellows in an effort at survival. It was exciting."

He said the last in that same dry tone, the voice of a man who could no longer be thrilled by anything, and I knew that the excitement he mentioned was not the sort I would choose to experience. Killing the

beetles, evidently, excited him as a frog is stirred by an electric shock, but certainly no more dramatically.

"But it soon began to pall," he was saying, "because, you see, I always won. Try as they would they could never crawl out of the jar; they would skid on the glass sides and plunge down, heavy with kerosene.

"I wonder," he mused, sucking his empty cigarette holder, "about the theosophy of beetles. Do you fancy they are Buddhists?" He chuckled dryly, and I made some noncommital reply. "Not," he continued, "that I feel profession of any organized religion an essential to respect for death; a boy who has never read Dante may have a superior image of hell. Or should I say 'inferior'?"

He chuckled again, but I did not join in his acrid merriment. I was not liking this. In the sinister night, threading through the raucous and jaunty tune on the phonograph, his reminiscences were becoming unbearable. I tried to change the subject.

"When did you move to Ceylon?"

"I shall come to that," he assured me. "First there was Africa. Then India." He was not to be hurried.

"As I was saying," he resumed, "to appreciate death one needs no blueprint drawn by a master. Each aware being has his own notion of what comes next, even though some believe it only to be nothingness, the end of all that is. But, alas, beetles do not impress me as being especially aware. True, they experienced some discomfort in the kerosene, but I at last decided that they could not possibly know that that would be the end of them, that life was about to cease. They no more sensed extinction than does a candle flame the second before I snuff it out.

"You asked when I moved to Ceylon. Now we start eastward. Africa first, for game. Big game, bigger than beetles. Smarter." He sighed and continued, "But the same thing eventually occurred there. Inevitably, again, I won a hollow victory; I killed, but the beasts did not know what death was. Once, face to face with a lioness, I thought I saw fear which went beyond immediate danger, a hint of the knowledge of finality, but it rapidly passed and she died insensitively.

"Then someone recommended tigers. Bengal tigers. A magnificent creature, I was told, with a nobility of intellect. So I went to India about ten years ago, my heart high with hope of finding a worthy adversary. It is no more good to kill without rapport than it would be so to love. If I were to kiss you" — I drew back, although he had not altered his position in the boat — "think how dull for me it would be if you did not know you were being kissed, if it produced in you no emotion of pleasure or of revulsion."

There was an erotic purr in his voice now, but he wasn't trying to entice me. He was in love with his topic, his hobby of creation in reverse.

"And with tigers?" I whispered.

"Same story," he stated. "I won

handily, and the first two or three knew only a moment of terror but no prescience. It occurred to me that their marvelous intellects might be in low gear, that they needed some time for understanding, so I began to take chances, giving them plenty of time before I fired the telling shot. I got clawed badly once in the process, and I realized that that wasn't any good either, for the beast would not know what he had done to *me*. At best he would see me as a menace averted, at worst as a tasty meal, but he would never know that he had worked a miracle, that he had suddenly stopped all the living organism of me.

"So tigers, too, proved unsatisfactory. You could prolong killing only with a creature so small and ineffectual that it presented no threat to you. With a more formidable animal, prolongation is merely a dressed-up suicide, meaningful merely to you; in short, a game of Patience. If one wants a two-handed game, a Bezique of death, there is only one possible antagonist."

I didn't want to ask the question, but it formed itself without my direction. "And that is?" I prompted.

"Human beings," he said.

I stood up in the lifeboat. My cabin suddenly seemed the most inviting spot in the world.

"You're not going? But I'm just coming to the interesting portion of my story," he protested.

"You don't mean you actually tried — murder?" I said.

"But of course."

I stumbled while getting out of the boat, and his hand on my arm was shockingly cool.

"I can manage," I said. "And don't bother to see me to my cabin. Perhaps you can find somebody else to listen to your little jokes."

"You think I'm joking?"

I did. I hoped so. We had been in almost total darkness, but the light from the radio operator's room now caught his eyes and they seemed to be laughing at me.

"Of course you are," I said, ashamed of my sudden panic. "Good night, Mr. — er, Jemison."

"Good night. And, as you Americans say, I'll be looking for you."

He didn't find me for some time. No stowaway could have hidden more competently. I breathed the stench in that cabin long enough to accept it as my natural atmosphere. In fact, I added the redolence of Sterno and the canned foodstuffs I had brought aboard. I wasn't afraid that Mr. J. would push me overboard, after first specifically explaining what the action would mean to both of us. At least, I don't think I was. Consciously, I thought he was a little crazy and pent-up, with a desire to capture attention. I wanted no part of him.

Three hours before we were due to dock I decided to desert my hermitage for a venture onto the fringes of society: there would be doctors in Bombay to cure the consequences of a meal in the dining salon. The food wasn't too bad, I found, and Mr. J. was nowhere to be seen.

After dinner I went above to what was euphemistically called a lounge, a dingy little cubicle amidship. I ordered a gin-sling, and got a surprisingly good one. I sat at a table near the porthole. There was a pack of cards on it, and as I sipped my sling I started to play one of my favorite brands of Idiot's Delight. My bags were all packed, and I was ready to disembark. I didn't have a thing to worry about.

So I'd thought. I had reckoned without Mr. J.: he stepped into the lounge and made straight for my table.

"I'm glad to see you using my playing cards," he said, and I dropped them as if they were acid. "I've been playing Patience all voyage. May I join you in a game of Bezique?"

I looked at him sharply. In the skull of his face his eyes crackled. Surely he was laughing.

"I don't play," I said, in as surly a manner as I could summon. I didn't ask him to sit down. I didn't have to. He did so, and told the bar boy to bring me another of whatever I had been drinking.

"I've missed you. Were you seasick?" he asked solicitously.

"Yes," I lied. It seemed simplest.

"Poor girl," he said. "I hope no remarks of mine contributed to your distress."

"Not at all," I told him. "You were, of course, only joking when you talked to me."

"Not necessarily," he contradicted.

I thought he might start the whole business over again and I was determined to ward it off. I looked straight at him. "Nonsense, Mr. J.," I said. "I know that you have never murdered anyone. Anyone with such a predilection for confiding in strangers could never have done so and remained at large. So please spare me any post-mortems of your Bezique of Death."

He looked at the table; with his lids down he more than ever resembled a death mask. "It is a very difficult game," he said. "Impossible to enjoy if one of the players cheats."

He picked up the cards and shuffled them, starting to deal two hands. "There's an old saw," he said, "that the cards never forgive. It's true. If one doesn't play them well at the first opportunity, one rarely gets a second chance."

He arranged one of the hands, frowning. I got up. "I've got to see to my packing," I said.

"Of course," he muttered from some deep crevice of thought.

A week or so later I was at a cocktail party in Bombay. A Mrs. Heath arrived late, with the excuse that she'd been seeing a friend off on a ship for Ceylon. Such a dear man, she said, Harold Jamison.

My ears pricked at the name. I asked Mrs. Heath if that could be the Mr. J. who had come on from Ceylon a few days before.

"I'm sure it is," she said. "A slender man?"

I nodded.

"Well," Mrs. Heath said, "if he lost an opportunity to renew a shipboard acquaintance, I'm doubly sorry that I could not persuade him to stay over. The poor man does so need a holiday, but he came here solely to attend to some legal matter and insisted upon taking the next steamer back."

She sighed, in palpable sympathy. "Harold's is such a sad story," she said. "I've been close to much of it. I went to his wedding. He was a bachelor for most of his life, and you know how they fall when they do. Her name is Irene; she's red-haired and beautiful. They met when he first arrived in Ceylon about nine years ago, and it was love at first sight for both of them. They were married almost immediately, and were so enthralled with each other that they didn't want other people around. They built a cabin up in the hills, beyond Kandy, miles from anyone, and I believe they would have lived there the rest of their lives if it had not happened."

"If it had not happened?"

"Yes, a most shocking thing and quite unexplainable. Irene must always have been a little skittish, I expect. Harold hated to talk about it, of course, but as closely as we can figure it out this is what occurred: Irene and Harold were walking through the jungle one day, searching for orchids for their dinner table. I suppose they had a lovers' quarrel or something of the sort — anyhow, Irene got the wind up and started running. She lost her balance and fell off a ledge, about eighty feet down.

"You can imagine how he felt. Somehow he got to her. By some miracle she wasn't dead, but there lay his beloved Irene, unable to move and babbling like a child, not even recognizing him. The poor man picked her up and carried her to the nearest village. There was a rest-house there with a telephone, and he fetched up the ambulance from the hospital in Colombo. For months, while Irene was in a cast, he stayed beside her day and night. About all the doctors could do was to set the broken bones and ease her over the initial agony. When she was finally discharged she was hopelessly paralyzed and," she touched her forehead, "unable to understand the simplest thing.

"I think it would have been more merciful for all concerned if she had died, but Harold took her to a bungalow near town and has made it his life's work to help her to recovery. He keeps saying that some day she will be well enough to return to their cabin. When I left him just now, he seemed almost apprehensive that she might have recovered in his absence, for he should hate to miss a minute of Irene as she used to be. God knows how the man maintains such faith, because she has the mind of a baby. A baby, did I say? It's more like the mind of an animal, unable to coordinate thoughts, to comprehend anything said to her. Every once in a while she looks at him in the strangest way, as if all things were known to her, and the poor man is so pathetically encouraged. He tries then to con-

verse with her — you should hear the mad way she laughs when that happens — but then the curtain comes down again and she's as remote as ever. Sometimes you almost feel that she could help herself if she'd only try."

She was much sorrier, I could see, for Mr. Jamison than for his wife, as if she felt that Mrs. J. were deliberately being a burden, had chosen to be immobile and stupid purely to spite her doting husband. I walked away from the woman resenting her deeply, and amazed to find myself such a violent partisan of Irene Jamison. Certainly Mrs. Heath knew the pair better than I, and her estimate of the affair was no doubt accurate; I had nothing to go on but a mistrust of Jamison's crackling eyes and the brain I detected behind them, the twisted psyche which could joke about death.

And then it struck me, shaking me. *Maybe he hadn't been joking!*

Irene would have thought he was joking also, at first, loving him, living with him in the jungled hill. She might even, in the manner of wives, have found the joke becoming tiresome, but she would never for a minute have believed it, until one day he found a ledge at her back to give it credence. They'd been hunting for orchids for their dinner table, pushing their way through the tangled ferns, ducking beneath the low-hanging branches, precariously keeping their footing on the slippery dark-brown soil. The green smell, the snake smell, the chattering and danger all around, and the precipitous plunges — but beside Irene was the man she trusted; until he said it believably, and for the first time she believed and knew that the gravest danger in the world for her was her husband. The realization must have startled her so that she fell, before he was ready.

And since then, what had gone on between them? He had devoted himself to her, trying to heal her body and to clear her mind so that they might return to the cabin. *So that they might start the ghastly game over again?*

I could almost see them, the man, and the faceless, mindless, red-haired beauty; the man shuffling the cards and waiting for the wife who wasn't well enough to play; and I thought: Irene Jamison, is that the only way you know how to beat him, to retreat into your incomprehension as I retreated into my cabin? The world is larger than a ship. You could get away, if you cured yourself.

Or (I began to wonder) is that your idea of getting even, of punishing him for the game he played before, when something in his calculations went wrong and he did not quite win? As he said, the cards never forgive; perhaps you are even more implacable.

I remembered vaguely how Bezique is played; in the first half of the game you draw and discard, building a hand which you play in the latter half, to the end. Kibitzing is onerous; however, I must say this: although it's not the way I'd have played it, Mrs. Jamison was certainly winning.

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Edward G. Ashton's "Cameron's Cave" is one of the eight "first stories" which were awarded special prizes in last year's contest. It is a tale of superstitions and spells, of warlocks and weird lore, and it introduces, for the first time in print, a canny old Scots sleuth, Uncle Hamish Mackay. The author, in accepting our offer to publish his first story, wrote to your Editors that if his letter seemed slightly incoherent, it was because "after all, it is not every day that a beginner is invited to join the gods and great ones on the detectival Mount Olympus." That is as pretty a compliment as EQMM has ever received, and we are deeply grateful to Mr. Ashton.

