ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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Number 35

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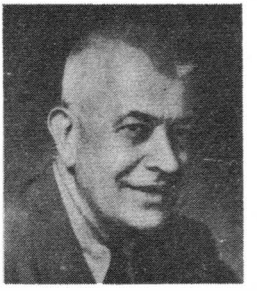

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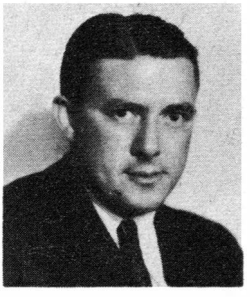

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK, *Publisher* • ELLERY QUEEN, *Editor*

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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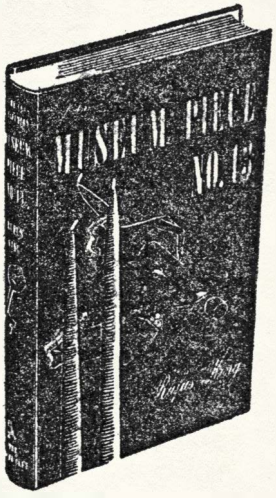

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THE CRIME CLUB

SECOND-PRIZE WINNER: PHILIP MacDONALD

Philip MacDonald's first detective novel was called THE RASP. *It was published in 1924 and introduced the "always hot and bothered," nerves-at-fever-pitch Colonel Anthony Gethryn, who is constantly storming about and wrestling frantically with powerful deductive problems — indeed, a Colonel in the fullest English sense. Anthony Gethryn "stuck" — he is now one of the most famous of fictional sleuths, and* THE RASP *is universally conceded to be a modern classic of the genre. Philip MacDonald's latest detective novel is* WARRANT FOR X, *which first appeared in 1938 and is also considered a modern classic. No less a homicidal handspringer than the late Alexander Woollcott hailed* WARRANT FOR X *as a masterpiece; he rated it "the best detective story I have ever read in any language," which is high praise even from the highly volatile Woollcott.*

In the fourteen years between these two classics, Mr. MacDonald wrote thirty-six novels, several plays, and quite a few short stories — surely enough work to satisfy any one man and to constitute an undeniably busy career. And yet, that's not the half of it. In 1931 Mr. MacDonald was "called" to Hollywood, and since that time he has made wine in the Hollywood vineyards. His screen credits are staggeringly impressive; they include "The Lost Patrol" for RKO, "Mister X" for MGM, "Rebecca" for Selznick, and "Blind Alley" for Columbia. Mr. MacDonald came to America fifteen years ago, planning to stay only two or three months; he is still here, and we hope that he not only continues to make California his home but that he takes the final plunge of American detectivization by joining Mystery Writers of America, Inc. The invitation to do so is hereby cordially extended.

For EQMM's first annual short-story contest, Philip MacDonald submitted a story titled "Malice Domestic" and was awarded one of the second prizes. The story ranked extremely high with the judges and was in the running for first prize until the very last ballot. It is not, unfortunately, a Colonel Gethryn tale — to the best of your Editor's knowledge, the doughty Colonel has not yet made his début in a short story; for that blessed event we look forward eagerly to Mr. MacDonald's entry in the current EQMM contest, hoping that Mr. MacDonald will permit his high-blood-pressured Colonel to grapple mightily with the short 'tec form.

"Malice Domestic" is a crime story of the BEFORE THE FACT *species — a type of story that has grown enormously popular in recent years and is now*

at the height of its vogue. It tells the events leading up to the tragedy, with emphasis on the psychological interplay between the murderer and the intended victim. The plot unfolds slowly but inexorably, each new incident adding to the suspense, each new development tightening the grip of circumstances, each new exposure of the murderer's plan another coffin-nail in the victim's inescapable fate. When successfully written, this kind of story achieves almost unbearable tension. It has been said of Philip MacDonald that he is not an innovator; that is true: the psychological study of murder told from the inside has been the forte of other writers, notably Francis Iles, and before him, Mrs. Belloc Lowndes. It has also been said of Philip MacDonald that he is a polisher and improver of established techniques; this is equally true, as "Malice Domestic" proves.

There are only three important characters in "Malice Domestic" — the husband Carl Borden, his wife Annette, and the family friend, Dr. Tom Wingate. They hold the threads of the story. But if you watch closely, remembering that the master's hand is quicker than the human eye and the human mind quicker than the master's hand, you will become increasingly aware of a fourth character — a character in the background, an invisible force. That character might be called Death — or, more accurately, Death's understudy . . .

MALICE DOMESTIC

by PHILIP MACDONALD

CARL BORDEN came out of Seaman's bookstore into the sun-drenched, twisting little main street of El Morro Beach. He looked around to see if his wife were in view, and then, as she wasn't, walked to the bar entrance of Eagles' and went in. He was a big, loosely-built, rambling sort of a man, with untidy blonde hair and a small, somehow featureless face which was redeemed from indistinction by his eyes, which were unexpectedly large, vividly blue and always remarkably alive. He was a writer of some merit, mediocre sales and — at least among the wordier critics — considerable reputation.

He sat on the first stool at the bar and nodded to the Real Estate man, Dockweiler, who had once been a Hollywood actor; to Dariev, the Russian who did the murals; then — vaguely — to some people in booths. He didn't smile at all, not even at the barman when he ordered his beer — and Dockweiler said to old Parry beside him, "Catch that Borden, will you! Wonder whatsa matter. . . ."

The barman, who was always called Hiho for some reason everyone had forgotten, brought Carl's drink and set it down before him and glanced at

him and said, "Well, Mr. Borden — and how've you been keeping?"

Carl said, "Thanks, Hiho — oh, all right, I guess. . . ." He took a long swallow from the cold glass.

Hiho said, "And how's Mrs. Borden? Okay?"

"Fine!" Carl said, and then again, "Fine!" He put a dollar bill on the bar and Hiho picked it up and went back to the cash-register.

Carl put his elbows on the bar and dropped his face into his hands; then sat quickly upright as Hiho returned with his change. He pocketed it and swallowed the rest of his beer and stood up. He nodded to Hiho without speaking and walked out into the street again.

His wife was standing by the car with her arms full of packages. He said, "Hey, Annette — hold it!" and quickened his pace to a lumbering trot.

She smiled at him. A brief, wide smile which was just a little on the toothy side. She looked slim and straight and cool and soignée, as she always did. She was a blonde Norman woman of thirty-odd, and she had been married to Carl for nine years. They were regarded, by everyone who did not know them well, as an "ideal couple." But their few intimates, of late, had been vaguely unsure of this.

Carl opened the door of the car and took the parcels from Annette's arms and stowed them away in the back. She said, "Thank you, Carlo," and got into the seat beside him as he settled himself at the wheel. She said, "Please — go around by Beatons. I have a *big* package there."

He drove down to Las Ondas Road and parked, on the wrong side of the street, outside a white-fenced little building over which a sign announced, BEATON AND SON — NURSERIES.

He went into the shop, and the girl gave him a giant paper sack, stuffed overfull with a gallimaufry of purchases. He picked it up — and the bottom tore open and a shower of the miscellany sprayed to the floor.

Carl swore beneath his breath, and the girl said "Oh, drat!" and whipped around to help him. He put the things he had saved on the counter, then, stooping, retrieved a thick pamphlet called *The Rose-Grower's Handbook* and a carton labeled KILLWEED in white lettering above a red skull-and-crossbones design.

The girl had everything else. Apologizing profusely, she put the whole order into two fresh sacks. Carl put one under each arm and went out into the sunny street again, and saw Dr. Wingate walking along it, approaching the car. Carl called out, "Hi, Tom!" and smiled his first smile of the morning as the other turned and saw him.

"Hi yourself!" Wingate said. He was a man in the middle forties, a little dandiacal as to dress, and he wore — unusual in a medico — a small, neatly-trimmed imperial which some people thought distinguished, others merely caprine. He turned to the car and raised his hat to Annette.

wishing her good-morning a trifle formally. He opened the rear door for Carl and helped him put the two packages in with the others. He looked at Carl, and for a moment his gaze became sharply professional. He said, "How's the book going?" and Carl hesitated before he answered, "Fine! Tough sledding, of course — but it'll be all right, I think."

"Well —" said Wingate, "don't go cold on it. It's too good."

Carl shrugged. Annette said, impatiently, "We must get back, Carlo," and he got into the car and started the engine and waved to his friend.

He drove back through the town and then branched inland up into the hills and came in five minutes to the narrow, precipitous road which led up to his house, standing alone on its little bluff. It was a sprawling, grey-shingled building, with tall trees behind it and, in front, a lawn which surrounded a rose-bed. Beside the lawn a graveled driveway, with traces of devil-grass and other weeds showing through its surface, ran down to the garage.

As he stopped the car, an enormous dog appeared around the corner of the house and bounded towards them. Annette got out first, and looked at the animal and said, "Hello," and put out her hand as if to fondle it.

The dog backed away. It stood with its head up and stared at her. It was a Giant Schnauser, as big as a Great Dane, and it was called G.B. because something about its bearded face and sardonic eye had always made Carl think of Shaw.

Annette looked at it; then, with a quick little movement of her head, at her husband. She said sharply, "The dog! Why does he look at me like that?"

Carl was getting out of the car. "Like what?" he said — and then it was upon him, its tail-stump wagging madly, its vast mouth open in a wet, white-and-scarlet smile.

"Hi there, G.B!" Carl said — and the creature rose up on its hind legs and put its forepaws on his shoulders and tried to lick his face. Its head was almost on a level with Carl's.

Annette said, "It is — peculiar. He does not like me lately." She was frowning.

Carl said, "Oh, that's your imagination," and the dog dropped upon all fours again and stood away while the packages were taken out of the car.

Carl carried most of them, Annette the rest. They stood in the kitchen, and Annette began to put her purchases away. Carl stood and watched her. His blue eyes were dark and troubled, and he looked like a Brobdingnagian and bewildered little boy who has found himself in trouble for some reason he cannot understand.

Annette wanted to get to the icebox, and he was in her way. She pushed at his arm, and said sharply, "Move! You are too big for this kitchen!"

But he put his long arms around her and pulled her close to him. He said, "Annette! What's the matter, darling? What is it? What have I done?"

She strained back against his arms

— but he tightened their pressure and drew her closer still and buried his face in the cool, firm flesh of her throat.

"Carl!" she said. She sounded amazed.

He went on talking, against her neck. His voice sounded almost as if there were tears in it. He said, "Don't tell me there isn't something wrong! Just tell me what it *is*! Tell me what I've *done*! It's been going on for weeks now — maybe months. Ever since you came back from that trip. You've been — different. . . ."

His wife stood motionless. She said, slowly, "But Carlo — that is what I have been feeling about you."

He raised his head and looked at her. He said, "It's almost as if you were — suspicious of me. And I don't know what it's about!"

She frowned. "I —" she said, "I —" and then stopped for a long moment.

She said, "Do you know what I think? I think we are two very stupid people." The lines were leaving her face, the color coming back to it.

"Two stupid people!" she said again. "People who are not so young as they were. People who do not see enough other people — and begin to imagine things. . . ."

She broke off as there drifted through the open window the sound of a car, old and laboring, coming up the hill. She said, "Ah!" and put her hands on Carl's shoulders and kissed him at the corner of his mouth. She said, "The mail — I will get it," and went quickly out of the side door.

He made no attempt to follow her, no suggestion that he should do the errand. Annette had always been very jealous about her letters, and seemed to be growing even more so.

He stood where he was, his big shoulders sagging, the smile with which he had met her smile slowly fading from his face. He shook his head. He drew in a deep breath. He shambled away, through the big living-room and through that again into his study. He sat down in front of his typewriter and stared at it for a long time.

He began to work — at first slowly, but finally with a true and page-devouring frenzy. . . .

It was dusk, and he had already switched on his desk-light, when there came a gentle sound behind him. He dragged himself back to the world which he did not control and turned in his chair and saw his wife just inside the door. She was very slim, almost boyish, in her gardening overalls. She said, "I do not want to interrupt, Carlo — just to know about dinner." Her face was in shadow, and she might have been smiling.

He stood up and threw his arms wide and stretched. "Any time you like," he said, and then, as she moved to leave the room, "Wait a minute!"

He crossed to her and took her by the shoulders and looked down at her. For a moment she was rigid; then suddenly she put her arms around his neck and moulded her slim strong softness against him and tilted her face up to his.

It was a long and passionate kiss — and it was only broken by the sound of a jarring, persistent thudding at the french windows.

Annette pulled abruptly away from her husband's clasp. She muttered something which sounded like, "*Sacré chien!* . . . " and went quickly out through the door behind her.

Except for the pool of light upon the desk, the room was very dark now, and after a moment Carl reached out and snapped on the switch of the overhead light. Slowly, he walked over to the windows and opened them and let in the big dog.

It stood close to him, its head more than level with his waist, and he stroked it and pulled gently at its ears. He shut the window then, and went out of the study and upstairs to his own room, the animal padding heavily beside him. He took a shower and changed his clothes, and when he had finished, could still hear his wife in her own room. He said, "Come on, G.B." and went downstairs again and out of the house.

He put the car away and shut the garage — and was still outside when Annette called him in to dinner.

This was, like all Annette's dinners, a complete and rounded work of art — and it was made all the more pleasant because, during it, she seemed almost her old self. She was bright, talkative, smiling — and although the dog lay directly in the way of her path to the kitchen and would not move for her, she made no complaint but walked around him.

As usual, they had coffee in the living room. After his second cup, Carl got up, and stretched. He snapped his fingers at G.B., who went and stood expectantly by the door. Carl stood over his wife, smiling down at her. He started to speak — but she was first, looking up at him in sudden concern.

She said, "Carlo — you do not look well! . . . You work, I think, too hard! . . . You should not go out, perhaps."

But Carl pooh-poohed her. "Feel fine!" he said and bent over and kissed her on the forehead and crossed to the door and was gone.

Whistling, and with G.B. bounding ahead of him, he walked down the steep slant of their own road and onto the gentler slopes of Paseo Street.

He had gone less than quarter of a mile when his long, measured stride faltered. He took a few uneven steps, then stopped altogether. He swayed. He put a hand up to his forehead and found it covered with clammy sweat. He wobbled to the edge of the road and sat down upon a grass bank. He dropped his face into both his hands. A vast, black bulk appeared out of the darkness and thrust a damp nose at him. He mumbled something and took his hands away from his face and clapped them to his stomach and bent his head lower, down between his knees, and began to vomit. . . .

Old Parry was sitting in his living room, a book on his knee, a glass on the table beside him. He heard a scratching at the porch door; then a

series of short, deep, demanding barks. He stood up creakily and went to the door and pulled it open. He bowed and said, "I am honored, Mr. Shaw!" — and then had his high-pitched giggle cut off short as the enormous dog seized the edge of his jacket between its teeth and began to tug at it with gentle but imperious sharpness.

"Something the matter, boy?" said Parry — and went the way he was being told and in a moment found the sick man by the roadside.

Carl had stopped vomiting now, and was sitting straighter. But he was badly shaken and weak as a kitten. In answer to Parry's shocked inquiries he mumbled, ". . . all right now . . . sorry . . . just my stomach upset . . ." He tried to laugh — a ghastly little sound. "I'm not drunk," he said. "Be all right in a minute — don't bother yourself . . ."

But Parry did bother himself: he had seen Carl's face — pinched and drawn and of a strange, greenish pallor shining with an oily film. Somehow, he got the big man to his feet; somehow, under the watchful yellow eye of the Schnauser, managed to pilot him into the house and settle him, half-seated, half-sprawling upon a sofa.

"Thanks," Carl muttered. "Thanks . . . that's fine . . ." He sank back on the cushions and closed his eyes.

"Just a minute now —" said old Parry — and went out into his little hallway and busied himself at the telephone to such effect that in less than fifteen minutes, a car pulled up outside and Dr. Thomas Wingate, bag in hand, walked in upon them.

Carl protested. He was much better already, and his face was pale with a more normal pallor. He was embarrassed and shy. He was grateful to old Parry, and yet plainly annoyed by all this fuss. He sat up very straight, G.B. at his feet, and said firmly, "Look, I'm all right now! Just a touch of ptomaine or something." He looked from his host to the doctor. "Awfully good of you to take so much trouble, Parry. And thanks for turning out, Tom. But —"

"But nothing!" Wingate said, and sat down beside him and took hold of his wrist and felt the pulse. "What you been eating?"

Carl managed a grin. "Better dinner than you'll ever get," he said — and then, "Oh — I had lunch out, maybe *that* was it! Annette and I went to The Hickory Nut, and I had fried shrimps — a double order! Tom, I bet that's what it was!"

Wingate let go of his wrist. "Could be," he said. He looked at Carl's face again and stood up. "That's a trick tummy of yours anyway." He turned to Parry. "I'll just run him home," he said.

Carl got up too. He thanked Parry all over again, and followed Wingate to his car. They put G.B. in the back and he sat immediately behind Carl, breathing protectively down his neck.

Wingate slowed down almost to a crawl as they reached Carl's driveway. He said, with the abruptness of discomfort, "Look now, I know you

pretty well, both as a patient and a fellow human being: this — call it 'attack' — may not have been caused by bad food at all. Or bad food may have been only a contributing factor. In other words, my friend, what everyone insists on calling 'nerves' may be at the bottom of it." They were in the driveway now, and he stopped the car. But he made no move to get out. He looked at Carl's face in the dimness and said, "Speaking purely as a doctor, Carl, have you been — worried at all lately?" He paused, but Carl said nothing. "You haven't seemed like yourself the past few weeks. . . ."

Carl opened the door on his side. "I don't know what the hell you're talking about," he said curtly.

As he stepped out of the car the front door of the house opened and Annette came out onto the porch. She peered through the darkness at the car. She called, "Who is there? Who is it?" Her voice was high-pitched, sharp.