The author went on to say that ever since his thirteenth birthday, when he was given the first volume of Dorothy L. Sayers's triple-anthology of detection, mystery, and horror, crime fiction has had no more enthusiastic a fan anywhere in the world. Until EQMM accepted "Cameron's Cave," however, Mr. Ashton's attempts to practise the art of ratiocination "resulted only in an extensive knowledge of the variety of ways in which editors can say no." Mr. Ashton is now in his middle thirties, a father (twice), and balding fast (there may be a connection). "Mine," he says, "has been a most unblurbable life — no sailing before the mast, no gold prospecting, just a quiet time as a newspaperman in my native Glasgow . . . Anyone who insists that the Scots are dour and taciturn has obviously never met the Ashtons. I hope one day to put Glasgow on the crime-fiction map — after all, the city has produced four of the classic real crimes — the Slater case, the Madeleine Smith case, Dr. Pritchard, and the Jessie MacLachlan trial. It's only right that fiction should try to catch up on truth."

And then Mr. Ashton thanks us "for the terrific encouragement which EQMM gives to raw hands like me." Well, Mr. Ashton is no longer a raw hand. You will find a quaint personality in his detective character, a quiet persuasion and quick perception in his style, and a queenly purity in his plot; and the locale of the story is irresistible — even to non-speleologists!

CAMERON'S CAVE

by EDWARD G. ASHTON

My Uncle Hamish has always had a feeling of responsibility for what happened at Glen-nan-alt, and he refuses to be comforted if I point out that the gift of prophecy or second sight is not considered part of the necessary equipment of even such a fine personage as a sergeant of police

of the County of Argyll, in Scotland.

On that black occasion, I remind him, even the classic warnings proved fallible. The Gray Piper did not walk, three crows did not fly westwards in single file (always a sure sign of disaster), and even the waters of the loch remained placidly blue, whereas everyone knows they lash themselves into a darksome red flurry when blood is going to be spilt. Uncle Hamish, I maintain, cannot blame himself when the beginnings of the affair escaped the beyond-sight of the piper, the crows, and the loch.

Certainly the beginning was humdrum enough. I had spent the afternoon sunning myself on a ledge high up on Ben-nan-alt, and it was not until the granite outcrops held blue pockets of shadow that I set my foot to the track back to the village. Somewhere a fox barked. A stoat blinked at me mildly before streaking away, a brown flash in the heather, and a hare, startled by my steps, squattered noisily across the loose stones by Cameron's Cave. As always, I vowed that I really must explore the Cave again, as I had not been in it since I was a barefoot laddie. I keep making the vow, but somehow I never get around to the exploration.

I leaped a burn, crossed a sheep track, then swung down the path to the village. I had just reached the road when I saw the two cars bucketing down the backroad. Visitors, I mentally classified them — locals would not speed like that on one of our backroads.

The first car, a gray sedan, swept past me, then halted, forcing the second, a convertible, to stop just a yard or so away. The driver of the convertible, a neat sun-tanned man about my own age, grinned amiably, and said in a soft American accent, "Looks like he's missed the road again."

There were two women in the open car with him. One, by his side, was young, pretty, and as dark as he was fair. Behind, perched with grace and no loss of dignity on what must have been a cruelly uncomfortable seat, was a plump matron with rimless glasses and blue-rinsed hair, obviously the mother of the dark girl.

The young man said, "Willie should have left the map with us, Peg."

"Either one of us or Rod," she replied. "Rod's pretty good with a map."

I was about to smile politely and move on when the gray car backed up. The driver of the sedan, a thickset man whom I guessed to be about forty, with a sulky mouth and thick hairy hands, also had two passengers, an enameled blonde like an aging cover-girl, and a wide-shouldered insolent-looking buck with a profile which he knew was good. I placed him as Rod, the map-reading wizard, and there was enough resemblance to hint that he and the fair-haired lad driving the convertible were brothers.

Rod looked at me doubtfully, obviously wondering whether conversation with such a peasant would be profitable, then decided to risk it. To

address me he had to lean across the other two, and his hand rested on the woman's leg. I answered his question.

"Glen-nan-alt," he echoed incredulously. "Migod. Gimme the map, Vera." He came out of the car, and Vera (I found myself thinking of them by their Christian names) followed. The driver of the car sat impassively at the wheel. Rod studied the map, then looked at the driver, malicious triumph in his smile.

"I was right," he crowed. "You should have taken that left fork two miles back."

"Oh, Willie," the blonde was archly reproachful. "Why didn't you do as Rod said?" She threw a bright hostessy smile to the people in the convertible. "Sorry, gang, but my dumb husband has snafued everything again." Willie's hands tightened a little on the wheel, but he said nothing.

The fair-haired youngster joined his brother. They were a good-looking pair, their differences being as strongly marked as their resemblances. Rod was bold, brassy, theatrical, bigger than life, a corsair born out of his time. His brother was finer, gentler, more civilized. His fair hair was brushed neatly back, Rod's tossed in careless waves. Rod might have slept in his clothes. His brother's sportssuit looked freshly pressed. Rod pulled a loose cigarette from his pocket and lit it with a match flipped on his nail. His brother offered his case to Vera and lit her cigarette with a small silver lighter. That, more than anything, summed up their differences for me.

"We'll never make Oban tonight, Sam." Rod made it a declaration, irrevocably settled, then looked at me. "Is there a hotel or something we can stay at?"

"Angus Morrison up the road has clean beds and sets a good table. He has a salmon that was brought out of the river this morning" — I stared innocently at the blue top of the ben — "before my Uncle Hamish was out of his bed."

"Poached salmon I never could resist." That was the lady with the blue rinse. "I'm sure we should stay there."

Sam, the fair-haired one, looked doubtful. "But ——"

"We stay at Angus's." Rod was crisp. "You and Willie park the cars and bring in the bags. I'll see about rooms. C'mon, Vee." Without waiting for her, he started off. A few paces and he stopped. "Thanks," he tossed at me over his shoulder.

Sam grinned at me. "Pay no attention to Rod, he's always like that, Mr. —"

"Mackay. John Mackay. Mostly they call me Ian."

"I'm glad to know you. I'm Sam Martin — Rod's my brother. This is Mrs. Clarke and her daughter. Willie Paris is in the other car there, and that's Vera, his wife, gone on with Rod. Now you know everybody. Tell you what, come up to the hotel for a drink with us tonight. Fine! See you then."

I told my Uncle Hamish about the

meeting when we were having our tea. He heard me out patiently enough, puffing at one of the clay pipes he colors so carefully, but I knew he wasn't very interested because he picked up a piece of wood and began to whittle it.

When I had done, he said, "Aye, so. I do not see we need bother them if they do not bother us. What think you of that now?" He was more intent on the toy he was carving. "Young Aneas down the glen has a birthday tomorrow. I think he will like it, he being so fond of dogs."

His lack of enthusiasm for my tale rankled. "If he is fond of dogs," I said coldly, "why give him what is obviously a sheep?" Then I hurried through to the back place to wash the dishes before the retort burst. Gaelic is a fine tongue for retorting in.

I have heard much of the hospitality of the Americans but I was unprepared for the welcome we received when Hamish and I went up to the hotel. It was rapturous. But, let me be honest, it was almost entirely for Hamish. Rod beat him on the back, Sam pressed a staggering measure of Angus Morrison's best whiskey into his hand, even Willie removed his pipe to beam the broader. Mrs. Clarke patted the seat beside her. "Come here, Mr. Mackay."

The old ruffian ogled her skillfully and shamelessly. "*Sliante*," he said.

There was laughter as the visitors vainly tried to twist their tongues round the Gaelic toast. Hamish joined in, but I saw that his cool gray eyes were sizing the newcomers up with serious efficiency.

Rod tried once more, then gave up. "Look, Hamish, we've been waiting for you. Angus Morrison says you're the man to tap for the stories and legends of these parts. So give, will you?"

"Please, Mr. Mackay," said Mrs. Clarke.

"Pretty please," said her daughter.

"I will have two words to say to yon Angus when I see him," said Hamish, brimming with mock-modesty. He knows, none better, how well he tells a tale, but the proprieties must be observed.

It was, oddly enough, Willie who finally swayed the balance. He added a spent match to the pile in front of him — like most pipe smokers, he seemed to spend more on matches than on tobacco — then said, "We should be honored, Mr. Mackay, if you would tell us of the Gray Piper. I think that was one which Mr. Morrison mentioned specifically."

"The gray piper," mused Hamish, "the gray piper and the goatwoman of Achnacree. Very well, I shall tell you. It chanced that once long ago ——"

The tale was an old one to me, but even so I found myself listening enthralled to my Uncle's soft lilting voice, weaving its spell of words in the darkening room.

After the gray piper, he told them of the white goose, and then the dark bloody history of the sixteen men of Morven, which made Mrs. Clarke stir uneasily and Vera say, "Oooh, wasn't

it scary?" looking herself about as scared as a cat facing a mouse.

"Don't worry, Vee, I'll keep his ghosts away," roared Rod, hauling her chair closer and putting his arm round her shoulders. "Come on, Hamish, a funny one for the women and children now."

Sam grinned. "Rod once did lifeboat drill and never forgot the routine. But he's right. A little frivolity might go down well, sir, if you've anything suitable."

So Hamish told them of the English tourist and the Macdonald of Sleat, and the tears of laughter washed away the horrors of Morven.

Willie looked across the table. "I was glancing at the map before dinner, Mr. Mackay, and I saw a place called Cameron's Cave. Has it a story?"

"Oh, aye, aye," nodded Hamish. "It is about Ewen Alastair Cameron, a poor fellow who was hunted by the redcoats in these parts after the '45."

As he told it, the legend was new to me, but that was not surprising. Hamish's head is stuffed with the old lore and I will be a doddering old man before I have heard them all. I cannot recall the details now of his Cameron tale, but it had to do with one of the wee folk promising Cameron a pot of gold if he spent a night in the cave. But the warlocks plagued the poor man so fiercely that long before dawn he fled screaming down the hill and was seen no more in Glen-nan-alt.

"What a shame," murmured Mrs. Clarke. "The poor man probably needed the money, too."

"And has nobody ever tried it since?" asked Willie.

"I do not know, but I doubt it. I'm thinking it would be a cold, comfortless bed, the cave. And besides, the offer was made to a Cameron, and we have few of them here," replied Hamish with a smile.

"I'd like to try it," said Sam. "It would make a good story to tell back home."

"Better to go to your bed, laddie, than treat an auld wives' tale seriously."

"Yes, but listen." Sam hunched forward in his chair. "It would work with me. After all, I'm a Martin, and the Martins are part of the Cameron clan, aren't they?"

"There is a Martin sept," agreed Hamish dubiously, "but ——"

"No buts about it, sir," grinned Sam. "Tonight I sleep in the cave, and tomorrow I pay for my drinks in gold."

"Sit down, junior." Rod's voice was contemptuously curt, and he wore a tight, hard smile. "Big Brother will handle this."

"Oh, no, Rod," Sam sounded like a child deprived of a promised treat. "Not this too. It was my idea and I ——"

"It's daft to think of either of you going." Hamish was angry.

Vera smiled up at Rod. "You just go if you want to, darling. It's nice to know there's some spirit of enterprise left around."

"Willie?" Rod was grinning.

"If you take my advice, which I

know you won't, you'll stay here. Going up there might be" — he paused before dropping the word into the blue dimness — "dangerous."

Vera looked up sharply. "What do you mean, dangerous?"

Willie seemed to be laughing at some secret joke. "Oh, I dunno. Maybe catch his death of cold."

Rod put a loose cigarette between his lips, felt for a match, then took one from Willie's box. "I'm going," he said flatly. "Junior, slip up and get my coat. Oh, and order some more drinks."

There was an uneasy silence while Sam was absent. Willie sat puffing his pipe, regarding his wife with detached interest, like a scientist watching some amusing bug. Sam returned and threw the coat down on a chair. Angus Morrison brought fresh drinks. No one drank success to Rod.

Rod banged his glass down. "Well, come on," he snapped, "let's go see this hole in the hill."

Mrs. Clarke rose. "Peg and I are going to bed. You're very foolish, Rodney. Thank you for a most enchanting evening, Mr. Mackay. Good night." Peggy slipped out behind her.

"I'll come a bit of the way with you," said Willie. "I could use a bit of fresh air."

"Go to bed, Vee." Rod smacked Vera's bottom. "Up that way, isn't it, Hamish?" he pointed out of the window. He had quite forgotten about Vera.

"I'm going up." Sam did not try to hide his anger. "G'night."

"Let's go." Rod was in tearing spirits. He bought some more cigarettes, then set off at a cracking pace. He sang *Excelsior*, but the rest of us kept silent.

At last Hamish pointed ahead. "Yonder's your place."

"I'll leave you here," grunted Willie. He looked at Rod and seemed about to say something, then abruptly wheeled and went off down the hill.

Rod laughed maliciously. "What a character! His wife hates his guts. Sometimes I think he figures it's my fault."

"Let's finish the climb," snapped Hamish brusquely. We left Rod at the mouth of the cave, gathering heather for his bed. "And may the dew get into his bones and give him rheumatism," muttered Hamish crossly, as we passed through the village, "dragging me up the ben at this time o' night. Now, if it had been that Mistress Clarke ——"

"Uncle," I said, "at your age!"

"Aye," he said cheerfully, "just so."

The sound of voices from the front of the house woke me, when my watch pointed to six thirty. From the window I saw Hamish talking to young Sam, who looked haggard in the clean golden light. His clothes were rumpled, he had not shaved, and his hair hung tangled over his forehead. He looked up and saw me.

"Can you come down? I'm worried. I was telling —"

"That idiot brother of his is not back yet and the laddie's worried. You'd better come down."

I was with them inside two minutes. "It's early yet to panic," I said.

"I know," Sam was apologetic, "but Rod's by habit an early riser. He's always on the move by six and it's now — well, I'm worried. Will you come up with me? I'm not sure of the way."

"Surely, son," soothed Hamish, "but take it easy. Like as not we'll meet him on the way down. Maybe he's had such a comfortable night he has slept past his time."

Could be, I thought as we trudged up the slope, could be.

We tramped across the stones by the entrance, then neatly Hamish slipped into the lead. We followed him into the darkness.

"Rod," Sam ducked under a hanging outcrop of stone, "hey, Rod, wakey, wakey."

Hamish went ahead, splaying the beam from his flashlight around the cavern. I stumbled forward, rubbing my head where I had not been quick enough in ducking.

Suddenly the torch beam stopped, jerked away, then focused on the thing on the floor. "It's Rod," muttered Sam, "it's — is he ——"

"Take him away, Ian," grunted Hamish. "Take him to the hotel, then phone Inspector Webster. Bring a stretcher and men."

I was glad he gave me a job because it helped to stop me thinking of Rod. Face and skull bones are no protection against a jagged lump of granite dropped from even a few feet. The only word of comfort I could give his friends was that he must have died instantly. Sam sat in the lounge, endlessly turning his little silver cigarette lighter between his fingers, saying no word, but now and then shuddering as if his blood had been turned to ice. The women, even Vera, tried to speak to him, but Willie, I noticed, kept away.

On a sudden impulse, as I left, I asked Angus Morrison if Willie and Vera had shared the same room. He shook his head. "No, Ian. Mr. Paris asked for separate rooms."

That gave me something to think about on the return journey. Why had Willie wanted separate rooms? So he could be unobserved all night? Why had Willie climbed the hill with us the night before? To learn the way to the cave? And wasn't Willie jealous of the good-looking Rod's success with his wife, Vera? And wasn't jealousy one of the most frequent motives for murder?

At the cave Hamish handed me the torch. "I have already looked, but I may have missed something. See what you can find lying about the floor."

"What am I looking for?"

"Anything, lad, anything." I crawled inside, leaving him staring sightlessly at the distant glimmer that was the sea.

The search, though doubtless necessary, was unpleasant, and I was glad enough to return to the fresh air.

"Well?"

"Nothing. Lots of traces of animals, but that's all."

He nodded. "I was sure I had got

it all." He unfolded a newspaper, and I glanced at his gleanings. Old orange peel long since dried hard; cigarette ends, some fresh and white — presumably Rod's — but mostly brown and old; weathered scraps of paper; tins; a milk bottle with a spider inside — all junk.

"This," Hamish opened another parcel, "was in his pockets." Keys, two handkerchiefs, a broken packet of cigarettes, watch, some change, a wallet, old letters, pen and pencil, comb, nail file, pocket knife, two bus tickets, a broken sleeve band.

I was too intent on my own theory to pay much attention. "Look here, what about Willie as the murderer? It is murder, I suppose?"

Hamish nodded heavily. "Aye, it is murder. But what is this about Willie?"

I told him what I had discovered and what I had deduced. "Aye, there's something there, and we'll keep it in mind. Thank God, here's the stretcher. We can get away now."

He led the way to the hotel. We sat in the same room and in the same chairs as on the previous night, but the mood had changed violently. Now the visitors seemed to be trying to draw away from one another. Far from giving them common cause, their grief had roused a brooding uneasy suspicion that found escape in sudden, sideways glances. Sam was badly shocked. His unshaven cheeks looked yellow, and his corn-colored hair, lank across his forehead, was dull and lifeless.

Mrs. Clarke, her eyes red-rimmed, looked up. "Mr. Mackay, for pity's sake, what has happened? It can't be true!"

"It is true, ma'am. I'm deeply sorry. Rodney Martin is dead." Uncle Hamish paused. "He was murdered."

They had not expected that, and their instant reaction gave them away. They looked at Willie, then quickly turned their eyes away, but I knew Hamish had not missed it.

Vera was frightened. She had lost her lacquered look and for the first time looked her age. "A tramp," she whispered, "it must have been a tramp."

Hamish shook his head slowly. "No, Mistress Paris, it was no tramp dashed a lump of granite on Rodney Martin as he slept. Martin was not a fool. He would not have lain down to sleep when some stranger was with him."

"Maybe the tramp arrived after he was sleeping?"

"No. You cannot approach the cave silently over the stones at the entrance. The sound of feet on the scree would have wakened him instantly. Besides, why would a tramp kill him save for gain? — and there was no robbery. The person who killed Rodney Martin was" — did his eyes rest on Willie for an instant? — "was someone here, someone he thought he could trust. Someone who visited him in the Cave last night and smoked and talked with him — and then killed him."

"But why? None of us has any reason to murder Rodney."

"Why, Mrs. Clarke? Folk will kill for many reasons. Money. Power. Jealousy. That's a powerful motive, now — jealousy."

They did not try to simulate now, but stared openly at Willie, horror in their eyes. Paris wiped the sweat from his face and neck, but made no answer to their unspoken accusation. Uncle Hamish must have seen the glances, but he gave no sign.

Quietly he went on. "But discovering a motive is but a step towards discovering a criminal. Other facts must be shown. For instance, who had the opportunity? In this case that means being able to leave the hotel secretly, climb the hill, murder Rodney Martin, and return unbeknownst. Who qualifies there? You know without my telling you — all those who had single rooms with no one to watch their comings and goings."

I could see them working it out slowly as I had done. And once again they looked at Willie, and now in their eyes I read, as well as revulsion, the stirring of the joy of the hunt. And still Uncle Hamish did not look directly at his victim.

"Now, let's consider the place itself — the scene of the crime, Cameron's Cave. Why was it the site, I wonder? Did the murder happen there because Rodney had gone there — or did Rodney go there because the murderer thought it a good place for the killing? In other words, did the killer merely follow Rodney to the Cave — or did he psychologically force Rodney to go to the Cave, having already decided to kill him there?"

For the moment that mystified me, then suddenly I understood. Once more I heard Willie — Willie again! — asking Hamish about Cameron's Cave and its story. Willie had raised the subject. And Willie had advised Rod to stay at the hotel, knowing beforehand that there was no surer way of making him go. Hamish had been right about the psychological forcing of Rod up to the Cave.

For the first time Willie spoke, a trembling plea. "I know what you're all thinking, but I didn't. I didn't. I wasn't near the cave. Vera, Sam, I swear I never killed him!"

Hamish took no notice of the outburst. "All this though is a wee bit over-theoretical and psychological for our Scottish courts. They like a peck of hard, material evidence which they can see and handle. So I made a bit search of the cave, and I took what the deceased had in his pockets." He opened his paper parcels. "Does it convey anything to you?"

They looked at the collection hopefully, then one by one they shook their heads. Willie muttered, "I didn't do it, I didn't kill Rod."

Hamish raised his eyebrows. "No? But surely you see. Six fresh cigarette ends and ——" he paused.

"*Nothing to light them,*" I burst out.

Hamish nodded approval. "Just so. Rodney used the last of his loose matches last night in this room, and had to borrow one from Mr. Paris. He didn't buy any more. Yet six cigarettes were smoked in the Cave

last night. Not all by Rodney because there are two different brands here — some from the packet he bought, the others brought by his visitor. But who was this visitor who smoked with Rod and lit Rod's cigarettes? Not a woman, because all three of you would leave lipstick traces on your cigarette ends. Not Mr. Paris, who's a pipe smoker and uses matches — and we found no spent matches in the cave."

There was a horrid shuddering gasp behind me.

"No, it must have been someone with a cigarette lighter, someone who had a single room in the hotel, someone who from his window watched us take the path up the hill and so knew the way, someone who for years had hated his overbearing and more brilliant brother — get him, Ian!"

I tripped Sam as he ran for it.

Hamish went on imperturbably. "—— someone who said he had never been up the hill before, yet who knew the interior of the cave well enough to duck under a hanging lump of stone. He knew to duck because he had bruised his forehead on that stone during the night, when he had gone up to kill his brother. All right, Ian, let him up now."

Hamish and I did not discuss the affair again until tea time, when all the formalities were done. "It was a queer affair," he said. "There was no big fact but a wheen little ones that made me look twice at Sam. No, I never thought about your pet suspect, Mr. Paris. It was not his kind of man's crime. He might have strangled Rod with those great hands of his, but he would never have dropped a stone on his face.

"No, I'll tell you what I thought. There was the contemptuous way that Rodney talked to Sam, all this 'sit down, junior' stuff. And you remember when Rod took over the expedition to the Cave from the youngster, Sam said, 'No, Rod, not this too.' *Too*, mind you, as if it had happened often before that the bold big brother had put the laddie's eye out at things. That's the sort of casual cruelty that makes a real killing hatred if it goes on long enough.

"Then Sam's hair bothered me. Yesterday he was as neat and clean as a new pin, but this morning, long before he was supposed to know there was anything to worry about, he was as bedraggled as a tramp. But hanging hair doesn't serve only to make you look dirty. It also hides any mark on your forehead — in his case, a bruise. But being untidy like that just wasn't natural with Sam. Then when he ducked under the stone inside the Cave, of course, I knew."

He stared sombrely at the thin gray smoke spiraling from the peat in the fireplace. "I wish I had never told them that tale."

"Of Cameron's Cave? Why not? Dash it, telling the story didn't make the murder happen."

"Did it not?" he looked at me strangely. "I wish I could be sure. You see, there is no legend of Cameron's Cave, lad. I invented it last night — to amuse the visitors."

The delicate, sensitive, deeply perceptive talent of Katherine Mansfield provides curious criminous caviar for the jaded palate. Tasting a Katherine Mansfield tidbit between, say, a Roy Vickers appetizer and a Cornell Woolrich entrée, is an epicurean 'tec thrill — or so it seems to us. And if the taste is chill, or bitter, or even queer *— why, all the better to eat you, my dear . . .*

POISON

by KATHERINE MANSFIELD

THE post was very late. When we came back from our walk after lunch it still had not arrived.

"*Pas encore, Madame,*" sang Annette, scurrying back to her cooking.

We carried our parcels into the dining-room. The table was laid. As always, the sight of the table laid for two — for two people only — and yet so finished, so perfect, there was no possible room for a third, gave me a queer, quick thrill as though I'd been struck by that silver lightning that quivered over the white cloth, the brilliant glasses, the shallow bowl of freesias.

"Blow the old postman! Whatever can have happened to him?" said Beatrice. "Put those things down, dearest."

"Where would you like them?"

She raised her head; she smiled her sweet, teasing smile.

"Anywhere — silly."

But I knew only too well that there was no such place for her, and I would have stood holding the squat liqueur bottle and the sweets for months, for years, rather than risk giving another tiny shock to her exquisite sense of order.

"Here — I'll take them." She plumped them down on the table with her long gloves and a basket of figs. "The Luncheon Table. Short story by — by —" She took my arm. "Let's go onto the terrace —" and I felt her shiver. "*Ça sent,*" she said faintly, "*de la cuisine . . .*"

I had noticed lately — we had been living in the south for two months — that when she wished to speak of food, or the climate, or, playfully, of her love for me, she always dropped into French.

We perched on the balustrade under the awning. Beatrice leaned over, gazing down — down to the white road with its guard of cactus spears. The beauty of her ear, just her ear, the marvel of it was so great that I could have turned from regarding it to all that sweep of glittering sea below and stammered: "You know — her ear! She has ears that are simply the most . . ."

She was dressed in white, with pearls round her throat and lilies-of-the-valley tucked into her belt. On the third finger of her left hand she wore one pearl ring — no wedding ring.