"Only me, dear," Carl said. "Tom Wingate drove me home." He opened the rear door and G.B. jumped out, then followed his master and Wingate up the steps to the house.

Annette stood just inside the door as they entered. Her face was in shadow, but she seemed pale. She acknowledged Wingate's formal greeting with a stiff little bow, and Carl looked harassed and uncomfortable. He tried to stop Wingate from saying what had happened, but to no purpose. Annette was told the whole story, firmly, politely and incisively — and Annette was given instructions.

She was most distressed. She said that Carl had not looked well after dinner, and she had not wanted him to go out. She was extremely polite to Dr. Wingate, and repeated his instructions carefully and asked for reassurance that the attack had been nothing serious. But all the time she was rigid and unbending, with frost in her manner. Only when Wingate had gone — and that was very soon — did she thaw. It was a most complete thaw, however. She rushed at Carl and fussed over him and got him upstairs and nursed him and mothered him. And when he was comfortably in bed, she kissed him with all the old tenderness.

"Carlo, *mon pauvre!*" she said softly, and then, "I am sorry I was not nice to your doctor, *cheri.* But — but — *eh bien*, you know that I do not like him."

He patted her shoulder, and she kissed him again — and he was very soon asleep. . . .

It was ten days after this that he had the pains again. They struck late at night. He was in his study, working. It was after one, and Annette had been in bed since before midnight.

They were much worse this time. They were agonizing. They started with painful cramps in his thighs — and when he stood up to ease this there was a terrible burning in the pit of his stomach. And then a faintness

came over him and he dropped back into his chair. He doubled up, his hands clutching desperately at his belly. Great beads of cold sweat burst out all over his head and neck. He began to retch. Desperately, he swung his chair around until his hanging head was over the big metal waste-basket. He vomited hideously, and for what seemed an eternity. . . .

At last, momentarily, the convulsions ceased. He tried to raise his head — and everything in the room swam before his eyes. Outside, G.B. scratched on the french windows, and a troubled whining came from his throat. Carl pulled a weak hand across his mouth and his fingers came away streaked with blood. He rested his forehead upon the table-top and with tremendous effort reached out for the telephone and managed to pull it towards him. . . .

In exactly ten minutes, a car came to a squealing halt in the driveway — and Wingate jumped out of it and raced up the steps. The front door was unlocked, and he was halfway across the living room when Annette appeared at the top of the stairs. She was in a night-gown and was fumbling to get her arms into a robe. She said, wildly, "What is it? What is the matter?"

Wingate snapped, "Where's Carl?" — and then heard a sound from the study and crossed to it in three strides and burst in.

Carl was on his hands and knees, near the door of the toilet. He raised a ghastly face to Wingate and tried to speak. The room was a shambles — and beside his master, near the leaf of the french window he had broken open, stood G.B.

Carl tried to stand and could not. "Steady now!" Wingate said. "Take it easy. . . ." He crossed quickly to the sick man and half-dragged, half-lifted him to a couch and began to work over him. G. B. stopped whining and lay down. Annette came into the room and stood at Wingate's shoulder. Her hair was in tight braids and her pallid face shone beneath a layer of cream. Her eyes were wide, their pupils dilated. A curious sound — perhaps a scream strangled at birth — had come from her as she entered, but now she seemed in control of herself, though her hands were shaking. She started to speak but Wingate cut her short, almost savagely.

"Hot water," he snapped. "Towels. Glass."

She ran out of the room — and was quickly back with the things he wanted; then stayed with him, an efficient and self-effacing helper, while for an hour and more he labored.

By three o'clock, though weak and languid and gaunt in the face, Carl was himself again and comfortable in his own bed. He smiled at Wingate, who closed his bag with a snap.

"Thanks, Tom . . ." he said — and then, "Sorry to be such a nuisance."

"You're okay." Wingate smiled back at him with tired eyes — and turned to Annette.

"You go to bed, Mrs. Borden," he said, "He'll sleep — he's exhausted." He turned towards the door, stopped with his fingers on the handle. "I'll call by at eight-thirty. If he wants anything — don't give it to him."

Annette moved towards him but he checked her. "Don't bother — I'll let myself out," he said — and was gone.

Very slowly, Annette moved back to the bed and stood beside it, looking down at her husband. The mask of cold cream over her face had broken into glistening patches which alternated with islands of dryness which showed the skin tight and drawn, its color a leaden grey.

Carl reached out and took her hand. He said, "Did I scare you, darling? . . . I'm awfully sorry!"

Stiffly, she bent over him. She kissed him. "Go to sleep," she said. "You will be all well in the morning. . . ."

And indeed he was, save for a great lassitude and a painful tenderness all around his stomach. He barely waked when Wingate came at eight-thirty, and was asleep again the instant he left five minutes later.

At twelve — like a child about to surprise a household — he got up and washed himself and dressed. He was a little tired when he finished — but less so than he had expected. He opened his door quietly, and quietly went downstairs. As he reached the study door, Annette came out of it. She was in her usual house-working clothes, and carried a dust-pan and broom. Under the gay bandanna which was tied around her head, her face seemed oddly thin and angular.

She gave a little exclamation at the sight of him. "Carlo!" she said. "You should not be up! You should have called me!"

He laughed at her tenderly. He pinched her cheek and then kissed it. "I'm fine," he said. "Sort of sore around the mid-section — but that's nothing." He slid his arm around her waist and they went into the study together. She fussed over him, and was settling him in the big chair beside the desk when the telephone rang.

Carl reached out and picked it up and spoke into it. He said, "Hello? . . . Oh, hello Tom. . . ."

"So you're up, huh?" said Wingate's voice over the wire. "How d'you feel?"

"Fine," said Carl. "Hungry, though. . . ."

"Eaten yet?" The voice on the telephone was suddenly sharp.

"No. But I —"

"Good. Don't. Not until you've seen me. I want to examine you — run a test or two — while that stomach's empty. Can you get down here to the office? That'd be better. Or do you want me to come up?" Wingate's voice wasn't sharp any more: it seemed even more casual than it normally was.

Carl said, "Sure I can come down. When?"

"Right away," said the telephone. "I'll fit you in. G'bye."

Carl hung up. He looked at his wife and smiled ruefully. "Can't eat yet," he said. "Tom Wingate wants to examine me first." He put his hands on the arms of the chair and levered himself to his feet.

Annette stood stock still. "I am coming too," she announced. "I will drive you."

"Oh, phooey!" Carl said. "You know you hate breaking off halfway through the chores." He patted her on the shoulder. "And I'm perfectly all right, darling. Really! Don't you think I've caused enough trouble already?"

"Oh, Carlo — you are foolish!" Her face was very white — and something about the way her mouth moved made it seem as if she were about to cry.

Carl put an arm around her shoulders. "You must be played out, sweet," he said.

"I am very well," she snapped. "I am not tired at all." And then, with effort, she managed to smile. "But perhaps I am," she said. "Do not mind because I am cross. Go and see your Doctor Wingate. . . ."

She hooked her arm in his and walked through the living-room with him, and at the front door she kissed him.

"Take care of yourself, Carlo," she said. "And come back quickly." She shut the door behind him.

As he entered the garage, G.B. came racing up — and the moment Carl opened the car door, leapt neatly in to sit enormous in the seat beside the driver's. His tongue was hanging out and he was smiling all around it.

Carl laughed at him; then winced as the laughter hurt his sore stomach-muscles. He said, "All right, you bum," and got in behind the wheel and started the car and backed out.

He drove slowly, but in a very few minutes was parking outside Wingate's office. He left G.B. in charge of the car and walked around to the back door — entrance for the favored few.

Wingate was standing by his desk. The light was behind him and Carl couldn't see his face very well, but he seemed older than usual, and tired. Even the little beard looked greyer. He waved Carl to a chair and then came and stood over him, feeling his pulse and making him thrust out his tongue to be looked at.

Carl grinned at him. "Goddam professional this morning," he said.

But Wingate didn't answer the smile, or the gibe. He sat down in his swivel chair and stared at Carl and said, "You were pretty sick last night, my friend," and then, after Carl had thrown in a "You're telling me!", added sharply, "You're lucky not to be dead."

Carl's grin faded slowly — and he gave a startled "Huh?"

"You heard what I said." Wingate had taken a pencil from the desk and was rolling it around in his fingers. He was looking at the pencil and not at Carl.

He said, "By the way, there's some property of yours there," and pointed with the pencil to a bulky, cylindrical

package, roughly wrapped in brown paper, which stood upon a side-table. "Want to take it with you?"

Carl looked bewildered. "What? . . ." He stared uncomprehendingly. "What you talking about?"

"That's your wastebasket." Wingate still kept his eyes on the twirling pencil. "From your study. I took it with me last night. . . ."

"Why? . . . Oh — you mean to get it cleaned. . . ." Carl was floundering. He burst out, "What the hell *is* all this? What're you driving at, Tom?"

Wingate looked at him, and drew in a deep breath. He said, in a monotone, "You'll find out very soon. Where did you eat yesterday?"

"At home, of course. What's —"

"Be quiet a minute. So you ate at home. What was the last thing you had? Probably around midnight."

"Nothing. . . . Wait a second, though — I'd forgotten. I had a bowl of soup — Annette's onion soup. She brought it to me before she went to bed. But that couldn't —"

"Wait! So you had this soup, at about twelve. And around an hour later, you have cramps in the legs and stomach, faintness, nausea, acute pain in the intestines. And you vomit, copiously. A lot of it, but by no means all, was in that metal wastebasket. And the contents of the basket, analyzed, show you must have swallowed at least a grain and a half of arsenic. . . ."

He let his voice fade into silence, then stood up to face Carl, who had jumped to his feet. He put his hand on Carl's arm and pushed him back into his chair. He unconsciously repeated the very words he had used the night before. "Steady now!" he said. "Take it easy!"

Carl sat down. His pallor had increased. He pulled a shaking hand across his forehead and then tried to smile.

"Narrow squeak," he said — and after that, "Grain and a half, huh? That's quite a dose, isn't it?"

"Could be fatal," Wingate said. "And you had more, maybe."

Carl said, "How in hell d'you suppose I picked it up?" He wasn't looking at Wingate, but past him. "Vegetables or something? They spray 'em, don't they?"

"Not in that strength." Wingate went back to his own chair and sat in it. "And you had that other attack ten days ago. Same thing — but not so much." His voice was absolutely flat. "And you ate at home, both times."

Carl shot out of his chair again. His face was distorted, his blue eyes blazing.

"For God's sake!" he shouted. "Have you gone out of your mind! What are you hinting at?"

"I'm not hinting anything." Wingate's voice was still toneless. "I'm stating something. You have twice been poisoned with arsenic during the last ten days. The second time provably."

Carl flung his big body back into the chair again. He started to speak,

but all that came from him was a muffled groan.

Wingate said, "You don't imagine I like doing this, do you? But you have to face it, man! Someone is feeding you arsenic. The odds against accident are two million to one."

Carl's hands gripped the arms of his chair until his knuckles shone white. He said, hoarsely, "If I didn't know you so well, I'd break your neck!" His voice began to rise. "Can't you see the whole thing must have been some weird, terrible accident! Don't you *know* that what's in your mind is completely, utterly impossible!" He stopped abruptly. He was panting, as if he had been running.

Wingate sat motionless. His face was shaded by the hands which propped it. He spoke as if Carl had been silent.

"Arsenic's easy to get," he said. "Especially for gardeners — ant paste, Paris green, rose-spray, weed-killer —"

"God blast you!" Carl crashed his fist down upon the chair-arm. "There *is* weed-killer in the house — but *I* told her to get it!"

He got to his feet and towered over Wingate. He said, "I'm going. And I'm not coming back. I don't think you're lying about the arsenic, but I know you're making a monstrous, evil mistake about how I got it — a mistake which oughtn't to be possible to a man of your intelligence!"

He started for the door, turned back. "And another thing," he said. "I can't stop you from thinking your foul thoughts —" his voice was shaking with suppressed passion — "but I *can* stop you from voicing them — and I will! If you so much as breathe a word of this to anyone — I'll half kill you, and then I'll ruin you! And don't forget that — because I mean it!"

He stood over the other man for a long moment — but Wingate did not move, did not so much as look at him — and at last Carl went back to the door and opened it and passed out of the room. He got out into the air again and made his way to the car. He was very white. He opened the car and slumped into the driving seat. He put his arms down on the wheel and rested his head upon them. He was breathing in long shuddering gasps. G.B. made a little whimpering sound and licked at his master's ear — and two women passing by looked at the tableau with curiosity.

Perhaps Carl felt their gaze, for he raised his head and saw them. He straightened in his seat, and pushed the dog's great head aside with a gentle hand.

He drove home very slowly. Annette heard the car and opened the front door as he climbed up the steps. She said at once, "What did he say, Carlo? Did he know what is the matter with you?" Her haggard, worn look seemed to have intensified.

Carl looked at her — and then he shook his head. He stepped through the door and sank into the nearest chair. He said, slowly, "No . . . No, he didn't. I don't think he knows much about it. . . ."

He said, "God, I'm tired! . . .

Come and give me a kiss, darling."

She came and sat upon the arm of his chair and kissed him. She pulled his head against her breast and stroked his hair. He could not see her face as she spoke.

"But, *cheri*," she said, "he must know *something*."

Carl sighed. "Oh, he used a lot of medical jargon — all beginning with *gastro* . . . But I don't think he really knows any more than I do — which is that I happen to have a nervous stomach." He leaned back in the chair and looked up at her. "I tell you — maybe you're right about Tom Wingate. I don't mean as a man — but as a doctor. I think another time — well, I might go to that new man . . ."

Annette jumped up. "That is quite enough talk about doctors," she said. "And I, I am very bad! Here is my poor man here, white and weak because he has no food! Wait one little moment, Carlo . . ."

She hurried off to the kitchen. She seemed to have shed her fatigue, her tenseness.

Carl sat where he was. He stared straight ahead with eyes which did not look as if they saw what was in front of them.

In a very little while Annette came back. She was carrying a small tray upon which were a spoon, a napkin and a bowl which steamed, gently and fragrantly.

She said, "*Voila!* —" and set the tray on his knees and put the spoon in his hand and stood back to watch him.

He looked at her for a long unwavering moment — and when she said, "Hurry now and drink your soup!", he did not seem to hear.

He said, very suddenly, "Annette: do you love me?" — and kept on looking at her.

She stared. She said, after an instant, "But yes — but of *course*, Carlo!"

And then she laughed and said, "Do not be a baby! Take your soup — it is not very hot."

He looked at the spoon in his hand and seemed surprised to find it there. He set it down upon the tray and picked up the bowl and looked at his wife over the edge of it.

"*Santé!*" he said — and put the china to his lips and began to drink in great gulps. . . .

He did not have the pains that night.

A week went by and he did not have them — a week in which he had not spoken to, nor seen, nor heard any word of Dr. Thomas Wingate.

It was past eleven at night, and he was walking with G.B. up the last slope of Paseo Street. Behind him, old Parry called a last good-night, and he half-turned and waved a valedictory hand. He had been returning from a longer walk than usual and had met Parry at the mail-box; a meeting which had somehow led to drinks in Parry's house and a long talk upon Parry's favorite topic, which was that of the world's declining sanity.

He reached his own steep little road

and shortened his stride for the climb and whistled for G.B., who came at once and padded beside him.

He was humming as he strode down the drive and up the steps. He opened the front door and let the dog ahead of him and then went in himself.

He said, "*Oh, my God!*"

He stood motionless for an instant which might have been a century.

Annette was lying on the floor, twisted into a strange and ugly shape — and all around her prostrate and distorted body the room was dreadfully befouled.

G.B. stared, then pushed through the half-open door to the kitchen. There was a thump as he lay down.

Carl dropped to his knees beside the prostrate woman. He raised her head and it lolled against his arm. Her eyes were closed and her stained and swollen mouth hung open. She was breathing, but lightly, weakly — and when he felt for her heart its beat was barely perceptible. . . .

Somehow, he was in the study, at the telephone . . . As if automatically, his shaking fingers dialed a number . . .

He was speaking to Wingate. "Tom!" he said, on a harsh high note. "Tom! This is Carl. Come at once! *Hurry!*"

His hand put back the phone. His feet took him out into the living-room again. His knees bent themselves once more and once more he held his wife in his arms. . . .

He was still holding her when Wingate came.

Wingate examined her and shook his head. He made Carl get up — and took him into the study. He said, "You've got to face it, Carl . . . She's dead."

Carl was shaking all over — his hands, his body, his head, all of him.

Wingate said, "Sit there — and don't move!" and went out into the living room again.

He looked at the dead woman; at the foulness around her; at everything in the room. He was staring at the two coffee cups which stood on the top of the piano when G.B. came in from the kitchen, paced over to the study and disappeared.

Wingate picked up the cups, one after the other. They were small cups, and each held the heavy, pasty remains of Turkish coffee. He dipped a dampened fingertip into each cup in turn, each time touching the finger to his tongue. The second test gave him the reaction he wanted — and, his face clearing, he strode back to the study.

Carl had not moved, but his trembling had increased. The dog sat beside him, looking into his face.

Wingate put a hand on the shaking shoulder. Carl tried to speak — but his teeth started to chatter and no words came out of him.

Wingate said: "You know, don't you? She tried again . . . You wouldn't let *me* look after you — but the Fates did!"

Carl mumbled, "I — I — I d-don't understand . . ."

Wingate said, "She was over-con-

fident. And something went wrong — some little thing to distract her attention." He lifted his shoulders. "And — well, she took the wrong cup."

Carl said, "*God!* . . ." He covered his face with his hands, the fingers digging into his temples. He said: "Tom — I almost wish it *had* been me!"

"Come on, now!" Wingate took him by the arm. "Stop thinking — just do what I tell you!"

He hauled Carl to his feet and led him out of the study and up the stairs and into his own room. G.B. came close behind them, and lay watchful while Wingate got Carl out of his clothes and into bed and finally slid a hypodermic needle into his arm.