"Why should I, *mon ami?* Why should we pretend? Who could possibly care?"

And of course I agreed, though privately, in the depths of my heart, I would have given my soul to have stood beside her in a large, yes, a large, fashionable church, crammed with people, with old reverend clergymen, with *The Voice that breathed o'er Eden*, with palms and the smell of scent, knowing there was a red carpet and confetti outside, and somewhere, a wedding cake and champagne and a satin shoe to throw after the carriage — if I could have slipped our wedding ring onto her finger.

Not because I cared for such horrible shows, but because I felt it might possibly lessen this ghastly feeling of absolute freedom — *her* absolute freedom, of course.

Oh, God! What torture happiness was — what anguish! I looked up at the villa, at the windows of our room hidden so mysteriously behind the green straw blinds. Was it possible that she ever came moving through the green light and smiling that secret smile, that languid, brilliant smile that was just for me? She put her arm round my neck; the other hand softly, terribly, brushed back my hair.

"Who are you?" Who was she? She was — Woman.

. . . On the first warm evening in Spring, when lights shone like pearls through the lilac air and voices murmured in the fresh-flowering gardens, it was she who sang in the tall house with the tulle curtains. As one drove in the moonlight through the foreign city, hers was the shadow that fell across the quivering gold of the shutters. When the lamp was lighted, in the new-born stillness her steps passed your door. And she looked out into the autumn twilight, pale in her furs, as the automobile swept by . . .

In fact, to put it shortly, I was twenty-four at the time. And when she lay on her back, with the pearls slipped under her chin, and sighed, "I'm thirsty, dearest. *Donne-moi un orange*," I would gladly, willingly, have dived for an orange into the jaws of a crocodile — if crocodiles ate oranges.

"Had I two little feathery wings
And were a little feathery bird . . ."

sang Beatrice.

I seized her hand. "You wouldn't fly away?"

"Not far. Not farther than the bottom of the road."

"Why on earth there?"

She quoted: "He cometh not, she said . . ."

"Who? The silly old postman? But you're not expecting a letter."

"No, but it's maddening all the same. Ah!" Suddenly she laughed and leaned against me. "There he is — look — like a blue beetle."

And we pressed our cheeks together and watched the blue beetle beginning to climb.

"Dearest," breathed Beatrice. And the word seemed to linger in the air, to throb in the air like the note of a violin.

"What is it?"

"I don't know," she laughed softly. "A wave of — a wave of affection, I suppose."

I put my arm round her. "Then you wouldn't fly away?"

And she said rapidly and softly: "No! No! Not for worlds. Not really. I love this place. I've loved being here. I could stay here for years, I believe. I've never been so happy as I have these last two months, and you've been so perfect to me, dearest, in every way."

This was such bliss — it was so extraordinary, so unprecedented, to hear her talk like this that I had to try to laugh it off.

"Don't! You sound as if you were saying goodbye."

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense. You mustn't say such things even in fun!" She slid her little hand under my white jacket and clutched my shoulder. "You've been happy, haven't you?"

"Happy? Happy? Oh, God — if you knew what I feel at this moment . . . Happy! My Wonder! My Joy!"

I dropped off the balustrade and embraced her, lifting her in my arms. And while I held her lifted, I pressed my face in her breast and muttered: "You *are* mine?" And for the first time in all the desperate months I'd known her, even counting the last month of — surely — Heaven — I believed her absolutely when she answered:

"Yes, I am yours."

The creak of the gate and the postman's steps on the gravel drew us apart. I was dizzy for the moment. I simply stood there, smiling, I felt, rather stupidly. Beatrice walked over to the cane chairs.

"You go — go for the letters," said she.

I — well — I almost reeled away. But I was too late. Annette came running. "*Pas de lettres*," said she.

My reckless smile in reply as she handed me the paper must have surprised her. I was wild with joy. I threw the paper up into the air and sang out:

"No letters, darling!" as I came over to where the beloved woman was lying in the long chair.

For a moment she did not reply. Then she said slowly, as she tore off the newspaper wrapper: "The world forgetting, *by* the world forgot."

There are times when a cigarette is just the very one thing that will carry you over the moment. It is more than a confederate, even; it is a secret, perfect little friend who knows all about it and understands absolutely. While you smoke you look down at it — smile or frown, as the occasion demands; you inhale deeply and expel the smoke in a slow fan. This was one of those moments. I walked over to the magnolia and

breathed my fill of it. Then I came back and leaned over her shoulder. But quickly she tossed the paper away onto the stone.

"There's nothing in it," said she. "Nothing. There's only some poison trial. Either some man did or didn't murder his wife, and twenty thousand people have sat in court every day and two million words have been wired all over the world after each proceeding."

"Silly world!" said I, flinging into another chair. I wanted to forget the paper, to return, but cautiously, of course, to that moment before the postman came. But when she answered I knew from her voice the moment was over for now. Never mind. I was content to wait — five hundred years, if need be — now that I knew.

"Not so very silly," said Beatrice. "After all it isn't only morbid curiosity on the part of the twenty thousand."

"What is it, darling?" Heaven knows I didn't care.

"Guilt!" she cried. "Guilt! Didn't you realize that? They're fascinated like sick people are fascinated by anything — any scrap of news about their own case. The man in the dock may be innocent enough, but the people in court are nearly all of them poisoners. Haven't you ever thought" — she was pale with excitement — "of the amount of poisoning that goes on? It's the exception to find married people who don't poison each other — married people and lovers. Oh," she cried, "the number of cups of tea, glasses of wine, cups of coffee that are just tainted. The number I've had myself, and drunk, either knowing or not knowing — and risked it. The only reason why so many couples" — she laughed — "*survive*, is because the one is frightened of giving the other the fatal dose. That dose takes nerve! But it's bound to come sooner or later. There's no going back once the first little dose has been given. It's the beginning of the end, really — don't you agree? Don't you see what I mean?"

She didn't wait for me to answer. She unpinned the lilies-of-the-valley and lay back, drawing them across her eyes.

"Both my husbands poisoned me," said Beatrice. "My first husband gave me a huge dose almost immediately, but my second was really an artist in his way. Just a tiny pinch, now and again, cleverly disguised — oh, so cleverly! — until one morning I woke up and in every single particle of me, to the ends of my fingers and toes, there was a tiny grain. I was just in time . . ."

I hated to hear her mention her husbands so calmly, especially today. It hurt. I was going to speak, but suddenly she cried mournfully:

"Why? Why should it have happened to me? What have I done? Why have I been all my life singled out by . . . It's a conspiracy."

I tried to tell her it was because she was too perfect for this horrible world — too exquisite, too fine. It fright-

ened most people. I made a little joke.

"But I — I haven't tried to poison you."

Beatrice gave a queer small laugh and bit the end of a lily stem.

"You!" said she. "You wouldn't hurt a fly!"

Strange. That hurt, though. Most horribly.

Just then Annette ran out with our *apéritifs*. Beatrice leaned forward and took a glass from the tray and handed it to me. I noticed the gleam of the pearl on what I called her pearl finger. How could I be hurt at what she said?

"And you," I said, taking the glass, "you've never poisoned anybody."

That gave me an idea; I tried to explain.

"You — you do just the opposite. What is the name for one like you who, instead of poisoning people, fills them — everybody, the postman, the man who drives us, our boatman, the flower-seller, me — with new life, with something of her own radiance, her beauty, her —"

Dreamily she smiled; dreamily she looked at me.

"What are you thinking of — my lovely darling?"

"I was wondering," she said, "whether, after lunch, you'd go down to the post office and ask for the afternoon letters. Would you mind, dearest? Not that I'm expecting one — but — I just thought, perhaps — it's silly not to have the letters if they're there. Isn't it? Silly to wait till tomorrow." She twirled the stem of the glass in her fingers. Her beautiful head was bent. But I lifted my glass and drank, sipped rather — sipped slowly, deliberately, looking at that dark head and thinking of — postmen and blue beetles and farewells that were not farewells and . . .

Good God! Was it fancy? No, it wasn't fancy. The drink tasted chill, bitter, *queer*.

"Q"

NEXT MONTH . . .

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE will bring you an exciting novelette by one of your favorite authors —

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Frederick Irving Anderson's THE MAN FROM THE DEATH HOUSE

Last year Elizabeth Bullock of "The New York Times" wrote that "there is a small band of novelists who have chosen the field of crime as their theme, and have handled it on such a high level that their books have escaped the fate of being classed as 'mystery fiction' and are accorded the privileges and perils of being treated as 'straight' novels."

Underlying this observation is the age-old literary snobbishness still prevalent among America's so-called "serious" critics. When the highhats and the highbrows speak of the fate of being classed as [if you will excuse the expression] "mystery fiction," they are speaking, dear reader, of that Victorian fate which is worse than death . . .

In any event, one of the few crime writers whom the critics have accepted as a "straight novelist" is W. R. Burnett, some of whose books have been Literary Guild and Book of the Month Club selections. Mr. Burnett's most famous work is LITTLE CAESAR, *which made book history and almost revolutionized the motion picture business. Although published more than twenty years ago,* LITTLE CAESAR *is still a vital and popular book. Only last year it was reissued in France as* LE PETIT CESAR, *and in Italy as* PICCOLO CESARE.

What was LITTLE CAESAR *like? What was the author's approach to crime writing in 1929, when* LITTLE CAESAR *burst like a bombshell, selling half a million copies and swishing Edward G. Robinson to stardom on the tail of a criminological comet? Well, here is a short story by W. R. Burnett which was first published in that same year, 1929 — the quiet little story of a gangster who takes a vacation. Here, too, is an insight into the real difference between the hardboiled and the realistic . . .*

ROUND TRIP

by W. R. BURNETT

It was about ten o'clock when the lookout let George in. The big play was usually between twelve and three, and now there were only a few people in the place. In one corner of the main room four men were playing bridge, and one of the center wheels was running.

"Hello, Mr. Barber," the lookout said. "Little early tonight, ain't you?"

"Yeah," said George. "Boss in?"

"Yeah," said the lookout, "and he wants to see you. He was grinning all over his face. But he didn't say nothing to me."

"Somebody kicked in," said George.

"Yeah," said the lookout, "that's about it."

Levin, one of the croupiers, came over to George.

"Mr. Barber," he said, "The Spade just left. He and the Old Man had a session."

George grinned and struck at one of his spats with his cane.

"The Spade was in, was he? Well, no wonder the Old Man was in a good humor."

"How do you do it, Mr. Barber?" asked the croupier.

"Yeah, we been wondering," put in the lookout.

"Well," said George, "I just talk nice to 'em and they get ashamed of themselves and pay up."

The croupier and the lookout laughed.

"Well," said the croupier, "it's a gift, that's all."

Somebody knocked at the entrance door, and the lookout went to see who it was. The croupier grinned at George and walked back to his chair. George knocked at Weinberg's door, then pushed it open. As soon as he saw George, Weinberg began to grin and nod his head.

"The Spade was in," he said.

George sat down and lighted a cigar.

"Yeah, so I hear."

"He settled the whole business, George," said Weinberg. "You could've knocked my eyes off with a ball bat."

"Well," said George, "I thought maybe he'd be in."

"Did, eh? Listen, George, how did you ever pry The Spade loose from three grand?"

"It's a business secret," said George and laughed.

Weinberg sat tapping his desk with a pencil and staring at George. He never could dope him out. Pretty soon he said:

"George, better watch The Spade. He's gonna try to make it tough for you."

"He'll try."

"I told him he could play his I. O. U.'s again, but he said he'd never come in this place as long as you was around. So I told him goodbye."

"Well," said George, "he can play some then, because I'm leaving you."

Weinberg just sat there tapping with his pencil.

"I'm fed up," said George. "I'm going to take me a vacation. I'm sick of Chi. Same old dumps, same old mob."

"How long you figure to be away?" asked Weinberg.

"About a month. I'm going over east. I got some friends in Toledo."

"Well," said Weinberg, "you'll have a job when you get back."

He got up, opened a little safe in the wall behind him, and took out a big, unsealed envelope.

"Here's a present for you, George," he said. "I'm giving you a cut on The Spade's money besides your regular divvy. I know a right guy when I see one."

"O.K.," said George, putting the envelope in his pocket without looking at it.

"Matter of fact," said Weinberg, "I never expected to see no more of The

Spade's money. He ain't paying nobody. He's blacklisted."

George sat puffing at his cigar. Weinberg poured out a couple of drinks from the decanter on his desk. They drank.

"Don't get sore now," said Weinberg, "when I ask you this question, but listen, George, you ain't going to Toledo to hide out, are you?"

George got red in the face.

"Say . . ." he said, and started to to rise.

"All right! All right!" said Weinberg hurriedly, "I didn't think so, George, I didn't think so. I just wondered."

"Tell you what I'll do," said George; "get your hat and I'll take you down to The Spade's restaurant for some lunch."

Weinberg laughed but he didn't feel like laughing.

"Never mind, George," he said. "I just wondered."

"All right," said George. "But any time you get an idea in your head I'm afraid of a guy like The Spade, get it right out again, because you're all wrong."

"Sure," said Weinberg.

After another drink they shook hands, and George went out into the main room. There was another table of bridge going now, and a faro game had opened up.

The lookout opened the door for George.

"I won't be seeing you for a while," said George.

"That so?" said the lookout. "Well, watch your step wherever you're going."

George got into Toledo late at night. He felt tired and bored, and he didn't feel any better when the taxi-driver, who had taken him from the depot to the hotel, presented his bill.

"Brother," said George, "you don't need no gun."

"What's that!" exclaimed the taxi-driver, scowling.

"You heard me," said George. "You don't need no gun."

"Well," said the taxi-driver, "that's our regular rate, Mister. Maybe you better take a street car."

Then he climbed into his cab and drove off. George stood there staring at the cab till it turned a corner.

"Damn' hick!" he said. "Talking to me like that!"

The doorman took his bags.

"You sure got some smart boys in this town," said George.

The doorman merely put his head on one side and grinned.

There were three men ahead of George at the desk, and he had to wait. The clerk ignored him.

"Say," said George, finally, "give me one of them cards. I can be filling it out."

The clerk stared at him and then handed him a card. George screwed up his mouth and wrote very carefully:

Mr. Geo. P. Barber,
Chicago, Ill.

The clerk glanced at the card and said:

"You'll have to give us an address, Mr. Barber, please."

"Allard Hotel," said George. "Listen, I'm tired, and I can't be standing around in this lobby all night."

"Yes, sir," said the clerk. "About how long will you be here?"

"I don't know," said George. "It all depends."

As soon as George was settled in his room he unpacked his bag and undressed slowly. He still felt tired and bored.

"Some town," he said. "Why, the way them birds act you'd think this *was* a town."

He turned out the lights, lighted a cigarette, and sat down at a window in his pajamas. It was about twelve o'clock and the streets were nearly empty.

"Good Lord," he said; "why, in Chi it's busier than this five miles north."

He flung the cigarette out the window and climbed into bed. He lay thinking about The Spade and Weinberg. Finally he fell asleep.

He woke early the next morning, which was unusual for him, and discovered that he had a headache and a sore throat.

"Hell!" he said.

He pulled on his clothes hurriedly and went across the street to a little Italian restaurant with a green façade and an aquarium in the window. The place was empty. He sat down at a table in the front and stared out into the street. A waiter came over and handed him a menu. The waiter was tall and stooped, with a dark, sad face. He studied George for a moment, then addressed him in Italian. George turned and stared at the waiter. He did not like to be reminded that he had been born Giovanni Pasquale Barbieri.

"Talk American! Talk American!" he said.

"Yes, sir," said the waiter. "You a stranger here?"

"Yeah," said George.

"I seen you come out of the hotel, so I thought you was."

"Yeah," said George, with a certain amount of pride, "I'm from Chicago."

"Me, too," said the waiter. "My brother's got a plumbing shop on Grand Avenue."

"Yeah?" said George. "Well, I live 4000 numbers north on Sheridan."

"That so? Pretty swell out there, ain't it?"

"Not bad," said George. "Say, what do you do around here for excitement?"

The waiter smiled sadly and shrugged.

"That's what I thought," said George.

"If I ever get me some money I'm going back to Chicago," said the waiter.

George ate his breakfast hurriedly and gave the waiter a big tip. The waiter smiled sadly.

"Thank you. We don't get no tips around here like that."

"Small town, small money," said George.

The waiter helped him on with his overcoat, then George returned to the hotel. He didn't know what to do with himself, so he went to bed. When he woke up his headache was worse and he could hardly swallow.

"By God, if I ain't got me a nice cold," he said.

He dressed in his best blue-serge suit and took a taxi down to Chiggi's. Chiggi was in the beer racket and was making good. He had a new place now with mirrors all around the wall and white tablecloths. The bouncer took him back to Chiggi's office. Chiggi got up and shook hands.

"Hello, George," he said. "How's tricks?"

"I ain't starving."

"In bad over in Chi?"

"Me? I should say not."

Chiggi just grinned and said nothing.

"Listen," said George, "does a guy have to be in bad to leave Chi?"

"Well," said Chiggi, "the only guys I ever knew that left were in bad."

"Here's one that ain't."

"That's your story, anyway," said Chiggi, grinning.

The bouncer came and called Chiggi, and George put his feet up on Chiggi's desk and sat looking at the wall. From time to time he felt his throat. Once or twice he sneezed.

"It's a damn' good thing I didn't come over on a sleeper; I'd've had pneumonia," he thought.

Chiggi came back and they organized a poker game. George played listlessly and dropped two hundred dollars. Then he went out into the dance hall, got himself a girl, and danced a couple of times. The music wasn't bad, the floor was good, and the girl was a cute kid and willing, but George wasn't having a good time.

"Say," he thought, "what the devil's wrong with me?"

About two o'clock he left Chiggi's, got a taxi, and went back to the hotel. It was raining. He sat hunched in one corner of the taxi with his coat collar turned up.

He went to bed as soon as he could get his clothes off, but he didn't sleep well and kept tossing around.

At eleven o'clock the next morning he came down into the lobby. He went over to the mail clerk to ask if he had any mail; not that he was expecting any, but just to give the impression that he was the kind of man that got mail, important mail. The girl handed him a sealed envelope with his name on it. Surprised, he tore it open and read:

> ". . . as your stay is marked on our cards as indefinite, and as you are not listed among our reservations, we must ask that your room be vacated by six tonight. There are several conventions in town this week and it is absolutely necessary that we take care of our reservations. . . .
>
> W. W. HURLBURT, *Asst. Mgr.*"

"Well, tie that!" said George.

The girl at the mail desk stared at him.

"Say, sister," he said, "where's the assistant manager's office?"

She pointed. He went over and knocked at the door, and then went in. A big, bald-headed man looked up.

"Well?"

"Listen," said George, "are you the assistant manager?"

"I am," said the big man.

George tossed him the letter.

"Sorry," said the big man, "but what can we do, Mr. Barber?"

"I'll tell you what you can do," said George; "you can tear that letter up and forget about it."

"Sorry."

"You think I'm going to leave, I suppose?"

"Well," said the big man, "I guess you'll have to."

"Oh, that's it," said George, smiling. "Well, try to put me out."

The big man stared at him.

"Yeah," said George; "try to put me out. I'd like to see somebody come up and put me out. I'll learn them something."

"Well, Mr. Barber," said the big man, "as a matter of fact, it is a little unusual for us to do anything like this. That is, it's not customary. But we were instructed to do so. That's all I can tell you."

George stared at him for a moment.

"You mean the bulls?"

"Sorry," said the big man. "That's all I can tell you."

George laughed.

"Well," he said, "I'm staying, so don't try to rent that room."

He went out, banging the door, ate his dinner at the Italian restaurant across the street, talked with the waiter for a quarter of an hour and gave him another big tip; then he took a taxi out to Chiggi's. But Chiggi had been called to Detroit on business. George had a couple of cocktails and sat talking with Curly, the bouncer, about Chicago Red, who had once been Chiggi's partner, and Rico, the gang leader, who had been killed by the police in the alley back of Chiggi's old place. At four o'clock George got a taxi and went back to the hotel. All the way to the hotel he sat trying to figure out why he had come to Toledo. This was sure a hell of a vacation!

The key clerk gave him his key without a word, and George smiled.

"Bluffed 'em out," he said.

But when he opened his door he saw a man sitting by the window reading a magazine. His hand went involuntarily toward his armpit. The man stood up; he was big and had a tough, Irish face.

"My name's Geygan," said the man, turning back his coat. "I want to see you a minute. Your name's Barber, ain't it?"

"Yeah," said George. "What's the song, flatfoot?"

Geygan stared at him.

"You talking to me, kid?"

"There ain't nobody else in the room that I see," said George.

"Smart boy," said Geygan. "Come over till I fan you."

"You'll fan nobody," said George. "What's the game?"

Geygan came over to George, whirled him around, and patted his

pockets; then he lifted George's arms and felt his ribs; then he slapped his trouser legs. George was stupefied.

Geygan laughed.

"I thought you Chicago birds packed rods," he said.

"What would I do with a rod in this tank town!" said George.

"All right," said Geygan. "Now listen careful to what I say. Tonight you leave town. Get that? You birds can't light here. That's all. We've had some of you birds over here and we don't like you, see? Beat it and no questions asked. You stick around here and we'll put you away."

George grinned.

"Putting it on big, hunh?"

"Yeah. You better not be in the city limits at twelve tonight or . . ."

"Listen," said George, interrupting, "you hick bulls can't bluff me that easy. Just try and do something, that's all. Just try and do something. You ain't got a thing on me."

"All right," said Geygan.

Geygan went out. George took off his overcoat and sat down in the chair by the window.

"Can you beat that!" he thought. "It's a damn' good thing I got my rods in the trunk. Why, that mug actually fanned me. Yeah. Say, what kind of a town is this, anyway? No wonder Chicago Red hit for home!"

He got up and unlocked his trunk. There was a false bottom in it where he kept his guns and his liquor. That was safe. Well, they didn't have a thing on him. Let them try and put him out. All the same, he began to feel uneasy. But, hell, he couldn't let these small-town cops scare him.

He was taking off his shoes when somebody knocked at the door.

"I wonder what the game is," he thought.

Then he went over and opened the door. Geygan and two other plain-clothesmen stepped in.

"There he is, chief. You talk to him. He won't listen to me."

"Say," said the chief, a big gray-haired man, "they tell me you've decided to prolong your visit."

"Yeah," said George, "indefinitely."

"Well," said the chief, "if you want to stay here, why, I guess we can accommodate you. Fan him, Buck."

"Say," said George, "I been fanned so much I got callouses."

"That's too bad," said the chief. "Go ahead, Buck."

Buck whirled George around and gave him the same kind of search Geygan had given him, with this difference: he found a gun in his hip pocket, a small nickel-plated .32. George stared at the gun and began to sweat.

"Geygan," said the chief, "you didn't do a very good job."

"I guess not," said Geygan.

"You never found that cap pistol on me," said George, staring hard at Buck.

"Will you listen to that, Buck!" said the chief. "He thinks you're a magician."

"Why, you planted that gun on me," said George. "That's a hell of a way to do."

"Well," said the chief, "when your case comes up, you can tell it all to the judge."

"My case!" cried George.

"Why, sure," said the chief. "We send 'em up for carrying rods here."

George stood looking at the floor. By God, they had him. Wasn't that a break. Well, it was up to Chiggi now.

"Listen," said the chief, "we ain't looking for no trouble and we're right guys, Barber. I'll make you a little proposition. You pack up and take the next train back to Chicago and we'll forget about the .32."

"He don't want to go back to Chicago," said Geygan. "He told me."

George walked over to the window and stood there looking down at the street.

"O.K.," he said, "I'll go."

"All right," said the chief. "Buck, you stick with the Chicago boy and see that he gets on the right train."

"All right, chief," said Buck.

Geygan and the chief went out. Buck sat down and began to read a newspaper.

Weinberg was sitting at his desk, smoking a big cigar, when George opened the door. Seeing George, he nearly dropped his cigar.

"Hello, boss," said George.

"By God, I thought you was a ghost," said Weinberg. "What's wrong with your voice?"

"I caught a cold over in Toledo."

"You been to Toledo and back already! Did you go by airplane?"

George grinned.

"No, but I made a quick trip. What a hick town. You ought to go there once, and look it over."

"Chicago suits me," said Weinberg.