"There!" he said. "You'll be asleep in five minutes. . . ."

He was turning away when Carl reached out and caught his hand and held it.

Carl said, "Don't go . . ." And then he said, "About what I said in your office — I'm sorry, Tom . . ."

Wingate did not try to release his hand. "Forget it," he said. "I have."

And then he started talking — slowly, quietly, his casual voice a soothing monotone. He said, "All you have to do now is go to sleep . . . I'll see to everything else . . . In a little while, all this will just be a nightmare you've half-forgotten . . . And don't go worrying yourself about publicity and scandal and things like that, Carl . . . There won't be any . . . You see, I was *sure* — and in spite of what you said I told Chief Nichols . . . He and I will explain it all to the Coroner . . ."

He let his voice trail off into silence — Carl Borden was asleep.

It was three weeks before Carl permitted himself to smile — and then he was not in El Morro Beach. He was in San Francisco — and Lorna was waiting for him.

When he smiled, he was driving up Market Street, G.B. erect beside him.

"Tell you something, boy," he murmured. "I nearly took too much that second time!"

The smile became a chuckle.

"Q"

Continuing our tradition of bringing to you, whenever possible, the unknown stories by famous writers instead of those over-familiar tales which most line-of-least-resistance editors foist upon their readers, we now offer an "unheard-of" Dashiell Hammett melodrama. To the best of your Editor's knowledge and up to the time of this writing, this story has never been reprinted, or included in any anthology ever published. But there is not the slightest doubt in our mind that once this unusual tale has appeared in EQMM, many editors will in the future make "The Hairy One" (or "Ber-Bulu," as it was originally titled) his or her anthological discovery.

"The Hairy One" presents another unforgettable Hammett character. It is a crime story, sharply and unexpectedly different from anything Dashiell Hammett has yet written. It is also a puzzle story — another departure in technique for Mr. Hammett. Altogether a strange and exotic dish, especially for Hammett devotees. We have warned you: let the reader beware . . .

THE HAIRY ONE

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

Say it happened on one of the Tawi Tawis. That would make Jeffol a Moro. It doesn't really matter what he was. If he had been a Maya or a Ghurka he would have laid Levison's arm open with a machete or a kukri instead of a kris, but that would have made no difference in the end. Dinihari's race matters as little. She was woman, complaisant woman, of the sort whose no always becomes yes between throat and teeth. You can find her in Nome, in Cape Town, and in Durham, and in skin of any shade; but, since the Tawi Tawis are the lower end of the Sulu Archipelago, she was brown this time.

She was a sleek brown woman with the knack of twisting a sarong around her hips so that it became part of her — a trick a woman has with a potato sack or hasn't with Japanese brocade. She was small and trimly fleshed, with proper pride in her flesh. She wasn't exactly beautiful, but if you were alone with her you kept looking at her, and you wished she didn't belong to a man you were afraid of. That was when she was Levison's.

She was Jeffol's first. I don't know where he got her. Her dialect wasn't that of the village, but you couldn't tell from that. There are any number of dialects down there — jumbles of Malay, Tagalog, Portuguese, and whatnot. Her sarong was a gold-threaded *kain sungkit*, so no doubt he brought her over from Borneo. He was likely to return from a fishing trip with anything — except fish.

Jeffol was a good Moro — a good companion in a fight or across a table.

Tall for a Moro, nearly as tall as I am, he had a deceptive slimness that left you unprepared for the power in his snake-smooth muscles. His face was cheerful, intelligent and almost handsome, and he carried himself with a swagger. His hands went easily to the knives at his waist, and against his hide — sleeping or waking — he wore a sleeveless fighting-jacket with verses from the Koran on it. The jacket was his most prized possession, next to his *anting-anting*.

His elder brother was datto, as their father had been, but this brother had inherited little of either his father's authority or his father's taste for deviltry. The first had been diluted by the military government, and Jeffol had got most of the second. He ran as wild and loose as his pirate ancestors, until Langworthy got hold of him.

Langworthy was on the island when I came there. He hadn't had much luck. Mohammedanism suited the Moros, especially in the loose form they practised. There was nothing of the solemn gangling horse-faced missionary about Langworthy. He was round-chested and meaty; he worked with dumb-bells and punching-bag before breakfast in the morning; and he strode round the island with a red face that broke into a grin on the least excuse. He had a way of sticking his chin in the air and grinning over it at you. I didn't like him.

He and I didn't hit it off very well from the first. I had reasons for not telling him where I had come from, and when he found I intended staying a while he got a notion that I wasn't going to do his people — he called them that in spite of the little attention they paid him — any good. Later he used to send messages to Bangao, complaining that I was corrupting the natives and lowering the prestige of the white man.

That was after I taught them to play blackjack. They gambled whenever they had anything to gamble for, and it was just as well that they should play a game that didn't leave too much to luck. If I hadn't won their money the Chinese would have, and anyway, there wasn't enough of it to raise a howl over. As for the white man's prestige — maybe I didn't insist on being *tuaned* with every third word, but neither did I hesitate to knock the brown brothers round whenever they needed it; and that's all there is to this keeping up the white man's prestige at best.

A couple of years earlier — in the late '90s — Langworthy would have had no difficulty in getting rid of me, but since then the government had eased up a bit. I don't know what sort of answers he got to his complaints, but the absence of official action made him all the more determined to chase me off.

"Peters," he would tell me, "you've got to get off the island. You're a bad influence and you've got to go."

"Sure, sure," I would agree, yawning. "But there's no hurry."

We didn't get along together at all, but it was through my blackjack game that he finally made a go of his

mission, though he wouldn't be likely to admit it.

Jeffol went broke in the game one night — lost his fortune of forty dollars Mex — and discovered what to his simple mind was the certain cause of his bad luck. His *anting-anting* was gone, his precious luck-bringing collection of the-Lord-knows-what in a stinking little bag was gone from its string round his neck. I tried to buck him up, but he wouldn't listen to reason. His security against all the evils of this world — and whatever other worlds there might be — was gone. Anything could happen to him now — anything bad. He went round the village with his head sagging down. In this condition he was ripe fruit for Langworthy, and Langworthy plucked him.

I saw Jeffol converted, although I was too far away to hear the talk that went with it. I was sitting under a cottonwood fixing a pipe. Jeffol had been walking up and down the beach for half an hour or more, his chin on his chest, his feet dragging. The water beyond him was smooth and green under a sky that was getting ready to let down more water. From where I sat, his round turban moved against the green sea like a rolling billiard ball.

Then Langworthy came up the beach, striding stiff-kneed, as a man strides to a fight he counts on winning. He caught up with Jeffol and said something to which the Moro paid no attention. Jeffol didn't raise his head, just went on walking, though he was polite enough ordinarily. Langworthy fell in step beside him and they made a turn up and down the beach, the white man talking away at a great rate. Jeffol, so far as I could see, made no reply at all.

Facing each other, they suddenly stopped. Langworthy's face was redder than ever and his jaw stuck out. Jeffol was scowling. He said something. Langworthy said something. Jeffol took a step back and his hand went to the ivory hilt of a kris in his belted sarong. He didn't get the kris out. The missionary stepped in and dropped him with a hard left to the belly.

I got up and went away, reminding myself to watch that left hand if Langworthy and I ever tangled. I didn't have to sit through the rest of the performance to know that he had made a convert. There are two things a Moro understands thoroughly and respects without stint — violence and a joke. Knock him round, or get a laugh on him, and you can do what you will with him — and he'll like it. The next time I saw Jeffol he was a Christian.

In spite of the protests of the datto, a few of the Moros followed Jeffol's example, and Langworthy's chest grew an inch. He was wise enough to know that he could make better progress by cracking their heads together than by arguing the finer theological points with them, and after two or three athletic gospel-meetings he had his flock well in hand — for a while.

He lost most of them when he brought up the question of wives. Women were not expensive to keep down there and, although the Moros on that particular island weren't rolling in wealth, nearly all of them could afford a couple of wives, and some were prosperous enough to take on a slave girl or two after they had the four wives their law allowed. Langworthy put his foot down on this. He told his converts they would have to get rid of all except the first wives. And of course all his converts who had more than one wife promptly went back to Allah — except Jeffol.

He was in earnest, the only idea in his head being to repair the damage done by the loss of his *anting-anting*. He had four wives and two slaves, including Dinihari. He wanted to keep her and let the others go, but the missionary said no. Jeffol's number one wife was his only real wife — said Langworthy. Jeffol almost bolted then, but the necessity of finding a substitute for his *anting-anting* was strong in him. They compromised. He was to give up his women, go to Bangao for a divorce from his first wife, and then Langworthy would marry him to Dinihari. Meanwhile the girl was turned over to the datto for safe keeping. The datto's wife was a dish-faced shrew who had thus far prevented his taking another wife, so his household was considered a safe harbor for the girl.

Three mornings after Jeffol's departure for Bangao we woke to find Levison among us. He had come in during the night, alone, in a power-yawl piled high with wooden cases.

Levison was a monster, in size and appearance. Six and a half feet high he stood and at a little distance you took him for a man of medium height. There were three hundred pounds of him bulging his clothes if there was an ounce — not counting the hair, which was an item. He was black hair all over. It bushed out from above his low forehead to the nape of his neck, ran over his eyes in a straight thick bar, and sprouted from ears and great beaked nose. Below his half-hidden dark eyes, black hair bearded his face with a ten-inch tangle, furred his body like a bear's, padded his shoulders and arms and legs, and lay in thick patches on fingers and toes.

He hadn't many clothes on when I paddled out to the yawl to get acquainted, and what he had were too small for him. His shirt was split in a dozen places and the sleeves were gone. His pants-legs were torn off at the knees. He looked like a hair-mattress coming apart — only there was nothing limp or loose about the body inside of the hair. He was as agile as an acrobat. This was the first time I had seen him, although I recognized him on sight from what I had heard in Manila the year before. He bore a sweet reputation.

"Hello, Levison," I greeted him as I came alongside. "Welcome to our little paradise."

He scowled down at me, from hat to shoes and back, and then nodded his immense head.

"You are —"

"I'm not," I denied, climbing over the side. "I never heard of the fellow, and I'm innocent of whatever he did. My name is Peters and I'm not even distantly related to any other Peters."

He laughed and produced a bottle of gin.

The village was a double handful of thatched huts set upon piles where the water could wash under them when the tide was in, back in a little cove sheltered by a promontory that pointed toward Celebes. Levison built his house — a large one with three rooms — out near the tip of this point, beside the ruins of the old Spanish blockhouse. I spent a lot of time out there with him. He was a hard man to get along with, a thoroughly disagreeable companion, but he had gin — real gin and plenty of it — and I was tired of *nipa* and *samshu*. He thought I wasn't afraid of him, and that error made it easier for me to handle him.

There was something queer about this Levison. He was as strong as three men and a vicious brute all the way through, but not with the honest brutality of a strong man. He was like a mean kid who, after being tormented by larger boys, suddenly finds himself among smaller ones. It used to puzzle me. For instance, old Muda stumbled against him once on the path into the jungle. You or I would simply have pushed the clumsy old beggar out of the way, or perhaps, if we happened to be carrying a grouch at the time, knocked him out of the way. Levison picked him up and did something to his legs. Muda had to be carried back to his hut, and he never succeeded in walking after that.

The Moros called Levison the Hairy One (*Ber-Bulu*), and because he was big and strong and rough, they were afraid of him and admired him tremendously.

It was less than a week after his arrival when he brought Dinihari home with him. I was in his house when they came in.

"Get out, Peters," he said. "This is a honeymoon."

I looked at the girl. She was all dimples and crinkled nose — tickled silly.

"Go easy," I advised the hairy man. "She belongs to Jeffol, and he's a tough lad."

"I know," he sneered through his beard. "I've heard all about him. The hell with him!"

"You're the doctor. Give me a bottle of gin to drink to you with and I'll run along."

I got the gin.

I was with Levison and the girl when Jeffol came back from Bangao. I was sprawled on a divan. On the other side of the room the hairy man was tilted back in a chair, talking. Dinihari sat on the floor at his feet, twisted round to look up into his face with adoring eyes. She was a happy brown girl. Why not? Didn't she have the strongest man on the island — the strongest man in the whole archi-

pelago? And in addition to his strength, wasn't he as hairy as a wanderoo, in a land where men hadn't much hair on face and body?

Then the door whipped open and Jeffol came in. His eyes were red over black. He wasn't at home in Christianity yet, so he cursed Levison with Mohammedan curses. They are good enough up to a certain point, but the climax — usually pig — falls a bit flat on western ears. Jeffol did well. But he would have done better if he had come in with his knives in his hands instead of in his twisted sarong.

The hairy man's chair came down square on its legs and he got across the room — sooner than you would think. Jeffol managed to loosen a kris and ripped one of Levison's arms from elbow to wrist. Then the Moro was through. Levison was too big, too strong, for him — swept him up, cuffed weapons out of hand and sarong, took him by arm and thigh and chucked him out of the door.

Dinihari? Her former lord's body hadn't thudded on the ground below — a nasty drop with the tide out — before she was bending over Levison's hairy arm, kissing the bleeding slit.

Jeffol was laid up for a week with a twisted shoulder and bruised back. I dropped in to see him once, but he wasn't very cordial. He seemed to think I should have done something. His mother — old toothless Ca'bi — chased me out as soon as she saw me, so my visit didn't last long. She was a proper old witch.

The village buzzed for a day or two, but nothing happened. If Jeffol hadn't gone Christian there might have been trouble; but most of the Moros held his desertion of the faith against him, and looked on the loss of Dinihari as just punishment. Those who were still Christians were too tame a lot to help Jeffol. His brother the datto washed his hands of the affair, which was just as well, since he couldn't have done anything anyway. He wasn't any too fond of Jeffol — had always been a bit envious of him — and he decided that in giving up the girl at the missionary's request, Jeffol had surrendered ownership, and that she could stay with Levison if she wished. Apparently she did so wish.

Langworthy went to see Levison. I heard of it a few minutes later and paddled like mad out to the house. If the missionary was going to be smeared up I wanted to see it. I didn't like the man. But I was too late. He came out just as I got there, and he limped a little. I never found out what happened. I asked Levison, but if he had done all the things he told me the missionary wouldn't have left standing up. The house wasn't upset, and Levison didn't have any marks that showed through his hair, so it couldn't have been much of a row.

Jeffol's faith in Christianity as a substitute for an *anting-anting* must have been weakened by this new misfortune, but Langworthy succeeded in holding him, though he had to work night and day to do it. They were together all of the time — Lang-

worthy usually talking, Jeffol sulking.

"Jeffol's up and about," I told Levison one day. "Better watch your step. He's shifty, and he's got good pirate blood in him."

"Pirate blood be damned!" said Levison. "I can handle a dozen of him."

I let it go at that.

Those were good days in the house out on the point. The girl was a brown lump of happiness. She worshipped her big hair-matted beast of a man, made a god of him. She'd look at him for hour after hour with black eyes that had hallelujahs in them. If he was asleep when I went out there, she'd use the word *beradu* when she told me so — a word supposed to be sacred to the sleep of royalty.

Levison, swept up in this adoration that was larger than he, became almost mellow for days at a time; and even when he relapsed into normal viciousness now and then he was no crueler to her than a Moro would have been. And there were times when he became almost what she thought him. I remember one night: We were all three fairly drunk — Levison and I on gin, the girl, drunker then either of us, on love. She had reached up and buried her brown fists in his beard, a trick she was fond of.

"Hold on!" he cried, kicking his chair away and standing up.

He reared up his head, lifting her from the floor, and spun around, whirling her through the air like a kid swinging on a May-pole. Silly, maybe. But in the yellow lamplight, his beaked nose and laughing red mouth above the black beard to which her fists clung, her smooth brown body slanting through the air in a ripple of gay waist and sarong, there was a wild magnificence to them. He was a real giant that moment.

But it's hard for me to remember him that way: my last picture of him is the one that sticks. I got it the night of Jeffol's second call.

He came in late, popping through the door with a brand-new service Colt in one hand and a kris in the other. At his heels trotted old Ca'bi, his mother, followed by broken-nosed Jokanain and a mean little runt named Unga. The old woman carried a bundle of something tied up in nipa leaves, Jokanain swung a heavy *barong*, and Unga held an ancient blunderbuss.

I started up from where I was sitting cross-legged on the floor.

Unga centered the blunderbuss on me.

"*Diam dùdok!*"

I sat still. Blunderbusses are wicked, and Unga had lost twelve dollars Mex to me three nights before.

Levison had jerked to his feet, and then he stopped. The Colt in Jeffol's hand was too large and too steady for even a monster like Levison to jump at. Dinihari was the only one of us who moved. She flung herself between Jeffol and Levison, but the Moro swept her out of the way with his left arm, into a corner without taking eyes or gun from the hairy man.

Old Ca'bi hobbled across the floor and peeped into each of the other rooms.

"*Mari*," she croaked from the sleeping-room door.

Step by step Jeffol drove Levison across the room and through that door, Ca'bi going in with them. The door closed and Unga, holding me with the blunderbuss, put his back against it.

Dinihari sprang up and dashed toward him. Jokanain caught her from behind and flung her into her corner again. Beyond the door Levison roared out oaths. Ca'bi's voice cackled excitedly in answering oaths, and in orders to her son. Bind (*ikat*) and naked (*telanjang*) were the only words I could pick out of the din. Then Levison's voice choked off into silence, and no sound at all came from the sleeping-room.

In our room there was no motion. Dinihari sat still in her corner, staring at her feet. Unga and Jokanain were two ugly statues against two doors. The chatter of flying foxes busy among the cottonwoods and the rustling of thatch in a breeze heavy with the stink of drying *tripang* were the only things you could hear.