George sat down, and Weinberg poured him a drink. George didn't say anything, but just sat there sipping his drink. Pretty soon Weinberg said:

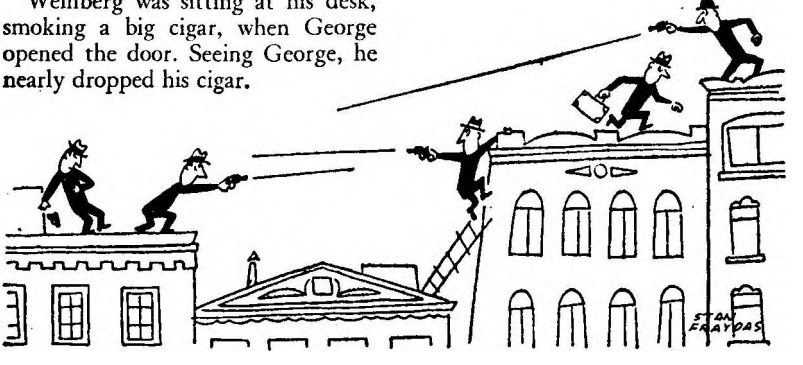
"George, I was hoping you'd stay in Toledo for a while. Rocco was in the other night and he told me that The Spade was telling everybody that your number was up."

George grinned.

"Ain't that funny!"

Weinberg didn't think it was funny, but he laughed and poured himself another drink.

"Yeah," said George, "that's the best one I've heard this year."



THE RESPECTFUL MURDER

by ROY VICKERS

BEFORE sentencing James Bladlow to death, the judge — following a strange convention of British courts — explained to the prisoner how richly he deserved to be hanged. The crime, he asserted, was a sordid one without a single redeeming feature. From the moment Bladlow set eyes on Miss Henson — the judge did not doubt — he had planned to destroy her. He had enticed this elderly but inexperienced woman to occupy the top floor of his house. For four years, under the guise of friendship, he had systematically obtained control of her fortune. With diabolical cunning he had placed himself beyond reach of the law. But for a tangential accident he would never have been brought to trial.

Thus did the judge make it all sound simple and straightforward. His law, of course, was impeccable, but his moralizing was slovenly. If Bladlow had been as insensitive a scoundrel as all that, there would have been no "tangential accident." The latter was a foreseeable consequence of his respect for the woman he murdered.

Detective Inspector Rason — without committing himself on the word "tangential" — certainly regarded his own success as pure luck. The luck drifted onto his desk in the Department of Dead Ends in the form of a portrait in oils of a girl of ten. Attached was a label to the effect that the picture was a forgery of the work of an artist named Merthyr. This certainly led him to Bladlow — but not in connection with the murder.

James Bladlow, born in 1900 — and bred in the stern tradition of middle-class respectability — was a house and estate agent. He had inherited a small business in West Kensington, founded by his grandfather, which was yielding a net income of about eight hundred pounds, with occasional windfalls — one of which had recently enabled him to open a small branch at Shaldon-on-Thames (some thirty miles out of London) where he lived.

In February 1932 another windfall was impending in the form of instructions from the bank, as executors of Sir Anstruther Henson, recently deceased, to sell the latter's house and contents, together with five other houses in the neighborhood. To his office a few days later came Miss Henson, the daughter of deceased and sole beneficiary.

She was a meagre, pinched little woman of fifty-two, looking rather older than her age. Bladlow's first impression was that her dress, though new and of good material, was ill-cut and old-fashioned. Under her outmoded muff her hands were twitching

with shyness. When he addressed her by name and asked her to sit down she bowed like an Edwardian dowager.

"I must confess, sir, that I have never before entered a business office, and I beg you to bear with me." The words sounded like a quotation from a Victorian novel, as indeed they were. The voice was equally startling, coming from the throat of a woman in her fifties. It was not a young voice — it was juvenile; it went on: "My father would, of course, disapprove. But — you don't mind, do you?"

While Bladlow reassured her and chattered a little, to help her, he noted that her face, now unquestionably plain, might have been attractive in youth. The wide-set, blue eyes were not stupid — they were, he thought, sensitive and vaguely pathetic.

Gradually she lost some of her nervousness and let him draw her out. In something less than twenty minutes he had learned much about her, including the reason for her visit. He was able to infer that she had lived alone with her father all her life, for the greater part of which he had been a tyrannical invalid.

"Now about this sale, Miss Henson. I understand that you wish to withdraw the furniture of two of the rooms, including everything that was in the rooms —"

"Everything in the rooms was mine!" She had become bold enough now to interrupt him. "The rooms were mine. He never once came into them. He promised he would not come in — ever. And he always kept his word."

Her nervous insistence revealed much of the atmosphere of her home life.

"I daresay that could be arranged. If you'll give me their name, I'll telephone the solicitors who are handling Sir Anstruther's affairs."

"My father did not approve of lawyers. I suspect that he, too, knew little about business. Before he died he told me the bank would do everything."

"Hm! Banks are heavily tied by the letter of the law. Never mind. You can 'buy in' at the auction." He explained that she would ultimately be paying the money to herself. She understood only one point.

"I haven't enough money," she said. "There's a portrait by Merthyr — you will be aware that his standing has increased since his death."

Bladlow had never heard of Merthyr. She explained, and astonished him again by her practical knowledge of art values. He gathered that the portrait might fetch a hundred guineas or more at auction.

"The best thing would be to ask your bank manager —"

"I have never had any dealings with a bank." The juvenility of the voice was pronounced as she added: "But I've been saving my pocket money for years. Eighty-three pounds! I have it all in my muff, but it won't be enough." And then: "Oh, do *please* help me!"

A shriveled, middle-aged woman

with the air of a child waiting for a grown-up to help her . . . Bladlow found it unnerving. So, far from "planning to destroy her," he planned to comfort her. He felt that quite deep emotion which some persons feel when a stray dog whines and cringes for food.

It might be six months or more before probate could be granted for her father's will which, after taxation, would bring her some thirty thousand pounds. Within a week the carpets would be taken from under her feet, by which time some pickpocket would probably have acquired her savings.

"I'm glad you came to see me, Miss Henson — it wasn't such an ordeal after all, was it? I'll see that you get what you want. If you will come back to this office at four this afternoon I think you'll find everything will have been settled."

When she left him, he allowed himself to be momentarily overcome.

"That's a rotten scandal, if you like!" he told the enlarged photograph of his late father on the opposite wall. "A selfish swine battening on his daughter's vitality without even the excuse of poverty! What fun can that poor old thing have had in the whole of her life? And now she's too old to enjoy the money!"

He rang his wife. He presented the case, not from the angle of the stray dog, but from that of the substantial client in difficulties while awaiting probate.

"If you can't stand her, we'll push her along after a few days. But if you can, it'll probably mean a good deal of juicy business for us."

That speech was as sincere as the speech he made to his father's photograph. He expected to act as general agent for her and intended to charge full fees for his services, but on a scale sanctioned by trade custom.

Before she returned, he fixed a loan for her of five hundred pounds, and opened a banking account in her name at Shaldon-on-Thames — which helped him to overcome her scruples about accepting hospitality from a stranger. He conceded that she should pay the out-of-pocket cost of her board.

Aileen Bladlow, without prompting, picked up something of the stray-dog point of view. In a few days she coaxed her protégée into a shopping expedition and helped her to choose clothes of the right kind — thereby awakening Miss Henson's dormant femininity. The couple treated her with indulgent kindness — though Cedric, their five-year-old, reserved judgment. In a month the spontaneity of Aileen Bladlow's welcome wore thin, but loyalty to her husband's business interests evoked a synthetic geniality.

On the other hand, Bladlow's benevolent interest became the stronger as the personality of Miss Henson opened, flower-like, in the sunshine of normal friendliness. In three months she no longer looked skinny. Bladlow began to take a pride in her improving health. The shadow of her

father was lifting from her — lifted, one might say, by James Bladlow. Her growing confidence of speech and manner he regarded as his own handiwork.

And so did Miss Henson.

In short, the rather unctuous little fairy story of the strong man stooping to help the drab old maid whom everyone despises was coming true. Even to the point where the strong man earns the undying gratitude of the beneficiary.

He had yet to discover that the catch in that particular fairy story is that the drab old maid, who ought to turn into a delectable princess, more often reveals herself as an Old Woman of the Sea who cannot be shaken from the shoulders of her rescuer.

He received his first warning when probate was granted and Miss Henson became a comparatively affluent woman in her own right.

It must be emphasized that Miss Henson was of normal intelligence and even of studious tastes. She knew a great deal about the history of art and literature and was something approaching an expert in her judgment of paintings. She could herself draw very competently. She was eccentric only in her ignorance of the rough-and-tumble of everyday life, and even this was unobtrusive. In casual contact she would appear an ordinary middle-aged spinster of the sheltered classes, a little more fluttery than is usual nowadays.

For the rest, she could sustain a drawing-room conversation, and she could buy food and domestic necessaries as competently as any housewife. But the mental habit of years made her attention panic away from anything to do with business.

Bladlow tried hard to explain the nature of investment.

"Let me put it another way, Miss Henson. The bank, through myself has sold all your father's property, paid his debts and the taxes, and so has finished the job it undertook. It won't do anything more until you tell it what you want it to do with your money. It has £31,000 and a few hundreds over belonging to you. If you will go and see the manager he will advise you how to invest it."

"It seems such a lot of money." Miss Henson was overawed and uneasy. "How do you think I ought to spend it?"

That started it all over again. Miss Henson became worried and unhappy until she struck a bright idea.

"But it's 'business,' isn't it, Mr. Bladlow? Couldn't you do it for me? I know it's a lot to ask after all the great kindness of Mrs. Bladlow and yourself. But I am painfully aware that I am uninstructed and very stupid at this sort of thing."

He said he would gladly do his utmost to help her and she thanked him effusively.

She signed a power-of-attorney without asking what it was. He would have told her, at this stage, if there

had been the remotest chance of securing her understanding.

He had done well out of his commissions on the sale of the properties. Further, he paid himself a consultation fee and decided that £300 a year would be a fair retainer for managing her investments. Also, he would persuade a stockbroker to treat him as a half-commission man.

A few nights later he gave his wife a present of £100. Aileen was the kind of wife commonly described as "most suitable," by both women and men, including her husband — a good-looking blonde of amiable temperament, cool, self-disciplined, and domestically efficient. Her affection lacked the spice of romantic adoration. She approved of him for his unadventurous ordinariness. She thanked him prettily for the check.

"You've earned it, darling!"

"I've tried to," she admitted. "What's the next step, Jim? I mean, when is she going?"

Bladlow found himself shirking the question, unworthily wondering whether he ought to have made the cheque £150.

"We must give her a week or two to find her feet," he said. "Let the suggestion to move come from her."

"I hope it won't be longer than a week or two." Aileen was being wintry about it. "She isn't good for Cedric. He doesn't like her, but I'm sorry to say he lets her buy his good will with little presents. It'll make him greedy and calculating."

Before the week or two had passed, Miss Henson burst in on them at tea time on Saturday.

"There's a lovely house — The Cedars — at the corner of Malvern Avenue. The agent happened to be there and he showed me over it. And Mr. Bladlow, please, I want you to buy it for me, I mean — buying a house is good business, isn't it?"

"In certain circumstances, but hardly if you mean to live in it. It's a twelve-room house —"

"Yes, and the top floor is self-contained!" panted Miss Henson. "And the agent said I could have a door put on the top staircase so that the top floor would be a flat. And I thought you could live in the rest of the house and we could all be together, only I shouldn't be always in your pocket, as I am now."

It was the suggestion of a woman wholly without social experience — of a child who cannot conceive that its company might not be desired. Aileen shrank from snubbing her, encouraged her to chatter about the house while she administered tea.

"It isn't the sort of thing one can decide quickly, Miss Henson. I would advise you to talk it over with James before you take any definite step."

James, thought Aileen, would be easier to manage than Miss Henson.

"The kindest way," she said that night, "would be for you to tell her that the house is a hopeless dud as an investment."

Bladlow hedged.

"But you don't mean to say you *want* to fall in with her absurd

plans!" exclaimed Aileen. "Why, we should never get rid of her!"

"I don't say I want to. But the proposition is not without some solid advantages for us. It is a very good house. At least, we might think twice before we turn it down."

"Jim! Don't you know that the poor, pathetic old golliwog is in love with you?"

"Rot, darling! She's too old."

"That's a very silly remark!"

"You started the silliness. For one thing, to her the idea of love is inseparable from marriage. Marriage, in her case, would involve divorce — and she's a strict churchwoman. For another — why, if a man were to kiss her, she'd probably call the police!"

"I didn't suggest there was any danger of your kissing her. At present she only idealizes you. She was bullied all her life by that horrible old father. You've been kind to her and made a fuss of her and, on top of it all, you're hopelessly good-looking. She'll soon start being a serious nuisance to you."

"Aileen, suppose you're right —"

"You needn't look so grim about it, old boy! We're not having an official row," urged Aileen. "The truth is that — though you didn't mean to — you have awakened her. Don't worry! When you've got rid of her, she'll soon transfer it all to some other man."