I had a dull, end-of-the-road feeling. A Moro is a simple son of nature. When he finds himself so placed that he can kill, he usually kills. Otherwise, it runs in his head, of what use is the power? It's a sort of instinct for economy. I suspected that Levison, gagged, was being cut, in the Moro fashion, into very small bits; and, while my death might be less elaborate, I didn't doubt that it too was on the cards. You don't last long among the Moros once you let them get the bulge on you. If not tonight, some young buck will cut you down tomorrow night, just because he knows he can do it.

Half an hour or more went by slower than you would think it could. My nerves began bothering me: fear taking the form of anger at the suspended activity of the trap I was in; impatience to see the end and get it over with.

I had a gun under my shirt. If I could snake it out and pot Unga, then I had a chance of shooting it out with Jeffol and Jokanain. If I wasn't fast enough, Unga would turn loose the blunderbuss and blow me and the wall behind me out into the Celebes Sea, all mixed up so you couldn't say which was which. But even that was better than passing out without trying to take anybody with me.

However, there was still gin in the bottle beside me, and it would make the going easier if I could get it in me. I experimented with a slowly reaching hand. Unga said nothing, so I picked up the bottle and took a long drink, leaving one more in it — a stirrup cup, you might say. As I took the bottle down from my mouth, feet pattered in the next room, and old Ca'bi came squeezing out of the door, her mouth spread from ear to ear in a she-devil's grin.

"*Panggil orang-orang*," she ordered Jokanain, and he went out.

I put the last of the gin down my

throat. If I were going to move, it would have to be before the rest of the village got here. I set the empty bottle down and scratched my chin, which brought my right hand within striking distance of my gun.

Then Levison bellowed out like a bull gone mad — a bellow that rattled the floor-timbers in their rattan lashings. Jeffol, without his Colt, came tumbling backward through the door, upsetting Unga. The blunderbuss exploded, blowing the roof wide open. In the confusion I got my gun out — and almost dropped it.

Levison stood in the doorway — but my God!

He was as big as ever — they hadn't whittled any of him away — but he was naked, and without a hair on him anywhere. His skin, where it wasn't blue with ropemarks, was baby-pink and chafed. They had shaved him clean.

My gaze went up to his head, and I got another shock. Every hair had been scraped off or plucked out, even to his eyebrows, and his naked head sat upon his immense body like a pimple. There wasn't a quart of it. There was just enough to hold his big beaked nose and his ears, which stood out like palm leaves now that they weren't supported by hair. Below his loose mouth, his chin was nothing but a sloping down into his burly throat, and the damned thing trembled like a hurt baby's. His eyes, not shadowed now by shaggy brows, were weak and poppy. A gorilla with a mouse's head wouldn't have looked any funnier than Levison without his hair; and the anger that purpled him made him look sillier still. No wonder he had hidden himself behind whiskers!

Dinihari was the first to laugh — a rippling peal of pure amusement. Then I laughed, and Unga and Jeffol. But it wasn't our laughter that beat Levison. We could only have goaded him into killing us. Old Ca'bi turned the trick. The laughter of an old woman is a thing to say prayers against, and Ca'bi was very old.

She pointed a finger at Levison and screeched over it with a glee that was hellish. Her shriveled gums writhed in her open mouth, as if convulsed with mirth of their own, her scrawny throat swelled and she hopped up and down on her bony feet. Levison forgot the rest of us, turned toward her, and stopped. Her thin body shuddered in frenzies of derision, and her voice laughed as sane people don't. You could almost see it — metal lashes of laughter that coiled round his naked body, cut him into raw strips, paralyzed his muscles.

His big body became limp, and he pawed his face with a hand that jerked away as if the touch of the beardless face had burnt it. His knees wobbled, moisture came into his eyes, and his tiny chin quivered. Ca'bi swayed from side to side and hooted at him — a hag gone mad with derision. He backed away from her, cringing back from her laughter like a dog from a whip. She followed him up — laughed him through the sleeping-room door,

laughed him back to the far side of the sleeping-room, laughed him through the thin wall. A noise of ripping as he went through the thatch, and a splash of water.

Dinihari stopped laughing and wiped her wet face with her sleeve. Her eyes were soft under Jeffol's cold gaze.

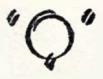
"Your slave (*patek*) rejoices," she cooed, "that her master has recovered his *anting-anting* and is strong again."

EDITOR'S NOTE: *We interrupt the tale of the Hairy One to pose an interesting question. Do you foresee the real point of Dashiell Hammett's unusual story? Dinihari has just said that Jeffol has recovered his anting-anting (luck-charm). What is Jeffol's new anting-anting? Why did it make Jeffol take his revenge in the manner he did? Surely we had every reason to expect Jeffol to kill Levison, or to cut Levison into very small bits, Moro-fashion; but Jeffol didn't — instead, he merely shaved the big man clean. Why? Why was that punishment even more effective than killing the man? That is the mystery in this Hammett story and you will find the solution in the next paragraph . . .*

"Not so," Jeffol said, and he unbent a little, because she was a woman to want, and because a Moro loves a violent joke. "But there is much in the book of the Christian (*neserani kitab*). There is a tale the missionary (*tuan padri*) told me of a hairy one named Sansão, who was strong against his enemies until shorn of his hair. Many other magics (*tangkal*) are in the book for all occasions."

So that damned Langworthy was at the bottom of it!

I never saw him again. That night I left the island in Levison's yawl with the pick of his goods. He was gone, I knew, even if not in one of the sharks that played round the point. His house would be looted before morning, and I had more right to his stuff than the Moros. Hadn't I been his friend?



Gleanings from Margery Allingham's autobiographical notes . . . She comes of a family of "blood" writers: John Till Allingham wrote melodramas in the early 19th century; later, in the nineties, another John Allingham was a popular author of boys' school stories; her grandfather was the owner of a newspaper; her father, H. J. Allingham, contributed serials to all the well-known weeklies of his day. Margery Allingham grew up from babyhood "in an atmosphere of ink and paper." Out of this literary background emerged the mild, bespectacled Albert Campion, Criminologist — that charming aristocrat who, though he mixes in the very best circles of London society, can still say: "Some of my best friends are — crooks!"

We are proud of our record in bringing you Campion tales that have never before been published in the United States. No less than six have already appeared in EQMM. There are more to come. In this issue we start on our second half-dozen of "new" Campions — and our seventh story is a "lucky seventh" in more ways than one.

It was lucky, for example, that Lance Feering had just endured an unlucky love affair — otherwise Mr. Campion would not have taken him to a house in Duke's Row. It was lucky that both of them took the crimson letters seriously. It was lucky that Lance Feering was at heart a knight-errant. But the luckiest thing of all was the quiet, determined presence of Albert Campion, and his subtle appreciation of the longer view.

"The Crimson Letters" will remind you of H. C. Bailey at his best — it has the same inordinate sympathy and heart-warming quality that the creator of Reggie Fortune instills into certain Fortunesque cases. You'll know what we mean after you have finished one of Margery Allingham's finest efforts in humanizing the detective short story.

THE CRIMSON LETTERS

by MARGERY ALLINGHAM

On the day that the entrancing Beatrix Lea married her famous leading man, Mr. Albert Campion took Mr. Lance Feering to re-visit the happy scenes of Mr. Feering's youth.

The expedition was purely remedial. Throughout their long luncheon Lance had remained mildly depressed. After all, as he said, a broken heart takes at least twenty-four hours in which to mend without a seam and while he was perfectly prepared to believe that life with a young woman of Miss Lea's uncontrolled and vituperative tongue might drive a man to suicide, he yet needed a day or two to get used to his merciful deliverance.

Campion, who had known Lance long before he had become one of the leading designers of stage *décor* in Europe, was ready to agree, but it occurred to him that a little gentle exercise, judiciously coupled with a rival sentimental regret, might possibly speed up the recovery.

He was rewarded. As they turned into the web of little streets which floats out like a dusty cap round the neck of the Museum, Lance began to brighten visibly.

"I used to live round here once," he remarked casually. "Four of us existed in a hovel on the top floor of a house in Duke's Row. We were all under twenty. Berry was there, and Jorkins, and old Salmon, the poster chap. We were all broke and completely happy. We used to slave away like lunatics, all striving and dreaming of the glorious future when our respective geniuses would be recognized and we should be rich and eat three times a day. It's tragic, you know, Campion. Look at us now. All recognized, all successful, and all damned miserable. We've got the apple off the top of the tree and the cursed thing's sour."

Campion experienced a sensation of relief. The man was becoming recognizable. Once Lance got going on his time-honored "futility of endeavor" the next stage, "self-expression, the comforter," was close at hand, and after that it was but a step to that mood of light-hearted good temper laced with high excitement which was his normal state.

"What we all miss now is adventure," Lance continued, absent-mindedly crossing the road to reach a familiar turning. "When we lived down here it was an adventure to be alive at all. Here we are. That's the place. Wonderful architecture. Look at that porch and those windows. Look at them!"

Campion surveyed the row of dusty houses, but even the rose-colored spectacles of Lance Feering's reawakening enthusiasm could not restore Duke's Row to any sort of splendor. The backwater was forlorn and shabby. Fine doors hung open under the ragged elegance of graceful porches, betraying glimpses of bare and dirty communal hallways within. It was a sad street of decayed mansions, whose rooms were now let out unfurnished at a few shillings a week. Lance strolled down the road.

"I haven't been here for ten years," he said regretfully. "All the old crowd must have gone, of course. No one stayed here long. It was a sort of halfway house. If you lived here you were either going up or coming down. I wonder who's got our old hovel now?"

He had paused before an open doorway as he spoke and, after a moment's contemplation, suddenly dived through it and hurried up the fine but unsteady flight of wooden stairs inside. Campion followed dubiously, catching up with him just as he was shamelessly engaged in trying the handle of the door on the top landing.

"I say, is this wise?" Campion put out a restraining hand, but the door swung open and Feering grinned.

"Empty, by George!" he said delightedly. "This is an omen, Campion. Who knows, it may be the will of Providence that we take this place, and turning our backs resolutely on the fleshpots, settle down to adventure and art for art's sake."

Campion remained polite but unimpressed. The crumbling attic with the discolored walls, the wobbling floor-boards, and the one dusty window did not attract him. But Feering was his old volatile self again.

"It's a hole, Campion, I admit," he said. "It's a dirty little hole, twice as dark and half the size I thought it was. Yet we all worked in here and slept in this bedroom. Lord, look at it! It's a cupboard. Salmon, Berry, and I shared this."

He had thrown open an inner door and they stepped gingerly into a tiny room in which there was nothing but a broken chair, a cup without a handle, and a portrait of a film star torn from one of the weekly illustrated magazines. Feering's enthusiasm sagged before this scene of desolation.

"I wouldn't like to see us trying it now," he remarked. "You haven't met old Salmon lately, have you? He's grown very pompous since his success, poor chap. We used to make Jorkins sleep in this cupboard over here. He was short enough to lie down in it."

He was still laughing as he opened the small door in the wall. Campion did not follow him immediately. An empty cigarette carton on the window sill had caught his attention and he had gone across to look at it. He still had it in his hand when Feering's voice came sharply from the cupboard.

"I say, Campion, come here. Look at this."

Campion put his head into the little cell and glanced round its dingy walls through his horn-rimmed spectacles. The place was less than six feet square and was lit by a small window in the roof. It was quite devoid of furnishing, but possessed one startling feature. All round the rough plaster walls, about a foot above the wainscot, ran a string of six-inch crimson letters. They made out the words with difficulty.

"*Let me out*," they read. "*O let me out let me out let me out let me out let me out.*"

The writing was shaky and irregular, but there was no mistaking the message. It sprang out at them from the little den like a cry and sent an unaccustomed thrill down Campion's spine. On and on the message went, all round the tiny room. Sometimes it was in a double row. Sometimes it staggered up the wall.

"*Let me out o let me out let me out let me out.*"

Very low down on the back of the door was the single word "*Janey*" repeated half a dozen times.

The two men stared at each other for an instant and finally Feering laughed.

"It's mad, of course," he said. "Some sort of joke. It gave me a shock, though, almost a superstitious thrill. 'Let me out' written in

blood on the walls of a prison. As soon as one's mind works one realizes it's a false effect. If anyone had been imprisoned here he would have shouted the words, not scribbled them. How attractively absurd!"

Campion was silent. He was kneeling down on the floor, peering at the inscription. Presently he rubbed one of the letters with an inquisitive forefinger and the color came off on his hand. He moved under the skylight to examine it.

"It's recent work, anyway," he observed at last. "Wait a minute. Get out of the light, can you, old boy? Stand in the doorway while I have a look round."

Feering moved obligingly and stood watching.

"I like to see the veteran sleuth sleuthing," he remarked cheerfully. "It's very instructive. Look out for the trouser knees. Hullo, have you got something? What is it? The clue the great man knew was here?"

"The clue the great man *hoped* was here," corrected Campion modestly. He prised something small and bright from beneath the wainscot board, and rose, holding the treasure in the palm of his hand. "There you are," he said. "There's half the explanation of the blood-stained handwriting."

"Lipstick!" Lance took the small gilt holder from which practically all the cosmetic had been worn away, and turned it over curiously. "Sample size," he commented. "What's the little bit of green thread for? That's amateur work."

"I shouldn't pull it off." Campion spoke hastily, an urgency in his tone which made the other man glance at him inquiringly.

"Taking it seriously?" he asked. "It is a joke of some sort, isn't it? Have we stumbled on a crime?" He almost sounded hopeful, and Campion shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear chap, I don't know," he said. "Yet it's odd that any woman should waste a whole lipstick writing '*let me out*' all round the wainscot of empty room."

"Perhaps it wasn't empty then?"

"In that case it's curiouser and curiouser. Why should she move the furniture away from the walls in order to write behind it?"

"I say, there is that." Lance Feering's black eyes were growing sharper. "Still, why write it? Why not shout it?" he insisted. "And anyway, why so low down?"

Campion hesitated. "I don't want to be melodramatic," he said, "but if she were lying on the floor she could just reach as high as that, and I can imagine a frightened woman writing like that if she was prevented from shouting."

"Good Lord!" Feering was staring at the little cell in blank astonishment. "Gagged!" he ejaculated. "Bound and gagged."

"Hardly. If she was bound she couldn't write, and if she wasn't bound she'd hardly remain gagged. But she might have been frightened. It's very curious."

"It's incredible." Lance was frankly

excited. "Shall we call a bobby?"

"Oh, no, I shouldn't do that." Campion was firm. "He might not be amused. We've got to account for ourselves being here at all, you see. We walked in off the street without being asked. There isn't even a 'To Let' sign anywhere. We're on enclosed premises. If you call the police we shall spend the rest of the day making statements. It's interesting, though. I should say it had been written within the last forty-eight hours. The stuff isn't dry, you see."

Lance grimaced. "I came up here on a silly sentimental impulse, hoping to recapture some of the old spirit of adventure," he remarked. "Now I seem to have found it, and hang it, Campion, it's a responsibility. Look at it. '*Let me out o let me out.*' It's pathetic, poignant. It must be answered. I don't see what we're going to do, though, apart from making discreet inquiries from the people downstairs."

"Wait a moment." Campion was examining the lipstick holder. "All in good time. Let's do the thing in proper academic style. First we learn all we can from the scene. Then we take the statements. I'll tell you something, young sir. This is no ordinary lipstick. Not only is it a sample but it has an inscription. Look. *Prince Pierrot, Inc.* '*Maiden Voyage.*' What does that tell you? Nothing, I suppose. However, the experienced sleuth deduces instantly that Prince Pierrot is an American firm of high-class cosmetic manufacturers; American because he's 'Inc.' and not 'Ltd.,' and high-class because the smell of the stuff is not offensive but rather pleasing. Moreover, it's a nice expensive-looking color. The 'Maiden Voyage' provokes a longer shot, I admit, but there has been a pretty important maiden voyage from the U. S. just lately."

"The *Eire!*" Lance swung round. "I say, that's about it. That boat is the last word in floating hotels and I believe the advertising tie-ups were incredible. Probably these Pierrot people control the beauty parlors on board and ran off a few special samples with the complimentary name. There you are. This poor girl Janey — her name must be Janey — came over on the *Eire*. We're on to something highly peculiar. They were all first-class passengers on that trip. What's an American socialite doing in a dive like this less than a week after she lands in England? We must find her. Hang it, it's up to us!"

Campion smiled, but his eyes were still serious.

"Don't be disappointed," he said warningly.

"Disappointed?" Lance was hurt. "My dear chap, I'm not a ghoul. I only hope it is a joke. I don't want any beautiful young woman to have had a beastly time. What are you laughing at?"

"I was wondering if she was beautiful and if she was young," murmured Campion.

Lance grinned. "Poor, ugly little beast, then," he said. "I don't care

I've got my adventure. Her name is Janey and I am her knight-errant. We've got all eternity before us. Where do we go from here?"

Their preliminary investigations were unexpectedly profitable. To Feering's delight he discovered that the old charwoman who had lived in the basement in the days of his youth was still in occupation. After a glorious reunion, which could not have been more hearty had he been her long-lost son, she told them all she knew of the ex-tenants of the top floor.

There had been two of them, she said, "flash boys, a little too smart to be trusted." They had been living there for the best part of a month, and had seemed to her experienced eyes to be none too flush with money, even according to the standards of the neighborhood. However, two days before there had come a change. The tenants of the attic had received visitors of an unusual kind. The strangers had arrived late one night. Out of her basement window she had caught a glimpse of their limousine, and afterwards had heard the sound of trampling feet on the uncarpeted stairs. The following evening the car had called again, and this time everyone had gone off in it, carrying bundles and packages.

The old lady suspected a moonlight flit but had been surprised in the morning to discover one of the tenants still in possession. Even more to her astonishment, he had fetched in a junk dealer and disposed of the entire furnishings for a few shillings. Then, after leaving a week's rent for the landlord, he had walked out quietly into the blue.

That was all Mrs. Sadd had to report, and she hardly liked to take the treasury note which Feering pressed upon her, but she came running after them to tell them that one of the "flash boys" had spoken with an American accent.