"Exactly! That's where we stick!" he exclaimed. "I brush her off. She takes her money with her. That childish, ignorant old dear in unrestrained possession of thirty thousand quid! A sitting certainty for the first crook who spots her. He won't even need to marry her — just tell her he understands all about 'business,' and wants to help her, and she'll hand him the lot — as she's handed it to me!"

Aileen was convinced, but remained of the same opinion regarding the proposal that they should all live in The Cedars.

"Jim, dear, I know it's a heartless thing to say, but does it matter to us if she throws her money away?"

It mattered very much to James Bladlow. A man must live up to his own moral pretensions or despise himself. The stray dog, once taken in, can never be turned out.

"I can prevent the love nonsense from becoming a nuisance," he hedged. "And she means a good deal of business to us in commissions."

"You aren't thinking of the commissions."

He let that go, but Aileen followed it up.

"What exactly *are* you thinking of, Jim?"

What indeed? Of a cruel old beast of a father, who made James Bladlow feel so happily superior. Of thirty thousand pounds. Of a stray dog, befriended, doomed to adore him for the rest of its life. Of the moral stature gained by chivalrously protecting an utterly unattractive woman. And — of thirty thousand pounds.

In the late autumn of 1932 they moved into The Cedars. When Miss

Henson had distributed her furniture in her quarters on the top floor, known as the flat, she invited the Bladlows to dinner. There was only one picture on the wall of the sitting room — an oil painting of a girl of about ten, vivacious, interesting, though the style of the artist was a bit beyond the experience of the Bladlows.

"That's the Merthyr — obviously," remarked Bladlow. Aileen gave him a warning glance, and he played for safety. "Charming!"

Miss Henson simpered. She was standing by the painting.

"I recognized you as soon as I saw it, Miss Henson," said Aileen quickly. Bladlow took his cue.

"You're more like yourself as a child than most people are, Miss Henson."

She was delighted. She told them the story of the sitting and a great deal about Merthyr's subsequent work, to which they listened with polite boredom. Towards the end of the evening Miss Henson made them a little speech, extolling their kindness to her.

"And so I want you to accept the Merthyr — *please* — as a little token —"

Miss Henson was overcome and Bladlow himself was not unaffected because he knew that this decent little old thing was giving something which she prized very highly. Art, of course, was art — but in this case the picture was worth at least £100, possibly a good deal more.

The Merthyr was hung in a prominent position in the Bladlows' drawing room, to Aileen's secret disgruntlement. When Miss Henson visited them — midday dinner on Sundays and tea on Wednesdays — she would sit where her glance fell easily on the picture. In three months they had settled into a regimen. From the start it worked better than might have been expected, helped by Aileen's forebearance. There were small daily contacts which she found irksome. Bladlow noticed a loss of sweetness in her temper but assured himself that she would soon get over it.

The thirty-one thousand pounds had been transferred to an account in his own name. He bought gilt-edged securities while he deliberated over Miss Henson's financial future. She was obviously unfit to have control of her capital. For some months he contemplated creating a trust. Then he thought he would rid her and himself of all further anxiety by using the whole sum for purchase of a life annuity.

Miss Henson smiled and nodded, but was not very receptive, while he tried to explain the nature of an insurance company and a life annuity. Some weeks later he was on the point of deciding to sell the gilt-edged securities and buy her the annuity, when Miss Henson herself torpedoed the whole idea.

She had read, it appeared, a "piece in the paper" about the folly of not making a will. For sixpence she had

bought a will form, with printed instructions on the back.

"There are only two persons in the world who are dear to me, in any personal sense," she told him, "Mrs. Bladlow and yourself. So, of course, I shall leave to you all I don't spend." (He could never make her understand she was not "spending" her capital.) "I would not have told you, only it says a will has to have two witnesses."

Bladlow kept his head, though his philosophy had been turned inside out, for he had never contemplated profiting from her other than through legitimate fees and perquisites, and even these had begun to seem illegitimate. He explained the law concerning witnesses, and called in the cook and the gardener to sign.

When he told Aileen, she was not as impressed as he had expected.

"Don't kid yourself, Jim, that it's any more than a ticket in a sweepstake. You might win a big prize. But you might forget to pass the salt one day, and then she'd make another will."

A pity Aileen was getting like that, he thought. Miss Henson would *not* make another will. Outside art, she was a simple, childlike creature who trusted him absolutely. In the normal course of nature the thirty-one thousand pounds — increased by his careful management — would be his before many years had passed. He shivered with horror as he remembered how nearly he had defeated Miss Henson's generous intention by buying her an annuity.

That she would, in the future, hit on that very idea herself was beyond his imagination.

In fact, in Aileen's words, he kidded himself that the fortune was as good as his. While he was waiting for nature to cooperate, he had unrestricted control. Feeling what we may call the shadow of ownership of the capital, he invested ten thousand in the purchase of a house agency in central London, putting a manager into the Chelsea office. Further, he bought and sold several properties in Shaldon, developing his local agency. With every movement of capital he wrote a letter to himself, approving the transaction, which Miss Henson signed. She became well accustomed to signing as many as half a dozen letters at a sitting, without giving more than nominal attention to their purport.

None of his investments were wildcat. But in a couple of years about a third of the capital was tied up in securities, sound enough in themselves, which were not immediately negotiable.

In the meantime, life at The Cedars achieved a smooth routine. Aileen, though she had many grievances, remained "satisfactory." Miss Henson would go to London regularly for the art exhibitions and often to the auction sales at Christie's. She would take her sketch-book and make line notes of any object of special interest to her, adding details of history, price, and purchaser as methodically as an art agent.

On one of these expeditions — in February 1934 — she made an impetuous decision. She had her hair cut short and waved.

The girl who attended her had a boy friend who was an insurance agent.

"Do you remember, Mr. Bladlow —" an attempt had been made to introduce first names, but Miss Henson forgot so often that it was tacitly abandoned "— do you remember explaining to me all about insurance companies and annuities? I was very stupid at the time. I didn't see that it would save you all that bother of looking after my money."

She meant, he realized, that it would save her the bother of signing the letters and pretending to understand them. He had blundered.

The hairdresser girl, on the other hand, had not blundered. The idea of an annuity was firmly implanted. It was doubtful whether he could achieve anything by explaining that an annuity would make waste paper of her will. The fortune was flying out of the window. Aileen would say she had told him so. Moreover, the life-long gratitude and the unbounded admiration, which had nourished his personality, would perish in the inevitable misunderstanding about those unnegotiable securities.

There was, he decided, only one possible answer.

"I think it is a very good idea, Miss Henson. If you remember, I was in favor of it from the first. The agent can see me, and we'll fix it up."

In that moment Bladlow stepped over the line. No good doing things by halves. He turned to her, with a marked change of expression — so marked, indeed, that a sophisticated woman would have laughed.

"If I am not being impertinent, Miss Henson — your hair! — that new way of doing it suits you wonderfully."

"For my part, Mr. Bladlow," said Miss Henson, sedately daring, "I hoped you would make that remark."

When the hairdresser girl's boy friend called, Bladlow told him that Miss Henson, who did not understand her own affairs, possessed a life interest, only, in her income and had no capital with which to buy an annuity.

Bladlow's firm, like most of its kind, were agents for the leading insurance companies. Under the letterhead of the Metropolitan & Colonial Assurance Society he wrote to Miss Henson, enclosing a form of application, and later sent a letter of acceptance and a receipt for £31,000. It was easy enough to reclaim both letters and the receipt and burn them.

The routine of life at The Cedars remained unbroken, except that he no longer took business letters to Miss Henson to be signed. Instead, he paid £1,150, in equal half-yearly payments, into Miss Henson's account at the local branch, deemed to equal her annuity after deduction of income tax.

After the second of these half-yearly payments the feeling that he

had stepped over the line passed away. He had deceived her, but only in the sense in which one deceives a child, because a full explanation would not be understood — notably the explanation of the good but unnegotiable securities. He had not robbed her, for she was receiving the same income as she would have received had an annuity been purchased. As to the practical position, the little deception about the insurance company could not be proved, so there was no possibility of a criminal charge.

True that in personal relations it had been difficult to retreat from the moment in which he had affected to admire her hair, but the situation was still manageable, if a little irksome.

Miss Henson continued to attend the art exhibitions and the sales at Christie's until August 1936, when she was murdered.

Aileen had insisted that the family should have its summer holiday unaccompanied by Miss Henson. She had been firm about this from the beginning. For this year, they had made reservations at an hotel in Bournemouth and intended to travel down on the Saturday.

On Friday evening Bladlow went up to the flat for a goodbye chat with Miss Henson.

"It's a shame to talk to you about business when you're in holiday mood," she apologized, "but I've had such a *funny* letter from the Metropolitan and Colonial Assurance Society — the people who pay me my annuity, if you remember."

Bladlow gave no outward sign. In his subconsciousness he had known that he must always be prepared for the million-to-one chance. She was chattering about her late doctor's widow with whom she had traveled up to Town last week. He held out his hand for the letter.

Dear Madam, In reply to your letter of yesterday we suggest that you are under some misapprehension of fact. This Society has made no payments to you under an annuity scheme, nor is your name on our books.

"— and when I told her how well it was working in my case she said it would not suit her, because she wanted to leave some money to her married son, who is in the Navy and gets very little. And I didn't want to bother you — in the circumstances — I mean, as you knew I had made a will in your favor —"

In short, Miss Henson had written to the Society to ask if it were true that, when she herself died, the Society would "keep all her money," so that her will would be meaningless.

Again, Bladlow kept his head. By a simple lie he would gain a little time. But only a little. For any one of a dozen benevolent reasons she might renew contact with the Society.

"I see what's happened," he smiled. "They've got their files crossed. We've had this trouble before. Now, on Monday, if you can spare the time, you and I will go together to the head office —"

"But you'll be at Bournemouth —"

"Not until Wednesday. I have an important auction on Tuesday."

"But is it true, Mr. Bladlow, that the money — that my will — ?"

He could turn this question to advantage — strengthen her faith in him by merely stating what had once been true.

"Yes. I know what you will say next. Why did I encourage you to take the annuity when I knew that it made your will valueless? I can only say that in my mind your interests came first and that I — had never associated our coming together with the idea of monetary gain to myself."

Fear drove out self-contempt. He saw with relief that his little speech was taken at its face value.

"On Monday, then. We'll do our business in the morning, and leave time for a leisurely lunch in the West End." He contrived a certain awkwardness of manner. "I wonder, Miss Henson, whether — whether you will be wearing that dress you wore last Wednesday? Forgive me — I oughtn't to have said that!"

On the way downstairs his thoughts formed the words "Winterbourne Manor — in the garage." Through his local branch he had recently bought the manor, which had been empty for nearly a year. Round it he had built his whole plan before he reached the hall.

With a short pantomime at the telephone he prepared the ground for telling Aileen that he would be unable to join herself and Cedric at Bournemouth until Wednesday.

In a short period of clarity during a sleepless night he realized that his ethical being had been poisoned by that will, which had turned his imagination to the idea of possessing Miss Henson's fortune. But the clarity passed and he whipped his resolution with the argument that he had to consider the greatest good for the greatest number. There was Aileen and Cedric, to say nothing of himself. As for Miss Henson, she had had four years of great happiness. She would never understand the nature of his investments on her behalf, and would believe he had cheated her. That would make her intensely miserable. She would demand the return of her property — and would fall into the hands of a crook. Her remaining years could hold nothing but stark misery.

On Saturday morning Aileen departed for Bournemouth with Cedric, after last-minute instructions to the cook and housemaid concerning her husband's comfort. Bladlow went upstairs and knocked at the door of the flat.

"My grass widowerhood has just begun," he said. "This morning I am going to inspect Winterbourne Manor. It's an eighteenth century manor and, apart from that, it has some paneling on which I would very much like to have your opinion — if you have nothing better to do."

Miss Henson seemed to be behaving oddly, almost as if she were alarmed.

"The Newfeld panels!" she murmured. "They're quite well-known."

She hesitated and he feared a lengthy disquisition. To his relief she added: "Thank you very much, Mr. Bladlow, I would be delighted."

The manor — actually, of course, Miss Henson's manor — stood in five acres of its own on the fringe of the suburb. When they arrived, Bladlow decided that he must waste a few minutes on the paneling. But Miss Henson hardly bestowed a glance.

"I did not know you had bought this house, Mr. Bladlow, or I would have mentioned the panels before. The fact is, I have a confession to make." She was a little breathless about it and inclined to be arch. "To begin at the beginning, my father tried to buy the panels. That was in 1913, when the Newfeld family fell on evil days. . . ."