"No girl," Lance remarked dubiously, as he followed Campion into a cab. "No mention of a girl at all. No screams. Nothing. The only corroboration we have is that one of the tenants had an American accent."

"He liked American cigarettes too," Campion observed. "There was an empty 'Camel' carton on the mantelshelf. They're expensive over here. Perhaps the visitors brought him a packet. It may be a wild-goose chase, but I think we'll try the shipping office."

"Janey," said Feering, leaning back in the cab. "I see her as a dazzling blonde with dark eyes."

Since Beatrix was a brunette with blue eyes, Campion took the observation to be a favorable sign.

Lance waited in the cab while Campion negotiated the somewhat delicate line of inquiry in the shipping office. It was a long vigil, but he was rewarded. The tall man in the horn-rimmed spectacles came striding out of the impressive doorway wearing that vacant expression which indicated that he was on the track of

something interesting. He directed the taxi-man to the offices of one of the newspapers and climbed in beside his friend.

"Miss Janey Lobbet, travelling with her mother, Mrs. Fran Lobbet, of Boston, Mass.," he said briefly. "That's all I can find out about her. Passenger lists aren't very communicative. But she was the only Janey on the boat, so far as I can find out. There's one other point. You were perfectly right. Messrs. Prince Pierrot, Inc. had the monopoly of the beauty trade on the ship and they did run a special line in 'Maiden Voyage' samples, exclusive to the trip. How's that?"

Lance whistled. "What an extraordinary thing!" he said at last. "'*Let me out o let me out*' . . . what on earth does it mean? There's been nothing in the papers. What's happened?"

"I don't know." The other man spoke with a seriousness unusual in him. "I don't know at all, but I don't like the feel of it and I rather think it's something I ought to find out."

At the newspaper office Campion's call was on Miss Dorothea Azores, well known as the most industrious gossip-writer of the day. The lady herself was out, unfortunately, but her secretary was able to give them at least the bare bones of the information they sought. Mrs. Fran Lobbet was the widow of Carl Lobbet, the paper magnate, and she and her only daughter, Janey, were staying at the Aragon Hotel, overlooking the Park.

"Well, what do we do?" inquired Lance as they came out through the bronze-and-glass doors into Fleet Street again. "Do we barge in on these good ladies and ask if either of them has spent a bad half-hour in Duke's Row?"

Campion hesitated. "No," he said, the anxious expression still lingering behind his spectacles. "No, hardly that. But we might dine at the Aragon tonight if you're not doing anything. I think I shall go myself, in any case."

"No, you don't," said Lance firmly. "No poaching. This is my adventure. I found it and I'm sticking to it. The dinner's mine. I'll meet you in the restaurant at a quarter to eight. Don't look so dubious. This is going to be good."

"I hope so." But Campion did not sound sanguine.

The Aragon was fashionable that year, and the big dining-room with the fine windows opening on to the Park was crowded with the usual noisy, well-dressed crowd when Lance arrived. He found Campion already installed at a table at the far end of the room, on the edge of the little dais which was part of the orchestra platform. It was a most advantageous position, giving him a clear view of the entire gathering.

"Any luck?"

"It all depends." Campion was cautious. "I'm not sure. I've been talking to Baptiste. He's the *maître d'hôtel* here. I cultivate a line in *maîtres d'hôtel*. He's an old friend. The Lobbets are here all right, or rather

Madame is. Mademoiselle is away for a few days, staying with friends. That's the table, the little one down there by the window. She's expected any moment now."

"Staying with friends?" Lance repeated, his eyebrows rising. "That's suggestive, isn't it? This is damned silly and exciting. Don't be so blasé — or is this an everyday affair for you?"

"I'm not blasé." Campion resented the accusation. "I don't like the look of the thing. If I'm on the right track, and I'm afraid I may be, I'm appalled by it. Hello, here she is."

Feering followed his glance across the room to where the portly Baptiste was settling a newcomer at the little table by the window.

"It's Janey." Lance turned to Campion. "What did I tell you? A dazzling blonde with dark eyes. I'm the seventh child of a seventh child: I've got prophetic vision. She looks a little pale, a little sad, doesn't she? Momma has been very trying and she doesn't know anybody in London. By George, she's lovely! Look at her."

Campion was looking at her. He saw a pale slender girl of twenty-eight or so, with ash-blonde hair and enormous dark eyes, the shadows beneath them enhancing their sombre loveliness. She was delightfully dressed, and from the clasp on her shoulder came the unmistakable watery gleam of real diamonds, yet he thought he had never seen anyone who looked so forlorn and miserably unhappy in his life. Lance drew a card from his wallet and began to scribble on it.

"One can only be snubbed," he observed philosophically. "'Faint heart,' 'nothing venture,' likewise 'fain would I climb.' Give me that lipstick-holder. The green thread may touch a chord."

He pushed the card across the table so that Campion could read the message.

"*I think this is yours. May I tell you where I found it and how I know? It's a good story.*"

"Yes, that'll do, I think." Campion produced the lipstick-holder as he spoke. "I wonder, though," he went on. "It's not fair to spring it on her like this unless ——"

His voice trailed away. Lance was no longer listening to him. He had signaled a waiter and was dispatching his message.

Together the two friends watched the man cross the room. He paused before the table in the window, and said something to the girl. She looked surprised and almost, it seemed to Lance, a little frightened, but she glanced across at him and took the card as the waiter placed the holder on the white table-cloth beside her plate. The card fluttered from her hand as she caught sight of it and even from that distance they saw all trace of color creep slowly from her face. She grew paler and paler and her eyelids drooped. Campion rose.

"Look out, she's going to faint," he said.

He was too late. The girl swayed sideways and crumpled to the floor.

Instantly there was commotion all round her, and the two men on the other side of the room had the uncomfortable experience of seeing her assisted to the door, Baptiste fluttering behind the procession like a scandalized duenna.

Lance turned to Campion. In any other circumstances the bewildered regret upon his face would have been comic.

"Ghastly," he said. "How did that happen? Was it coincidence or the sight of that confounded thing?"

Campion put his napkin on the table. "We're going to find out," he said briefly.

Baptiste, solemn and reproachful, was bearing down upon them. He paused before the table and gave the message in a tone in which respectful deference was subtly mingled with deep disapproval.

"Mrs. Lobbet will be glad to see the two gentlemen who sent her the card in her private sitting-room."

It was not so much an invitation as a royal command, and Lance said afterwards that he followed Campion to the suite on the first floor feeling as if he were bound for the headmaster's study. At any rate, five minutes later they stood side by side, looking helplessly at the pale, unsmiling woman who waited to receive them with courage and dignity as well as terror in her dark eyes.

As the door closed behind the servant who had conducted them she spoke. Her voice was unexpectedly deep, and its trace of New England accent made it very attractive.

"Well?" she said. "Has the price gone up again? Or couldn't you wait until tomorrow?"

They gaped at her and Lance tugged at his collar uncomfortably.

"I'm afraid there's some mistake," he began awkwardly. "You see, we had no idea that you were Mrs. Lobbet. We — that is, I — was looking for Janey."

The name was too much for the woman. She remained for a moment struggling to master herself and then, with a gesture of complete helplessness, collapsed into a chair and hid her face.

"Don't," she whispered. "Oh, please don't. I've told you I'll meet any demands you like to make, but don't torture us like this. Is she all right? Please, please tell me. Don't you understand, she's my baby? Is she all right?"

Lance glanced sharply at Campion and met the other man's eyes.

"A child!" he said huskily. "Good lord, I never guessed."

Campion did not reply to him. His mouth was grim as he went across the room and looked down at the woman.

"Mrs. Lobbet, you should have gone to the police," he said quietly. "When did you miss your daughter?"

The young widow sprang up. Before she had been broken-hearted; now she was terrified.

"Who are you?" she demanded. "I tell you I don't know anything. I — I don't want to discuss anything with you. Please go away."

He shook his head.

"You're making a great mistake," he said gently. "This is England, you know. Conditions are rather different over here. I know when someone dear is kidnaped in America it is often safest not to go to the authorities for fear of reprisals, but over here, believe me, it's not the same."

The girl did not speak. There was a light of pure desperation in her eyes and her lips remained obstinately closed. He stood watching her for a little while and finally shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm sorry," he said. "You could have trusted us."

He had reached the door before she called him back.

"If only I knew what to do," she said brokenly.

Lance went suddenly across the room and took her hand. He looked young for his years and very handsome as he peered down into her face.

"We are both reputable people, my dear girl," he said. "We'll give you our credentials if you'll let us. We found that holder in such very odd circumstances that it made us curious, and quite by chance we were able to trace it to you. Won't you tell us all about it? We'll help you if we can."

It was a sincere little speech and gradually the tenseness round her mouth slackened, although her eyes were still afraid.

"Where did you get it?" she whispered. "Did you see her? Do you know where she is?"

It took them the best part of an hour to convince her that they were genuinely disinterested parties in the affair. Lance left the description of the scribbled message, which had now taken on such a new and pathetic significance, to Campion, who managed it very tactfully, without frightening the young mother unduly.

"So you see," he finished at last, "we were curious and just a little apprehensive. How old is Janey?"

"Only six." Fran Lobbet's voice quivered. "She's just a baby. I've never let her out of my sight before, but this new nurse seemed so sensible and trustworthy that I let them both go out into the Park. When they didn't return I was paralyzed with fear. Then the telephone message from these — these people came."

"Oh, they 'phoned you, did they? What did they say?"

"The usual thing. I nearly fainted when I heard the warning. I've read about the same sort of thing in our newspapers. I wasn't to tell anyone or — or I'd never see her again. I was to go to Oxborough Racecourse and put ten thousand dollars to win on a certain horse with a certain bookmaker. Then they promised she'd be returned to me."

"Did you do it?"

"Oh, yes, of course. That was the day before yesterday. I did everything they told me, but there was no sign of her when I got back here. I waited by the telephone all day and this morning, when I was half out of my mind, they rang again. They swore that she was safe but they made

another demand. They may be playing with me. She may be dead. But what can I do? What *can* I do?"

The appeal was too much for Lance.

"My poor, dear, good girl," he said, forgetting himself completely, "ring up the police instantly. This is frightful. You poor child, you must be in agony. See to it, Campion. Get on the telephone."

"No, no, please don't! Please. They'll kill her if I do that. I know they will. They so often do." She was clutching his coat imploringly, and Campion intervened.

"Look here," he said, "it's not as bad as you think, or at least I think not, thank God. This is a small country and the law is tight, but I think you may be right about not calling in the police at this juncture. Tell me, did the man you spoke to on the 'phone have an American accent?"

"Yes."

"I see. Then that's what's happened. Probably the whole thing's engineered from the other side, with confederates in this country. The nurse is in it, of course. When did you engage her?"

"Just before we sailed. She came to me with wonderful references and I never dreamed ——"

Mrs. Lobbet's voice trembled and she broke off, fighting with her tears.

"I'm alone," she said. "I daren't trust anyone. Even now I don't know about you. Forgive me, but you come to me out of the air with something that Janey had with her. How can I trust you?"

"Wait a minute," said Lance, who was still puzzled. "What was a child of six doing with a lipstick?"

In spite of her anxiety a faint smile passed over Fran Lobbet's beautiful face.

"It belonged to her doll," she said. "Janey has a very grand French doll with a green belt, and on the boat, when they were giving away those little samples, she got hold of one because it was a doll's size. I tied it on to the belt for her with a piece of green thread. That's how I recognized it. Look, the thread's still there. "

"I see. And when she was too scared to shout she used it to write her name on the door. She's a clever kid for six." Lance's black eyes had grown bleak. "They're swine," he said softly. "They deserve what's coming to them. Now look here, Mrs. Lobbet, you've got to allow us to manage this. We'll get her back safely if it's the last thing we do. You can rely on us."

Campion did not echo the impulsive promise. Long experience with criminals had made him cautious. But there was a rare spark of anger in his eyes.

"Suppose you tell us about this latest demand," he said quietly.

Mrs. Lobbet glanced from one to the other of the two men. She seemed pathetically young and tragic and, to Lance at any rate, one of the loveliest women he had ever seen.

"It's so impressed on us back home that complete silence is the only hope," she said, "but I can't help it. They've lied to me once and they

may go on doing it. I feel I'm taking her life in my hands, but I'll tell you, and please God I'm doing the right thing. This is what they've told me to do."

As Campion listened to the instructions his opinion of the organizing powers of the gang increased. It was a pretty little plan, evidently devised by someone with a proper appreciation of English laws and police procedure. Janey's captors required her mother to attend Thursday's Oxborough meeting alone. She was to seek out a bookie called Fred Fitz, whose stand would be among the others, but she was not to speak to him until the second race was actually being run. Then she was to walk over and place two thousand pounds in one-pound notes on *Flyaway* to win the two-thirty.

The simplicity of the scheme was exquisite. Here was no clumsy passing of notes in narrow lanes, no leaving of mysterious boxes on churchyard walls. A bookmaker is the only man on earth who can receive large sums of money for nothing from perfect strangers in the open light of day without occasioning suspicion or even interest. Moreover, in the event of a police trap what man could have a better story? Any tale which she might tell about mysterious telephone messages could always come as a complete surprise to him, and who could argue? No charge could be preferred against him, for he had done nothing to offend.

"I've got the money ready and I shall do exactly what they say." The girl spoke stiffly, as if her lips were set. "You mustn't come with me. I mustn't jeopardize her chances in any way. I daren't. I just daren't."

"Mrs. Lobbet is right," said Campion hastily before Lance could interrupt. "For her own peace of mind she must keep her bargain with the crooks. She must go to the meeting and pay the ransom money alone."

"But we shall be there," Lance insisted.

Campion cocked an eye at him. "Oh, dear me, yes," he said and his precise voice was almost caressing. "We shall be there."

They *were* there. Lance Feering, in chauffeur's uniform, drove Fran Lobbet to the meeting in his own car.

Campion went racing alone. Apart from an hour's intensive telephoning in the morning, his day might have borne the scrutiny of the most suspicious of shadowing crooks. He had an early lunch at the celebrated White Hart Hotel in Oxborough Wool Market and drove gently down to the car park as though he had no care in the world. He watched the first race from the stand, won a little money, and afterwards wandered down to the bookies' ring to collect it and place another trifling stake.

He did not bet with Fred Fitz. Indeed, he scarcely looked at the wizened little man who was shouting so lustily. He did not recognize his face and did not expect to. The morning's careful inquiries had identi-

fied him as a small man of no reputation, nor of sufficient importance to be of any great interest to the police. After discussing him on the telephone with Superintendent Stanislaus Oates of Scotland Yard, Campion had been moved once more to admire the organizing abilities of the men who had engineered the kidnaping of the little American girl. Fitz was one of those men who float round the edge of the underworld, doing odd jobs for larger and more wholehearted crooks. Since nothing definite was known against him the police were bound to treat him as an honest man, whatever their private opinions might be.

The man who was acting as his clerk, however, was a different person altogether. As soon as Campion set eyes upon that sharp white face his own expression became an amiable blank and he never glanced again in his direction. There was no mistaking Fingers Hawkins. Once seen, never forgotten, and Campion had not only seen but had dealt before with that little crook, whose reputation was not admired even by his own kind.

He returned to the stand in thoughtful mood. If Fingers was a typical member of the gang with whom he had to deal, things could hardly be more unpromising.

He took up his position and reviewed the scene through his glasses. The meeting was not a very popular one and the crowds were not enormous, although there were enough people to make the gathering interesting. The racecourse is just outside the town, which lies in a hollow, and beyond the red rooftops the rolling green hills, dotted with country houses, rise up to the skyline. It was a sunny day, and as Campion's powerful glasses swept the country they brought him little intimate glimpses of manors and farms and villas nestling in their surrounding greenery. He spent some time apparently lost in the beauties of the scene, and dragged his attention back to the course almost with reluctance.

Just before the second race started, when the stand was full and the crowd was moving steadily towards the rails, he caught sight of Fran Lobbet. She was wearing the red hat on which they had agreed, and was quite alone, he was relieved to notice. Through his glasses he watched her edging her way towards the ring, clutching an enormous white handbag with both hands. She made a very small and pathetic figure in her loneliness, and his indignation rose to boiling-point. He did not notice the horses coming up to the start, and it was not until the roar from the crowd told him that they were off that he was even aware of their existence.

As the crowd swept past Fran in a last-minute rush, the bookies and their stands were temporarily deserted, and Campion saw her walk resolutely forward. His glasses left the girl and focused upon the ignoble features of Fingers Hawkins. The little crook appeared to be employed in something which looked at first like amateur tic-tac work. His arms rose

above his head and dropped again. Then Fran came into the circle. A package passed and she received her slip. Still Campion did not follow her. Fingers made his entry and then, stepping up on the box, raised his arms once again. Afterwards he too raised glasses and looked steadfastly out across the course.

Campion remained where he was for a few seconds and for a while appeared to watch the race, but he did not stay to see the finish. At the very moment when the horses passed the post he was forcing his way out through the excited throng, and two minutes later climbed into a solid-looking black car containing five expressionless men, all of whom appeared to favor the same particular type of nondescript raincoat.

"Over there, on the brown hill," he said briefly to the man at the wheel. "A modern white villa with a flat roof. Take the London road and branch off by a church with a spire."

The short fat man with the American accent, who was known to the F.B.I. as Louis Greener, was still standing on the flat roof of the white villa, his glasses trained on the racecourse which lay, a patterned ribbon of color, in the valley below him, when one police car, followed by another, swung quietly up the steep drive and debouched its swarming cargo before it reached a standstill.

Mr. Greener was engrossed in his vigil and was not disturbed from it until a shout from the room below him, followed by a volley of revolver shots, brought him back to present emergencies with a rush. He dropped his glasses and fled to the stairhead just as a lean figure appeared through the hatchway, an automatic in its hand.

"I should come very quietly if I were you," said Campion.

Twenty minutes later the villa was calm and peaceful again, and the drive was empty. Fingers Hawkins drove up in a small car, a tremendous smile on his unbeautiful face, and a suspicious bulkiness about his coat pockets. He was not alone. Two men accompanied him, each betraying a certain careful solicitude for his safety which could hardly be accounted for by mere affection. Fingers was jaunty. He sounded the horn two or three times.

"You come be'ind me," he said to his bodyguard. "I deserve a committee of welcome for this lot. Now let's see how his American Nibs treats a bloke who's done 'alf his work for him."

He strolled up to the front door and kicked it open.

"Anyone at 'ome?" he shouted as he passed into the hall.

His companions followed him, and as soon as they came into the hall the door closed quietly behind them. The little click which the latch made as it shot home brought them all round, the hair bristling on their necks. There was a moment of uncomfortable silence and the police closed in on them.

Meanwhile, in a private sitting-room at the White Hart, Fran Lobbet sat in an armchair clasping a grubby little bundle, while tears of pure relief streamed down her face. From the other side of the room Lance Feering beamed at her.

"She's all right," he said. "I believe she enjoyed it."

"No, I didn't." Janey Lobbet's bright eyes peered at him from a tangle of hair. "Sometimes I was frightened. After Nurse left me I was frightened."

"But you're not frightened now, are you, darling?" Fran put the question anxiously and the child chuckled.

"No," she said. "Not now. I'm *tough*."

They laughed and Fran smiled at the man.

"I'll never be able to thank you."

"Don't thank me. Campion worked the oracle." Feering nodded towards the fourth occupant of the room, who sat on the edge of a table, an expression of mild satisfaction on his thin face. "I don't see how you spotted the house. Was it second sight?"

"In a way, yes. I did it with my little binoculars," said Campion modestly. "Fingers takes full credit for the rest. As soon as I saw his little weasel snout quivering pinkly through the undergrowth I thought, 'Hullo, my lad, you're not handling two thousand pounds of anybody's money without a pretty close watch being kept on you, I'll bet.' I saw he had two attendants in the background, but neither of them looked exactly like the foreman of the sort of outfit we had been led to expect. I was completely in the dark until I noticed Fingers signal to someone apparently in the middle of the course. Then he put his glasses up and I saw he wasn't watching the race. Since he was taking a longer view naturally I did the same myself and caught sight of a person whom I now know to be a most unpleasant bird called Louis Greener, standing on a flat roof and waving his arms about in reply.

"That was really quite enough in the circumstances. The police were waiting, as they had promised, so off we went and there was the gang and there was Janey. She and I came away and we left the boys waiting for Fingers and the loot. There should be a happy family party down at the police station by this time."

His voice died away. Neither Fran nor Lance was listening to him. He watched them for some seconds, but they appeared to be having a satisfactory, if wordless, conversation of their own, so presently he wandered off to find the Inspector in charge of the raid. That good-tempered man was comforting.

"Fingers has been talking about you, sir," he said cheerfully as Campion appeared. "I've had it all taken down. I'm thinking you might like a copy. Coming from him it's a regular testimonial. If it wasn't so highly colored that some might think it vulgar, you could almost have it framed."

Your Editor was once asked in a classroom: What is the fundamental quality of Georges Simenon's work? Why are the Simenon novels, the ones about Inspector Maigret in particular, considered "more than just detective stories?" Your Editor's explanation was necessarily extemporaneous, but reflection has not altered our opinion. First, we replied, Simenon accomplishes something that relatively few authors do: he creates and sustains a mood that catches the reader's imagination on the very first page and holds it until the very last page, and often after that. Second, and even more important, Simenon mirrors French middle-class people, their lives and their living, with a sincerity and realism that makes every Inspector Maigret story approach what litterateurs call a "novel of manners." Inspector Maigret himself is a typical bourgeois Frenchman, except that he is not a butcher, baker, or candlestick maker — he is simply a policeman whose trade is manhunting.

But Georges Simenon can also write a detective-rogue story in the purest Lupinesque vein. In less than 2500 words he can pose a baffling crime-riddle and still give us, between the lines, more than a hint of French "manners."

THE SAFE OF THE S.S.S.

by GEORGES SIMENON
(Translated by Anthony Boucher)

Joseph Leborgne was reading his newspapers, or rather savoring the odder items related in them; and I believe it was purely in order to be left alone that he idly pointed out to me the dossier labeled *S.S.S.*

The first thing that struck my eyes was a news story from a large Parisian daily:

A MYSTERIOUS BURGLARY

A burglary which far surpasses the greatest feats of an Arsène Lupin has been committed in the Boulevard Haussmann; and the case is all the more perplexing in that it is impossible to determine within a fortnight the date at which the crime took place.

The Society for Synthetic Sugar, recently incorporated with a capital of 1,500,000 francs, occupies extensive premises on the first floor of 36 Boulevard Haussmann. A safe of sizable dimensions and of the most modern design is the chief

ornament of these premises.

At the time of the incorporation of the Society a month ago, certain stocks representing a capital value of one million francs were deposited in this safe in the presence of the three directors. A sealed envelope containing the formula for synthetic sugar discovered by the chemical engineer Morowski was locked in the safe at the same time.

To open the safe, built to order by the firm of Leroy on specifications of the S.S.S., three keys are needed. Each of the directors had, and still has, one of these three keys.

Yesterday, when the three met to withdraw from the safe certain needed stocks, they found to their astonishment that the safe was empty.

There was no evidence that the safe had been broken into. And the police have had no success in finding fingerprints on the steel surface.

The three directors, MM. Morowski, Germain Massart and Henry Leprin, agree positively in their statements. They have opened the safe only once, on the occasion on which they deposited the stocks and the sealed envelope. Moreover, not one of them has ever let his key pass out of his personal possession.

As to M. Gérard Leroy, maker of the safe, he has stated that the most experienced burglar could not have solved the problem of the three secret locks.

An investigation is in progress. But the task of the police is rendered extremely difficult by the fact that it is impossible to determine even approximately the date of the theft.

Nevertheless, the police have one lead. An international thief connected with an Amsterdam gang specializing in such operations was seen in Paris about a week ago. His present whereabouts have not yet been discovered.

Leborgne went on reading and paying no heed to me; it was in vain that I tried to attract his attention by my comments. I gave up, and went on to glance over a clipping from a weekly journal which made a great point of being indiscreet, but which was careful never to hint that its indiscretions bordered on blackmail:

THE GREATEST ROGUE OF THE THREE

The daily press has given a brief account of the case of the S.S.S. (Society for Synthetic Sugar), but as usual it has taken great care not to tell everything.

We propose, therefore, to fill in the story, and let the reader observe that it involves as delightful a farce as he can possibly conceive.

Among other items, the dailies have suppressed the voluntary evidence of M. Leroy, manufacturer of safes, Boulevard Richard-Lenoir, who reported the statement con-

fided in him by his chief mechanic Jean-Baptiste Canelle, the very man who installed the safe in the offices on the Boulevard Haussmann.

Some days after the founding of the S.S.S., when the well-known stocks were reposing in the safe, Canelle received a visit *at his private home* from Germain Massart, director of the Society.

Massart, seeming very nervous, stated that his two associates were on the road, one in Marseilles and one in foreign parts, and that he needed to secure immediately an article contained in the safe. He asked Canelle to accompany him at once to the Boulevard Haussmann and help him to open the safe in spite of the absence of two of the three keys.

The workman hesitated and finally, to soften his refusal, asserted that the task was physically impossible. Massart continued to insist, and departed only after urging the mechanic not to mention his visit to anyone.

Canelle nevertheless expressed his astonishment to M. Leroy the following day, and his employer commended his attitude.

As one may well imagine, the examining magistrate questioned the mechanic, who repeated the same story. He even added a more serious accusation, which he had not seen fit to make to his employer.

Four days after Massart's visit, director Henry Leprin in turn appeared at Canelle's home.

After a long preamble he offered the workman 50,000 francs if he would consent to open the safe. Upon Canelle's refusal, Leprin also entreated the mechanic to hold his tongue and tried to make him accept a check for 10,000 francs as a reward for his silence.

When the workman continued to prove stubborn, Leprin left the check on a table and departed. Canelle has confessed that he did not resist the temptation to cash the check the next day.

As the reader will observe, the case by now presents a far less simple aspect than the daily press would have him think.

But this is not all!

We can state positively that there is a third rogue — none other than the "chemical engineer" Morowski himself.

This individual, we have discovered, holds no engineering degree. His academic career was confined to one year at the University of Liége. In this city he narrowly escaped conviction on charges of swindling, and chose to retreat to Berlin, where he developed his "synthetic sugar" project. He tried to interest various industrial firms in his supposed invention. Once he almost succeeded; but when the trial experiments were held, another chemical engineer exposed his fraud. If so far no suit has been brought, it is because the German industrialists do not care to admit

that they were for many weeks the dupes of an adventurer.

Morowski did not lose heart; he simply changed his base of operations. And in Paris he found Massart and Leprin, who immediately agreed to form a society for the exploitation of his invention.

The three colleagues had such deep confidence in each other that they ordered a triple-locked safe in which to deposit the society's holdings, and divided the three keys among themselves.

Which is the greatest rogue of the three?

Who succeeded in opening the safe despite all obstacles?

The dossier contained nothing further save photographs of the safe, the locks and the three keys, and a floor plan of the offices in the Boulevard Haussmann.

"What do you think of it?" Joseph Leborgne asked without raising his eyes from his newspaper.

"Obviously, that a professional burglar must be involved."

He shrugged his shoulders and rose. "Do you happen to be well-versed on the subject of safes? No? Then I must repeat to you what M. Leroy, one of the most conscientious of businessmen, told me on the telephone: 'The safe was not broken into. Not one of the standard methods of safe-cracking was even tried on it. It was opened, purely and simply, *by its three keys.*' "

"The weekly's statements on Morowski are correct?"

"They are. He is undoubtedly a common swindler, of the scientific variety."

"Massart?"

"A free-lance promoter."

"Henry Leprin?"

"A jack-of-all-trades."

"Would it have been easy to get into the office at night?"

"Merely one door to open. Child's-play to a burglar."

"But the concierge?"

"Pulls the latch cord, like all concierges, without even waking up, much less noticing the name called out to her."

"The three directors got on well?"

"Superficially, yes; but obviously with a basic mutual distrust."

"And now?"

"They accuse each other. Massart and Leprin offer a plausible reason for approaching Canelle. They claim that their curiosity was roused by Morowski's persistence in putting off actual tests on the process; they wanted to check the contents of the famous sealed envelope."

"And what does Morowski say?"

"That he's the victim of his partners who were trying to retrieve their stocks."

"But why?"

"According to him, because the stocks were worthless. The others were trying to steal his invention by carrying out this farce of incorporation while depositing in the safe only 'watered stocks,' as they say on the bourse. Once he had revealed his formula for synthetic sugar, the two

men could readily have exploited it or resold it on their own."

"And the examining magistrate?"

"Is spending sleepless nights over the case. Or rather he was . . . up to yesterday."

"Yesterday?"

"When I told him that I had discovered the truth."

Joseph Leborgne handed me the carbon copy of a letter. "This now belongs in the dossier," he said. The letter ran:

> Dear Monsieur Canelle:
>
> Turn over to the examining magistrate in charge of the S.S.S. case the worthless stocks and the envelope of blank paper which you have in your possession and which you have no idea what to do with.
>
> Unless I am seriously in error, no action will be taken against you, since all parties will prefer to suppress this farcical episode.
>
> Tell the truth: no more, no less.

"And he told the truth?"

"But of course! So simple a truth! This good man, who knew the secret of half the safes in Paris, had never once dreamed of using his knowledge to turn burglar. But suddenly the very owners of one of these safes come to tempt him. One of them goes so far as to offer him 50,000 francs. The idea is planted. Observe that he reports the first visit to his employer, but not the second; the seed is growing. From then on Canelle thinks only of this safe which must contain a huge fortune. He himself makes duplicates of the keys; he has made the originals and knows them perfectly. He slips by night into the Boulevard Haussmann offices. He has brought off a perfect theft . . . which has netted him not one single centime of profit."

"But the stocks?"

"Worthless, as Morowski guessed. What a magnificent Society! One director contributes a formula that does not exist! The others deposit paper bought by the ream! And not one of them has a single thought beyond retrieving from the famous safe his own contribution before the swindle can be discovered!"

"And yet you hit upon Canelle?"

He looked at me in surprise. And he sighed, as if outraged by my lack of perception. "Suppose that any of the others, or even all three together, had stolen the contents of the safe — what would have been their first object? *To imitate an ordinary burglary.* You would have found the office in chaos, the door broken in, and heaven knows what else — so that the directors of the S.S.S. would never have been suspected.

"The very fact that they were mutually suspected pointed to the only other man connected with the keys — the honest man who finally met up with the world of promoters. . . . Poor Canelle!"

FOURTH-PRIZE WINNER: CLIFFORD KNIGHT

Earlier this year we commented at length on the strategic power and advertising value of continuity titles — how such continuity established not only a personal association between an author and his books but also developed in readers' minds a psychological acceptance for the author's future books. Many detective-story writers have aimed, with varying success, at "shock of recognition." Here are some further examples, classified by authors' approach: COLOR: *Constance and Gwenyth Little called their first book* THE GREY MIST MURDERS. *Perhaps, on reconsideration, they decided that the word* GREY *was too weak to carry the burden of a long title-continuity; in any event, the titles of their next dozen books all pivoted on the word* BLACK — THE BLACK HONEYMOON, THE BLACK THUMB, THE BLACK GLOVES, THE BLACK EXPRESS, *et cetera. Cornell Woolrich also uses the word* BLACK; *his Simon & Schuster series include* THE BLACK ANGEL, THE BRIDE WORE BLACK, THE BLACK CURTAIN, *and* THE BLACK PATH OF FEAR. *Frances Crane, on the other hand, does not restrict herself to a single color; she has what might be termed the "rainbow method." Some of her Pat and Jean Abbott novels are called* THE PINK UMBRELLA, THE APPLEGREEN CAT, THE INDIGO NECKLACE, *and in one instance she was actually double-dyed —* THE YELLOW VIOLET.

ALPHABET: *Barnaby Ross began with* X, *went on to* Y, *and closed the continuity with* Z; *of course, there is nothing to prevent Ross from reversing his field and starting all over again, this time with* THE TRAGEDY OF A — *nothing except that Lawrence Treat has taken the edge off such a Rossian possibility. Mr. Treat has adopted the alphabetical angle and given it a new twist. Each of his titles also contains a letter of the alphabet, as in* B AS IN BANSHEE, D AS IN DEATH, H AS IN HANGMAN *and* V AS IN VICTIM.

QUOTATION: *We have no statistics handy, but we would wager a queenly royalty that a surprisingly large percentage of the titles of so-called "serious" books derive from literary quotations, with the works of one W. Shakespeare representing an inexhaustible reservoir of research. One of the most imaginative series in this general category was inaugurated by C. W. Grafton. Before Mr. Grafton joined the United States armed services, he wrote two books titled* THE RAT BEGAN TO GNAW THE ROPE *and* THE ROPE BEGAN TO HANG THE BUTCHER. *When Mr. Grafton returns to civilian blood-and-thunder, he will undoubtedly continue the series. If so, his third title is signed, sealed, and delivered; we take no risk whatever in predicting that it will be* THE BUTCHER BEGAN TO KILL THE OX; *if our prediction is*

wrong, then there is neither rhyme nor reason in the Mother Goose source of Mr. Grafton's original inspiration.

NUMBERS: *Francis Beeding once wrote a book called* THE ONE SANE MAN. *This was followed by* THE TWO UNDERTAKERS. *At what stage of the game Francis Beeding hit upon the idea of a numerical sequence we do not know. But judge for yourself the colossal scope of the Beeding continuity: other Beeding novels are titled* THE THREE FISHES, THE FOUR ARMOURERS, THE FIVE FLAMBOYS, THE SIX PROUD WALKERS, THE SEVEN SLEEPERS, THE EIGHT CROOKED TRENCHES, THE NINE WAXED FACES, THE TEN HOLY HORRORS, ELEVEN WERE BRAVE, THE TWELVE DISGUISES, *and the latest in the mathematical progression,* THERE ARE THIRTEEN. *What a magnificently ambitious project! We foresee the time when Francis Beeding's cast of characters in a single story will be enormous! — as in a book that might be titled* THE TWO HUNDRED AND SIXTY-SEVENTH SUSPECT.

AFFAIR: *Clifford Knight's* THE AFFAIR OF THE SCARLET CRAB *won the first Dodd, Mead Red Badge Prize Competition. Other winners in this annual contest were Marco Page's* FAST COMPANY, *Hugh Pentecost's* CANCELLED IN RED, *and Christianna Brand's* HEADS YOU LOSE. *But it was Mr. Knight who proved himself a veritable man of affairs. Since his prizewinning novel he has written, among others,* THE AFFAIR OF THE HEAVENLY VOICE, THE AFFAIR OF THE BLACK SOMBRERO, *and* THE AFFAIR ON THE PAINTED DESERT. *And for EQMM's first prize contest, Mr. Knight again proved his prizewinning prowess. His first short story about Professor Huntoon Rogers won a fourth prize, and it was titled with commendable consistency "The Affair at the Circle T" — the tenth important "first" in EQMM's first annual short story contest.*

THE AFFAIR AT THE CIRCLE T

by CLIFFORD KNIGHT

THIS PROFESSOR was a big guy. He was from over the line in California, and taught English at the university. He'd been fishing up in the High Sierras and just dropped by to see Buck Chamblis who runs the Circle T ranch, which ain't far outside Reno.

The dame was dead before the professor got there. Hell, we'd had the boys from the sheriff's office hanging around all day. They'd ask questions and go into huddles and then come back and ask everything all over. But they were doing their best.