In his state of tension he could not endure one of her interminable art stories. He put his hand on her arm, which surprised her, not unpleasurably, into silence.

"If you don't want to look at the panels, I don't either. I have something in the garage that will interest you."

As she did not protest, he kept hold of her arm and led her out of the house.

"The garage," said Bladlow, "was, of course, the stables. It was converted about 1900." He unlocked the padlock on the sliding door and entered with her. "In those early days a car required expert attention after every run. So every private garage had to have its own observation pit." As if absent-mindedly, he closed the sliding door behind them. "As the automobile improved and became more reliable, the pits were filled in. But not in this case. Look!"

He stooped and removed a sufficiency of boards covering the pit. "I want to show you — if you'll come to the edge you'll see what I mean —"

He shot her twice in the back, replaced the boards, and relocked the garage. Late that evening he returned, bringing in his car a wheelbarrow and spade. Throughout the hours of darkness he loaded earth onto the body, filling the pit.

He spent Sunday inside the garage. He was planing the boards, getting them down to an inch below floor level. A fortnight later he procured cement and covered the boards. When this had hardened, leaving a very noticeable patch, he gradually recemented the whole of the floor of the garage.

This work was not completed for more than six weeks. In the interval his arrangements had been thorough. On the Monday morning he had called at a local Repository and instructed them to move the furniture from the flat on the following day. Miss Henson had suddenly left his house, he explained, implying a quarrel. He would pay all expenses and six months' storage.

A quarrel. No explanation beyond that to anyone. On the premise of a quarrel the Merthyr in his drawing-room, Miss Henson's gift, would be an anomaly. He removed it from the

wall. He would lock it up and eventually sell it — for a hundred pounds or more.

But this, on reflection, seemed rather hucksterish behavior. After all, it had been a very personal gift — a symbol of a happy and ennobling relationship. As a gesture of respect — presumably to impress himself — he took it upstairs to the flat, to be removed with her furniture.

He went through all her possessions, found three diaries, which he destroyed. Otherwise, only a sketchbook and a litter of charcoal drawings — no letters, no documents. Miss Henson had no roots extending beyond the Bladlow family.

On Wednesday he joined his family at the hotel in Bournemouth.

"You were right," he told Aileen. "In your absence — well, I couldn't manage her. I'm not going to give you the details and I don't suppose you want them. I had to be pretty firm. She said she was grossly insulted. Walked out of the house with a suitcase. Her furniture has gone — stored at Mentall's."

"I'm glad, in a way," said Aileen. "And you know I was never counting on that will!"

"That will," he said, "is in a safe at the office. Unless she definitely makes another, it will stand."

On December quarter-day he paid the half-yearly installment into Miss Henson's local account, taking, as usual, the bank's receipt.

In the first few weeks there had been a dozen or so casual inquiries. He answered only that Miss Henson had left suddenly and that he did not know her address. To their own circle he explained further that, in Aileen's absence, Miss Henson had felt herself insulted by a remark he had considered it necessary to make and had walked out of the house with a single suitcase. To this he added nothing. His very reticence suggested that the quarrel had been of an embarrassing nature. People wagged their heads contentedly. Old maids, they loved to believe, were like that sometimes.

The December quarter-day ended the first phase of anxiety. To the casual glance the floor of the garage bore no trace of once having been fitted with an observation pit. Since August he had stalled four prospective purchasers. He was now ready to accept the next offer. As a good business man, he had the panels removed, and was gratified to receive four hundred pounds for them from a dealer. The house was sold in January.

Mathematically, his chance of being hanged for murder, he calculated, was very substantially smaller than his chance of being killed in a road accident, a fire, or a shipwreck. It would be as foolish to worry about the one as about the others.

His security lay in the fact that it was nobody's special business to inquire into the whereabouts of Miss Henson. Nobody had any recognizable interest which would justify an application to the courts to presume death. Even if some freak application

were to be made, he would not oppose it. He would produce the will, which gave him everything.

He had nothing to fear from the prying of an accountant. Miss Henson's capital was intact, with a file of letters signed by herself, sanctioning his various investments. The money was, in effect, already his. He was not an ostentatious man — felt no temptation to arouse Aileen's suspicion by flinging money about.

With the passing of his early fears he was able to take a view of the whole thing — which he called realistic. He was not, he reminded himself, a cruel man. Poor Miss Henson, he was sure, had never known what had struck her. Through himself she had enjoyed four years of happiness. Circumstance, for which he could not be blamed, had ended that chapter of her life. Her ultimate fate at the hands of a less scrupulous man was so certain that his act had been equivalent to that of putting an about-to-be tortured animal out of its pain.

He suffered a little through his own sentimentality — he missed her. He missed particularly the moral uplift he had derived from being the architect of her happiness, the chivalrous protector of an unattractive woman. There were even moods in which he wished he had kept the Merthyr as a memento.

Freed from the society of Miss Henson, Aileen became even more satisfactory. But it was Aileen who produced the first ripple on the surface of his complacency.

"Miss Henson!" she exclaimed suddenly at breakfast from behind her picture paper.

It was a second or more before he could bring himself to ask: "What about Miss Henson?"

"She's sold that picture she gave us — for three hundred and fifty pounds. Look! That's it, all right! '*Julia, daughter of Sir Anstruther Henson, 1880.*' I suppose you had to give it back, but it does seem a pity!"

He stared at a photograph which reminded him so vividly of the picture that had hung in the drawing room. On his way to London he took the paper with him to the local furniture Repository.

"Must be a duplicate," said the manager. "Nothing of Miss Henson's has left the warehouse. You can inspect it now if you like, Mr. Bladlow."

"As I'm more or less responsible I think it would be as well," said Bladlow. It took half an hour to produce the picture for his inspection — the picture which was reported as having been sold at a West End auction the previous day.

"Thank you. As you said, it must be a duplicate. Miss Henson will no doubt decide for herself whether her interests are concerned. I am no art expert."

In a month he had forgotten the incident. At the half-year he increased the housekeeping allotment and doubled Aileen's personal allowance. It was a very happy year. Now and again, while Cedric was away at

school, he took Aileen to the coast for a weekend in a good hotel.

A few days before Easter 1938 he received a call from Detective Inspector Rason of the Department of Dead Ends.

"I asked for you, Mr. Bladlow," said Rason apologetically, "but I've really come to see Miss Henson. Her late father's bankers told me that when they last heard from her she was living in your house."

"Sorry!" said Bladlow. "Miss Henson left here over eighteen months ago. I don't know her address — I don't even know where she went from here. She took sudden offense — she was — er — an elderly spinster, you know. If there's anything I can do —"

"Can you tell me anything about a picture of herself as a little girl? Funny sort of question, you'll say, but the fact is there've been a lot of forgeries of the paintings of well-known artists — after they're dead, of course. Last year we nearly got the gang, but we didn't quite — and that sort of thing is pushed onto me."

Over eighteen months ago Bladlow had seen that he must never tell a single lie about Miss Henson, except the lie that he did not know where she had gone after she left the house.

"The picture you want, Mr. Rason, is at Mentall's Repository."

At the Repository, Rason inspected the picture. He was jubilant. The case against the forgers was practically buttoned up. But Chief Inspector Karslake would be sure to say they must get Miss Henson to authenticate. The manager was unhelpful.

"But surely Miss Henson is paying you storage?"

"Yes, but the check itself comes from Mr. Bladlow! He told me she had left certain funds in his hands."

"Funds," repeated Rason, as he took himself off. "Bladlow hasn't got the old girl's address, but he has got her funds. Now I'm here, it wouldn't do any harm to have a look round."

He was looking specifically for Miss Henson's bank — always a good starting point. By a circuitous route he reached the vicar, who had received many a check from Miss Henson for charitable purposes.

"We have received no communication from Miss Henson since August 1936," said the bank manager.

Under pressure from Rason he interpreted the Bank Acts with a certain elasticity and revealed that an income of £1,150 was being paid into her account, half yearly, by Mr. Bladlow.

The latter item disappointed Rason. By precedent, her income ought to have stopped abruptly. Without much hope he returned to The Cedars.

"Oh, yes, wasn't that clear in our first conversation?" Bladlow permitted himself to reveal a slight impatience. "I am her financial agent. I hold securities of hers to the value of around £30,000."

"Funds!" ejaculated Rason, impressed by the amount. "Just huffed off and forgot to take her thirty

thousand with her? Or has she got other funds besides that lot, so's she wouldn't notice? And another banking account?"

"I don't know." Bladlow, indeed, had nothing to add to his previous statement.

Rason went back to the Repository and put an official seal on Miss Henson's property. In the following week he returned and searched the furniture for relevant documents. He found none. But he pounced on a sketch-book and a litter of charcoal drawings.

"Maybe these are forgeries, too!" he reflected with sublime confusion and carried them back to the Yard.

There was plenty of follow-up work to be done. Bladlow did not see him again until the end of August.

It was a couple of days after Bladlow had returned from his summer holiday, this time in North Wales. It had been an enjoyable holiday, on the whole. He had not allowed his mind to dwell unduly on the detective's investigations. He was himself entrenched in a veritable Maginot Line of legality.

He was accountable to no one but Miss Henson for his management of her money. The police, of course, had realized this, or they would have tried to subject him to further questioning. No news was obviously good news. They must either apply to presume death, which would be pointless, or find the body which was, virtually, impossible.

Rason arrived late in the afternoon. With him was another burly-looking man whom he introduced as Chief Inspector Karslake.

"My superior officer," said Rason when they were all seated in the morning room, "knows a great deal about art." Ignoring Karslake's glare he went on: "He's still worried about Miss Henson's ownership of that picture. He wants to ask you —"

"I'll ask my own questions," snapped Karslake. "Mr. Bladlow, can you give me the exact date of Miss Henson's departure?"

"I can't remember whether it was the Saturday or the Sunday — August 2 or 3."

"But you do remember," cut in Rason, "that your wife and child had gone to Bournemouth and that, as from Saturday morning, you and Miss Henson were alone in the house except for the servants?"

"How thorough your investigations are!" smiled Bladlow. "Yes, we were alone. Hence our rather embarrassing quarrel."

"According to the servants and a baker's delivery man, Mr. Bladlow, you left this house in Miss Henson's company on the Saturday morning? That would be before you had the quarrel?"

"Obviously!"

"Where did you go with Miss Henson?"

"Really, Inspector! All that time ago! I simply don't remember."

"*Did you take her to Winterbourne Manor?*"

That was a bombshell for Bladlow — a fact duly noted by Rason, who pressed on.

"If you did not go with her, you joined her there later. The place was your property then. You gave her permission to go there as often as she liked."

"She never asked me for any such permission!" Bladlow was at sea. "I've no reason to believe she ever went there in her life."

Rason grinned at Karskale, inviting him to note the answer.

"My superior officer," he announced, "is not satisfied with that answer. If you want to know how we traced the body to Winterbourne Manor —"

Bladlow caught his breath.

Karslake sprang up. "You've no right to say that, Rason!" he cried angrily. "It's flat against the Rules."

"My superior officer," mouthed Rason, "is quite correct. I ought to have said — if you want to know how we traced *Miss Henson* to Winterbourne Manor, I'll show you." From a bag he took a sketch-book and a number of charcoal drawings. "These — before you bother to think up something, Bladlow — are sketches made by the deceased — beg pardon! — made by Miss Henson. Sketches of the Newfeld panels!"

Bladlow forced himself to stare at the sketches, while he thought: She was only in the room for a minute or so and she didn't sketch anything. These sketches are the work of a good many hours. He dimly remembered that she had gushed about having some "confession" to make.

"Miss Henson might have visited the empty house, unknown to me — not knowing that it was my property." In the last few seconds he had abandoned hope, but he went on: "These sketches don't prove anything."

"Not a thing! They're what Mr. Karslake calls a location clue!" chirped Rason. "Fact is, that dealer you sold those panels to had 'em written up in an art magazine, with illustrations. And one of our art boys — not Mr. Karslake — linked up these sketches. Funny how these things happen, isn't it, Bladlow? You put a lot o' brain-work into this job — *refusing four offers for the house, so's to give the earth time to settle!* If you'd only thought to bury those panels along with the — *you know!*"

An hysterical laugh broke from Bladlow. He laughed and laughed. It was a huge joke, Detective Inspector Rason's suggestion. Bury the panels? Absurd! Why, the observation pit would not have been big enough to hold the whole set of panels together with . . .

A couple of hours later the police had located the site of the observation pit — whereupon they began digging . . .

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