The thing had them plumb worried.

If it had been a killing like where some cowpoke had leaned impulsive like on the trigger, they wouldn't have given it a second thought. But the dame was from New York. She'd been waiting out her six weeks at the Circle T. Buck Chamblis had a pretty good trade in folks from the East visitin' Nevada in the interest of marital freedom, and of course he was worried some about getting a bad reputation.

Nobody ever commits suicide by chokin' himself to death with his own bare hands. At least I never heard of it, and I don't think it can be done. So what is it, then, but murder when the dame's maid finds her that morning deader than a cow picked clean by the buzzards, with her throat all black and blue. Not much of a struggle, probably, and not any noise. When the guy made the pass at her, he just clamped on her neck like a bulldog and didn't let go.

The dame wasn't old at all, but this was her third man she was gettin' rid of. Funny thing, he had followed her out from the East and was hangin' around the Circle T hopin' that things would be different. He was nuts about her. She wasn't my kind of a woman; I like 'em quiet and comfortable. She was a chain smoker, and her voice was beginnin' to get hoarse from hoistin' too many; she couldn't sit still, couldn't stand still, couldn't keep her tongue from runnin' at both ends; and all the time she was in a lather to be doing something else. She'd wear a man out just to watch her for a little while. Buck Chamblis told me he didn't see how he could stand havin' her around the whole six weeks.

Tell you what she done the first evening; she set her bed afire with a cigarette, and if we all hadn't been prompt the cottage she was in might have burned down. The maid dragged her outside without her sustainin' any damage. Next day she said she didn't like the cottage, and wanted another one. Buck moved her. But she didn't like the furniture in that one. So she threw it all outdoors, and went into Reno and ordered all new furniture. Paid for it herself. Money didn't mean a damn thing to her. Her name was Mrs. Rolard, but we all called her the dame.

I didn't tell you about this other guy. Not the husband, but a guy she called André. I never heard his last name. He showed up the second day. Buck wasn't goin' to take him in, but the dame started a row. As it turned out he was the playboy who was lookin' forward with pleasure to bein' husband number four. He was built like a stud horse, but he was soft; he'd never had a callous on his hands in his whole life, or a saddle blister. Couldn't get him on a horse. He'd of made a good bartender, maybe. Just a pleasant half-baked big boy.

The husband was a different sort. He was normal-lookin'. Quiet, but hard underneath it. He wasn't anybody's fool, except the dame's. You couldn't understand why a nice guy like him would fall for a woman like her; a normal man would just naturally want to cut her throat. You

could see, though, if you watched him close, that he was holdin' himself in. Like a boiler all set to explode. On the surface he was polite and courteous; he'd smile at her and wait on her, but you wondered how long it would be before he hauled off and smacked her down.

It was the funniest setup I ever saw. The dame was goin' to sue for divorce. The husband was on hand and livin' at the same ranch. The husband-to-be was there too, and all three actin' like good friends and sort of makin' a party out of it.

The husband was fishin' quite a bit; puttin' in his spare time at it. Goin' out early nearly every day, but gettin' back in time for dinner. He tried to take André with him, but the guy wasn't even that athletic. He did sing a little evenings for exercise, in the corral when we were all settin' around under the stars, and I was pickin' the guitar, but that's as far as he would go.

But the husband was good at it — singin', I mean. He remembered cowboy songs I hadn't heard for years, and he could play the guitar too. It's funny how some big shots are; they fit right in and have a good time, although you know that it ain't what they're used to at home. The dame was like a lot of others from east of the Rockies — where had they been all their lives that they hadn't heard about the West? They're goin' to move out and live in it. Great wide open spaces that does somethin' to your soul. Maybe she meant it for the first few minutes after she said it; a lot of 'em do. But all the same they can't get back to what they're used to quick enough when it's time to go.

We are tellin' all this to the professor, Buck and I and the sheriff, settin' down in the corral in the shade. Several of the deputies from the sheriff's office are still there at the Circle T, too, because they haven't done nothin' yet. The undertaker has come and got the body, but the husband and André are still hangin' around wonderin' what's goin' to happen. The maid and the chauffeur — the dame brought her chauffeur out — they're in a kind of huddle by themselves over at the cottages in the shade of a cottonwood.

The sheriff went over the chauffeur pretty hard at first. A sheriff would, you know, because the chauffeur looked like a dressed-up gorilla. All shoulders and nothin' above 'em. You'd think naturally the chauffeur killed her. It was his kind of a crime. Only he didn't take it on the lam. When they got to lookin' around they found all the dame's rings and a couple of thousand in bills in her purse. That threw them off, and they counted the chauffeur out for the time being.

The maid, of course, wasn't any sort for a crime like that. She was thin and gettin' on in years, and her face was sharp and kind of sour. She was both a maid and a balance wheel to the dame, not that it seemed to do any good. The dame let her speak her mind, which she did plenty, and that was an important part of bein' the maid. She bristled all up when the sheriff got to talkin' to her — like she

had to defend the dame. Nobody else was goin' to. She was kind of like a foster mother maybe.

The professor squatted on his heels there at the corral when he might have set on the top rail, and asked all about these folks. He wasn't interested in what had happened when he first got to talkin'; it was more what these people were like and who was married to who, and what were they all up to while the dame was waitin' out her six weeks? He'd rub the side of his nose now and then as if it helped him think. As I said, he was a big fellow; sort of blond, and with blue eyes and a big nose. His ears stuck out away from his head. His name was Rogers, Huntoon Rogers. He and Buck Chamblis had been friends for a long time. He said afterwards that the professor wasn't a regular detective, but was just interested in things like what had happened at the Circle T.

We got around to that after a while. It was like this: The husband had been fishin' that day. He left early and didn't come back until 'long towards dinner time. He brought in a nice mess of trout, but instead of handin' 'em over to the cook, he went to work on a bench outside the kitchen door and cleaned 'em himself. Said he liked to do it; or, anyway, he wanted to this time. Then he went down to his room in the bunkhouse and got ready for dinner. Seemed in an awful good humor; we could hear him singin' while he changed his clothes, and when he come out he strolled over to the corral where some of us loafed in the shade. He said he remembered an old song which he hadn't sung to us yet; thought of it while he was fishin' that day. We got my guitar and he gave out with it while we waited for the dinner gong. What I'm sayin' is that a guy who's plannin' to kill his wife ain't in a mood like that just a few hours before he chokes her to death. Or, is he?

Now, I saw this myself: at supper that night all three of 'em sat down at the same table, the husband, the dame and this André. They ate the fish he caught that day. All three were in good humor; they had a bottle or two of wine, but nothin' to get any of them heated up. Just pleasant and talkative and kind of gay at times. Maybe that's all right; maybe that's the way it should be done. But if I was bustin' up with my wife, I don't think I'd be eatin' at the same table with her and the guy who was expectin' to marry her. I'm just not built that way.

For a while after dinner they talked about goin' into town to gamble; but it was too early, then. We started a little fire down in the corral, and brought up the benches, and I got out my guitar, and they just drifted in with the other folks and sat around enjoyin' themselves. For a while the husband sung some songs, and then André tried his hand at it, with me playin'.

This run on till about ten o'clock. A couple of the boys got to spinnin' yarns, and the husband and me were standin' off to one side. As I say, he was in an awful good humor.

"You know, boy," he says to me,

"this is wonderful country. I'd forgot how the stars look in the sky at night, and what sage brush smells like, and the sound of a coyote yapping out in the dark. Makes me sorry sometimes I can't live out here."

He meant it. His wife had said practically the same thing, but she didn't mean it. I feel sorry for anybody who can't do just what he wants to do. Now, as for André, I think most of his troubles come from the fact that nobody called him Andy. They told me he was plain American, which shows that somebody was a fool who picked out that name for him.

Anyhow we set around the corral until it got chilly, and the guests began to pull out for bed. The husband and I had quite a talk. He knew a lot about the West. He was askin' me if I'd ever heard of the iodine bush, which grows around here and there in this country. But before I could answer that one, the dame jumps up and starts off. So he told me goodnight; said he'd enjoyed the evening, and he excused himself to me and caught up with her. He took hold of her arm and they walked along together. She didn't try to shoulder him off; just walked like a wife would do. André loafed around with the others pretendin' not to notice, then he walked off towards his room in the bunkhouse, singin' to himself.

It all sounds cockeyed. She was in Nevada expectin' to get a divorce. Some women, of course, just can't turn off their charms. Maybe that was the explanation. But as for her husband it seemed to me like coaxin' a dog up with soft words and then kickin' him.

The ranch quieted down after a while like it always does. Some of the guests were in town, and I heard them come in, although they didn't make much noise. The dame's maid and the chauffeur had gone to town for something she wanted. Buck had a hunch that the chauffeur and the maid were gettin' sweet on each other. While he was all gorilla, and she gettin' to be a sort of old maid, it wasn't impossible that she'd fall for him, if he worked at it.

There was this business of the dame's will. Nobody at the ranch knew anything about that angle. Bein' rich she'd have a will, of course; but it was back East, and there was no way of knowin' yet what was in it. Buck's idea was that since the maid had been a long time with the dame, there'd be something comin' to her. Might be several thousand dollars; could be. And the killin' might have been cooked up between her and the chauffeur. Maybe he had something comin' too. Just because her rings and money hadn't been stolen didn't include the chauffeur out. That was Buck's idea. And it was reasonable.

There was another funny angle. The maid and the dame were in the same cottage; each had a separate bedroom. The dame was dead when the maid got back from town, or must have died just about that time. Yet she didn't make any holler until next morning. She claimed she looked in

and didn't see anything wrong, and thought the dame was asleep, and so didn't go in and didn't call out to her.

But next morning when the hullabaloo started, she says that just as she came around the corner of the cottage, she thought somebody came out the front door. It was dark. The light had gone out, or had been turned out, and she didn't see who it was; but she was close and all of a sudden the guy pushed her in the face with his hand. Shoved her against the cottage. She fell down, and when she got up the guy was gone. Claimed she didn't get a look at him.

"Where was the chauffeur at that time?" the professor asked.

"They'd separated at the garages and he'd gone down to the bunkhouse and she went in the opposite direction to the cottage. They both stuck to that," Buck told him.

The professor thought that over for a while. Meantime we added what else there was to know about that angle. All this was before any more questions were asked of the people in the party.

"You see, Professor," says Curt Matthis, the sheriff, "we've gone over all this stuff today — it's all we've done — and it adds up to the husband. The maid sticks to it that when she was shoved in the face that she smelled fish on the guy's hand. What's easier than deducin' the answer from that? He's the only guy around here that went fishin'. He cleaned the fish himself."

The professor didn't offer anything for a while, then he asks a question: "What does the husband say?"

"He claims he didn't do it."

"Can he prove it?"

"No. He says that he and his wife had made it up between them, and there wasn't goin' to be any divorce. So he doesn't have any motive. That's what he says."

"When did they make up?"

"He claims it was last evening. After the crowd broke up in the corral."

"You see, Hunt," Buck Chamblis explains, "he can't prove it. She's dead. He admits he didn't tell anybody. When you think of it, that's just the excuse a man in his fix would think up. It's weak; in fact, it's the poorest thing he could say."

Professor Rogers didn't say anything. He kept lookin' around the corral from where he squatted on his heels, takin' in everything. Curt Matthis spoke again.

"Now, André," he said, "he can't prove anything, either. About where he was after the party broke up. But he's got a damn sight better reason for not killin' her than the husband has."

The prof. looked at him. "How so?"

"You don't throw away a meal ticket, do you? Not if you're sane. He don't make no bones about it, does he, Buck? He was goin' to marry Mrs. Rolard when she was free, and it meant a meal ticket from here on out. He admits he's practically broke. So I ask you, Professor, what would you do, saying you were in his place?"

Professor Rogers just grinned, as if

there wasn't any other way to answer.

"You wired New York, did you, to find out what there might be in the will?" he asked.

"Yes, we did. But we won't hear for a day or two probably."

I had a hunch the prof. was goin' to settle on the maid and the chauffeur. Killings are usually a lot simpler than they look at first. Why make a mystery out of it, when you've got a guy like the chauffeur? You could put the case to a jury just the way it was, and they'd take one look at the guy and say he was guilty.

What went for the chauffeur went for the maid. Maybe she'd got tired waiting for a few thousand dollars she figured was coming to her. If the chauffeur and the maid each had something coming, then maybe they'd get their heads together. Plenty of time to talk it over drivin' back from Reno.

That's the way I figured the professor's mind was working. He'd have made a good poker player, that guy — maybe he was, I didn't know. You sure couldn't read anything that went on behind his eyes. But finally he had the whole story the way the sheriff and the rest of us had doped it out. Matthis looked like he expected the prof. to say, "Yeah, go ahead and take the husband down. He's the guy who did it, because how are you going to get away from the fishy odor on his hands?" But instead he said:

"How were they sitting last night here in the corral?"

"Why, on the benches," says Buck. "'Round the fire like always."

"Yes, I know. But who sat where and on which bench?"

"Do you remember how they all were?" Buck asks me.

"I could figure it out —"

"Could we have the benches put around the way they were?" The prof. sounded as though he was afraid of troubling us.

"Get 'em out, boys," said Buck.

We dragged the benches out. We'd have been gettin' 'em out anyway in a little while.

"Now, I want them exactly as they were last night," said the prof.

"There it is, Hunt," said Buck when we'd got through.

"Wasn't that bench there just a little closer to that little bush?" he asked. He pointed to a little green bush that was growin' near the corral fence.

"You're right, Professor," I said, rememberin' that it had been that way. But I didn't know how he knew, because he hadn't been there the night before, and nobody had said just how the benches were put around. We moved the bench to suit him. Then he wanted to know where the different people sat. I started to tell him, but just tellin' wasn't enough.

"Can we have the principals out here, Mr. Sheriff?" he asked.

"Sure. Go round 'em up, Jim," Curt says to a deputy. The folks had been allowed to go, just so they didn't leave the Circle T. They were around somewheres. I went along with him.

"The chauffeur and the maid too,

please," the prof. calls.

The husband was in his room, lyin' on the bed, starin' up at the ceilin'. He hopped up, though, as soon as we called out to him, and said he'd be glad to accommodate. He was like that. The maid and the chauffeur were settin' in a swing, talking, and they jumped apart when they heard us come up.

"Again?" she says, sour like. "I'm tired hashin' it over."

"Orders," I said.

"Listen, Buddie," the chauffeur comes at me. I hauled off to let him have it, if he started anything. The maid hollered at him.

"Cut it out, Mike." The two of them walk off toward the corral without sayin' anything more.

André was squattin' on the ground outside the cottage where the dame had died. Just settin' there on his heels lookin' off.

"Come along," the deputy says.

"Is this it?" André asks, kind of resigned like.

"It's more talk," I said. "But this time there's a guy out there in the corral who knows all the answers."

The big boy got up, like he was tired out. He wasn't foolin' me into thinkin' that he was a martyr; all that was troublin' him was that he'd lost a meal ticket.

The maid and the chauffeur were arguin' with the boys when we got back to the corral. Finally the professor said without raisin' his voice:

"We know you weren't in the corral last night, but sit down on that bench." He pointed out a bench. "Now, where were you sitting, sir?" he asked the husband. The fellow walked over and sat down on the bench he'd occupied last night. "And you?" he said to André.

André went to a bench and sat down. But it wasn't where he ought to be.

"He wasn't there, Professor," I said. "He was out on the end."

"That's right," said André, and got up and moved down. "But somebody set on the other end to hold me down," he said as the loose end of the bench started to come up. A deputy held it down, while everybody waited for the prof. to say something.

"I just wanted to ask a few questions," he said, sort of grinnin' at everybody. "You two were in town last night," he said, lookin' at the maid and the chauffeur.

"Yes, sir. The party here was over when we got back." The maid's voice was snappish; she was lookin' out for trick stuff now.

"And when you were about to enter Mrs. Rolard's cottage a man you can't identify pushed you in the face and you fell down — ?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did he take hold of you? Show me."

The maid laid the palm of her hand on her nose, and her fingers spread out over her whole face. She give herself a shove and nearly fell off the bench.

"Like that, was it?" said the prof.

"Yes, sir."

"And you smelled fish?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me, was the odor a strong one, or was it faint?"

Nobody had asked her that question before, and she sort of pawed over it, still suspectin' a trap. After a bit she said:

"Why, it was strong. Quite strong. I remembered it, even though I was mad at being knocked down. I smelled it for a long time after I got into the house."

The prof. turned to the husband. "You like to fish, don't you?"

"I love it."

"So do I. Any luck yesterday?"

"Excellent."

"Tell me what you did with your catch."

"I brought it to the ranch, and we ate it for dinner — my wife and André and I. I gave some to Mr. Chamblis."

"You turned the fish over to the cook?"

"After I cleaned them."

"The usual fish smell was on your hands, then?"

"Yes. I took a shower, though, before dinner. I was particular to get the odor off my hands."

"Did you succeed?"

"Well — you know a little odor will cling for a while in spite of all you can do."

"Did you notice any odor on them after dinner, say, along about ten-thirty or eleven?"

"I don't know that I — well, as a matter of fact, my wife did detect the odor, when I said goodnight to her —"

"Did you kill your wife?"

"No, sir. I had no reason to."

"What is your reason for not doing it?"

"We had made up our differences. She agreed to drop her plans for a divorce. We planned to start home in a day or two."

"Can you prove that?"

"No, sir."

The professor looked at the maid and then back at the husband; there was a kind of grin on his face. He indicated the maid and said to the husband: "Shove her in the face."

"You mean — ?"

"Go ahead."

The fellow got up and went over. He hated to do it.

"I'm sorry," he says to her, then put his hand on her face and gave her a shove that nearly knocked her off the bench. He went back and sat down and nobody said anything.

The maid didn't like it. Her face was red. The prof. just grinned at her. Finally he says:

"Well?"

"Well what?" she comes back.

"Was that the way it happened?"

She didn't say anything for a minute, but she glared. "I smelled fish just now."

The prof. got up and went over to the husband, picked up the guy's hand and smelled it carefully, then went back and squatted again.

"Imagination," he said. "Some sort of reflex on your part. Are you sure it happened last night just the way you said it did?" It was a sly question.

"How do you mean?"

"That you got pushed in the face and knocked down." I could see what was back of the question. If she and the chauffeur were in on it together, that would be the phony part; she'd lie about gettin' pushed in the face.

"Yes," she said. It sounded like she had bit the word as it went by her sharp teeth.

I could see that this was a ticklish angle; and I figured the prof. would skate around it, then come back to it. He looked at André. The guy hadn't said anything. He'd broke a piece off the little bush at the end of the bench, and was twistin' it in his fingers. He knew the prof. would jump on him any second, and he was sweatin' it out. He kept fingering that little branch he'd broke off, squeezin' it and turnin' it in his fingers. Then the prof. landed on him.

"Did you kill Mrs. Rolard last night?" The prof.'s voice was hard. André looked at him for quite a long time before sayin' a word, then he opened his mouth and said easy-like:

"Of course not."

"Why wouldn't you kill her?"

"Why would I? We were going to get married as soon as she got her divorce."

"Did she tell you she had changed her mind about the divorce?"

"No."

The prof. paused and looked at the maid again. She'd cooled down a little, but now she guessed what was comin'. It was. The prof. all of a sudden spoke.

"Shove her in the face," he ordered.

The guy didn't move for several seconds, then he finally got up and walked over to the maid.

"Sorry," he said, but sort of hung off doin' anything.

"Go ahead," ordered the sheriff.

André all of a sudden put his palm on her nose and shoved hard. The maid's head went back. I hoped he had snapped her neck, but he didn't. The maid popped up with a screech, and tried to slap him in the face. She was hollerin' something that didn't make sense. Finally she calmed down.

"That's the smell. There! It's him!" She pointed at André's hand. The guy backed away. He looked down at his big hand, then at the prof. There was a funny look on the guy's face. Sort of like he had smelled a ghost, or something. "He did it. It's fish! He's still got it on his hands." The maid kept on screechin'.

The sheriff got up and walked over and took André's hand, and smelled it, and then turned around and looked at Professor Rogers.

"If fish had anything to do with it, Professor, this has to be the guy who killed her." He turned back to André. "How about it? Come clean, now."

I thought André was goin' to cave in. His face went white and his knees wobbled, and he couldn't keep his eyes off his hands; kept lookin' at 'em. Then he smelled them, and his nose curled. He looked around as if he'd make a break, then said:

"Okeh; you win. I did it."

"What for?" asked the sheriff.

"She told me she wasn't going through with the divorce. I lied a while ago. I guess I went off my nut."

"Did you shove this woman in the face last night?"

"I shoved somebody in the face," he said, lookin' at the maid.

"All right, let's go to town."

A couple of the boys went off with André to get his things, and the rest of us hung around wonderin' what had happened, and how the professor had worked it.

"Well, it wasn't hard," said the prof., when the sheriff asked him. "That little bush over there —" he pointed to the end of the bench where André had sat. "As soon as they were in the places they had last night, it was easy to figure it out. In all probability the man who sat there would reach over and pull off a few leaves and rub them between his fingers. Especially at this time, if he were worried, as André was."

I began to tumble, and I remembered startin' to talk the night before to the husband about the iodine bush.

Buck got up and went over to the bush and pulled a branch, and came back squeezin' it. "I'll be damned," he said, smellin' his hand. "I didn't know the stuff was growin' around here. Iodine bush, ain't it, Hunt?"

"Yes. *Allenrolfia occidentalis*," he said, springin' the scientific name on us. "It grows here and there. Desert vegetation has a way of turning up in odd places. You'll run into stuff you haven't seen for a long time, or never seen before, even though you've been in and out of the desert for years, as I have. The last time I ran across the iodine bush was down in Death Valley. A ranger called my attention to it. Very strong fishy odor when you crush the leaves in your fingers."

"Strong is right," said the sheriff. "I'd never have thought of it."

THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

The tale is told how the publishing firm of Frederick A. Stokes Company bought English sheets of Percival Wren's BEAU GESTE *— enough for one or two thousand books, certainly no more; how they bound the imported pages in the United States; how a few hundred copies were distributed, representing the advance sale; how some of our leading newspapers and literary journals did not even bother to review the book; how for weeks, for months,* BEAU GESTE *was only a beautiful gesture; how the Stokeses, father and sons, wrote the book off mentally as merely a good deed; how suddenly, spontaneously, from all parts of the country, orders began to come in; how the orders doubled, tripled, quadrupled; how like wildfire the book started to climb the bestseller lists; how the printer's supply simply could not meet readers' demand; how in the end* BEAU GESTE *sold more than half a million copies. . . . What had happened? What extraordinary stimulus had transformed an ignored book into a sensational seller? No trick of advertising. No ballyhoo. No "raves" from reviewers. Only one thing could have been responsible: word of mouth recommendation . . . Yes, even in the book business, we the people speak . . .*

Of all book successes the soundest are those made by the voice of the people. Clever sales promotion will do it sometimes; critics will do it sometimes; book clubs do it now on a regular monthly schedule. But it is the vox pop bestseller that usually makes literary history.

The same can be true, in a smaller measure, with a short story. Many EQMM readers write to your Editor and suggest stories for reprint. These suggestions are enormously welcome — we only wish that more of you would tell us your alltime favorites. Each and every story nominated by our readership is promptly located, read, and considered for publication in EQMM. We never overlook a single possibility, and we are ready, willing, and able to track down the most obscure tale.

Henry Sydnor Harrison's "Miss Hinch" is brought to you "by popular demand" — in the most literal meaning of that phrase. Shortly after EQMM was born, we received a letter asking us to reprint "Miss Hinch." We knew the story — indeed, it was already in our backlog of "possibilities." But we dillydallied. A little later, from another part of the country, a second request came in to reprint "Miss Hinch." Again we delayed the issue. And every so often, from widely scattered fans, the same suggestion popped up: letters, postcards, even one telegram — all asking for "Miss Hinch."

When more than a dozen requests had piled up, we could no longer

question the judgment of the public. They wanted "Miss Hinch" and indisputably it was our duty to give them "Miss Hinch." The last plea came from a "constant reader" named Freda McCaig. Her letter, recapitulating all the virtues of "Miss Hinch," was irresistible. Freda McCaig recapitulated, we capitulated.

So here is "Miss Hinch." A detective short story of the old school, it was first published in 1911. Perhaps you will find its storytelling a bit old-fashioned: welcome that quality in these days of lean and jolting prose. Mr. Harrison's style is not terse or sharp: it is full and rounded, and it is mellow. And above all, this story is the people's choice: after the acid test of time the people know what they like and what they like is demonstrably good . . .

MISS HINCH

by HENRY SYDNOR HARRISON

In going from a given point on 126th Street to the subway station at 125th, it is not usual to begin by circling the block of 127th Street, especially in sleet, darkness, and deadly cold. When two people pursue such a course at the same time, moving unobtrusively on opposite sides of the street, in the nature of things coincidence is likely to attract the attention of one or the other of them.

In the bright light of the entrance to the tube they came almost face to face, and the clergyman took a good look at her. Certainly she was a decent-looking old body, if any woman was: white-haired, wrinkled, spectacled, and stooped. A poor but thoroughly respectable domestic servant of the better class she looked, in her old black hat, wispy veil, and grey shawl; and her brief glance at the reverend gentleman was precisely what it should have been from her to him, — open deference itself. Nevertheless, he, going more slowly down the draughty steps, continued to study her from behind with a singular intentness.

An express was just thundering in, which the clergyman, handicapped as he was by his clubfoot and stout cane, was barely in time to catch. He entered the same car with the woman, and chanced to take a seat directly across from her. It must have been then after twelve o'clock, and the wildness of the weather was discouraging to travel. The car was almost deserted. Even in this underground retreat the bitter breath of the night blew and bit, and the old woman shivered under her shawl. At last, her teeth chattering, she got up in an apologetic sort of way, and moved toward the better protected rear of the car, feeling the empty seats as she went, in a palpable search for hot pipes. The clergyman's eyes followed her candidly, and watched her sink down, presently, into a seat on his

own side of the car. A young couple sat between them now; he could no longer see the woman, beyond occasional glimpses of her black knees and her ancient bonnet, skewered on with a long steel hatpin.

Nothing could have seemed more natural or more trivial than this change of seats on the part of a thin-blooded and half-frozen passenger. But it happened to be a time of mutual doubt and suspicion, of alert suspicions and hair-trigger watchfulness, when men looked askance into every strange face and the smallest incidents were likely to take on an hysterical importance. Through days of fruitless searching for a fugitive outlaw of extraordinary gifts, the nerve of the city had been slowly strained to the breaking-point. All jumped, now, when anybody cried "Boo!" and the hue and cry went up falsely twenty times a day. .

The clergyman pondered; mechanically he turned up his coat collar and fell to stamping his icy feet. He was an Episcopal clergyman, by his garb — rather short, very full-bodied, not to say fat, bearded and somewhat puffy-faced, with heavy cheeks cut by deep creases. Well lined against the cold though he was, however, he, too, began to suffer visibly, and presently was forced to retreat in his turn, seeking out a new place where the heating apparatus gave a better account of itself. He found one, two seats beyond the old serving-woman, limped into it, and soon relapsed into his own thoughts.

The young couple, now half the car-length away, were thoroughly absorbed in each other's society. The fifth traveller, a withered old gentleman sitting next to the middle door across the aisle, napped fitfully upon his cane. The woman in the hat and shawl sat in a sad kind of silence; and the train hurled itself roaringly through the tube. After a time, she glanced timidly at the meditating clergyman, and her look fell swiftly from his face to the discarded "ten-o'clock extra" lying by his side. She removed her dim gaze and let it travel casually about the car; but before long it returned again, pointedly, to the newspaper. Then, with some obvious hesitation, she bent forward and said:

"Excuse me, father, but would you please let me look at your paper a minute, sir?"

The clergyman came out of his reverie instantly, and looked up with almost an eager smile.

"Certainly. Keep it if you like: I am quite through with it. But," he said, in a pleasant deep voice, "I am an Episcopal minister, not a priest."

"Oh, sir — I beg your pardon! I thought ——"

He dismissed the apology with a smile and a good-natured hand.

The woman opened the paper with decent cotton-gloved fingers. The garish headlines told the story at a glance: "Earth Opened and Swallowed Miss Hinch — Headquarters Virtually Abandons Case — Even Jessie Dark" — so the bold capitals

ran on — "Seems Stumped." Below the spread was a luridly written but flimsy narrative, "By Jessie Dark," which at once confirmed the odd implication of the caption. "Jessie Dark," it appeared, was one of those most extraordinary of the products of yellow journalism, a woman "crime expert," now in action. More than this, she was a "crime expert" to be taken seriously, it seemed — no mere office-desk sleuth, but an actual performer with, unexpectedly enough, a somewhat formidable list of notches on her gun. So much, at least, was to be gathered from her paper's display of "Jessie Dark's Triumphs":

March 2, 1901. Caught Julia Victorian, *alias* Gregory, the brains of the "Healey Ring" kidnapers.

October 7–29, 1903. Found Mrs. Trotwood and secured the letter that convicted her of the murder of her lover, Ellis E. Swan.

December 17, 1903. Ran down Charles Bartsch in a Newark laundry and trapped a confession from him.

July 4, 1904. Caught Mary Calloran and recovered the Stratford jewels.

And so on — nine "triumphs" in all; and nearly every one of them, as the least observant reader could hardly fail to notice, involved the capture of a woman.

Nevertheless, it could not be pretended that the "snappy" paragraphs in this evening's extra seemed to foreshadow a new or tenth triumph for Jessie Dark at any early date; and the old serving-woman in the car presently laid down the sheet with an irrepressible sigh.

The clergyman glanced toward her kindly. The sigh was so audible that it seemed to be almost an invitation; besides, public interest in the great case was a freemasonry that made conversation between total strangers the rule wherever two or three were gathered together.

"You were reading about this strange mystery, perhaps?"

The woman, with a sharp intake of breath, answered: "Yes, sir. Oh, sir, it seems as if I couldn't think of anything else."

"Ah?" he said, without surprise. "It certainly appears to be a remarkable affair."

Remarkable indeed the affair seemed. In a tiny little room within ten steps of Broadway, at half past nine o'clock on a fine evening, Miss Hinch had killed John Catherwood with the light sword she used in her famous representation of the Father of His Country. Catherwood, it was known, had come to tell her of his approaching marriage; and ten thousand amateur detectives, athirst for rewards, had required no further "motive" of a creature so notorious for fierce jealousy. So far the tragedy was commonplace enough, and even vulgar. What had redeemed it to romance from this point on was the extraordinary faculty of the woman, which had made her celebrated while she was still in her teens. Coarse, violent, utterly unmoral she might be, but she happened also to be the most astonishing impersonator of her time. Her brilliant "act" consisted of a series

of character changes, many of them done in full view of the audience with the assistance only of a small table of properties half-concealed under a net. Some of these transformations were so amazing as to be beyond belief, even after one had sat and watched them. Not her appearance only, but voice, speech, manner, carriage, all shifted incredibly to fit the new part; so that the woman appeared to have no permanent form or fashion of her own, but to be only so much plastic human material out of which her cunning could mould at will man, woman or child, great lady of the Louisan court or Tammany statesman with the modernest of East Side modernisms upon his lip.

With this strange skill, hitherto used only to enthrall huge audiences and wring extortionate contracts from managers, the woman known as Miss Hinch — she appeared to be without a first name — was now fighting for her life somewhere against the police of the world. Without artifice, she was a tall, thin-chested young woman with strongly marked features and considerable beauty of a bold sort. What she would look like at the present moment nobody could venture a guess. Having stabbed John Catherwood in her dressing-room at the Amphitheatre, she had put on her hat and coat, dropped two wigs and her make-up kit into a hand-bag, and walked out into Broadway. Within ten minutes the dead body of Catherwood was found and the chase begun. At the stage door, as she passed out, Miss Hinch had met an acquaintance, a young comedian named Dargis, and exchanged a word of greeting with him. That had been ten days ago. After Dargis, no one had seen her. The earth, indeed, seemed to have opened and swallowed her. Yet her natural features were almost as well known as a President's, and the newspapers of a continent were daily reprinting them in a thousand variations.

"A very remarkable case," repeated the clergyman, rather absently; and his neighbor, the old woman, respectfully agreed that it was. After that she hesitated a moment, and then added with sudden bitterness:

"Oh, they'll never catch her, sir — never! She's too smart for 'em all, Miss Hinch is."

Attracted by her tone, the stout divine inquired if she was particularly interested in the case.

"Yes, sir — I got reason to be. Jack Catherwood's mother and me was at school together, and great friends all our life long. Oh, sir," she went on, as if in answer to his look of faint surprise, "Jack was a fine gentleman, with manners and looks and all beyond his people. But he never grew away from his old mother — no, sir, never! And I don't believe ever a Sunday passed that he didn't go up and set the afternoon away with her, talking and laughing just like he was a little boy again. Maybe he done things he hadn't ought, as high-spirited lads will, but oh, sir, he was a good boy in his heart — a good boy. And it does seem too hard for him to die like

that — and that hussy free to go her way, ruinin' and killin' ——"

"My good woman," said the clergyman presently, "compose yourself. No matter how diabolical this woman's skill is, her sin will assuredly find her out."

The woman dutifully lowered her handkerchief and tried to compose herself, as bidden.

"But oh, she's that clever — diabolical, just as ye say, sir. Through poor Jack we of course heard much gossip about her, and they do say that her best tricks was not done on the stage at all. They say, sir, that, sittin' around a table with her friends, she could begin and twist her face so strange and terrible that they would beg her to stop, and jump up and run from the table — frightened out of their lives, sir, grown-up people, by the terrible faces she could make. And let her only step behind her screen for a minute — for she kept her secrets well, Miss Hinch did — and she'd come walking out to you, and you could go right up to her in the full light and take her hand, and still you couldn't make yourself believe that it was her."

"Yes," said the clergyman. "I have heard that she is remarkably clever — though, as a stranger in this part of the world, I never saw her act. I must say, it is all very interesting and strange."

He turned his head and stared through the rear door of the car at the dark flying walls. At the same moment the woman turned her head and stared full at the clergyman. When he turned back, her gaze had gone off toward the front of the car, and he picked up the paper thoughtfully.

"I'm a visitor in the city, from Denver, Colorado," he said presently, "and knew little or nothing about the case until an evening or two ago, when I attended a meeting of gentlemen here. The men's club of St. Matthias' Church — perhaps you know the place? Upon my word, they talked of nothing else. I confess they got me quite interested in their gossip. So tonight I bought this paper to see what this extraordinary woman detective it employs had to say about it. We don't have such things in the West, you know. But I must say I was disappointed, after all the talk about her."

"Yes, sir, indeed, and no wonder, for she's told Mrs. Catherwood herself that she's never made such a failure as this so far. It seemed like she could always catch women, up to this. It seemed like she knew in her own mind just what a woman would do, where she'd try to hide and all, and so she could find them time and time again when the men detectives didn't know where to look. But oh, sir, she's never had to hunt for such a woman as Miss Hinch before!"

"No? I suppose not," said the clergyman. "Her story here in the paper certainly seems to me very poor."

"*Story*, sir! Bless my soul!" suddenly exploded the old gentleman across the aisle, to the surprise of both. "You

don't suppose the clever little woman is going to show her hand in those stories, with Miss Hinch in the city and reading every line of them! In the city, sir — such is my positive belief!"

The approach to his station, it seemed, had roused him from his nap just in time to overhear the episcopate criticism. Now he answered the looks of the old woman and the clergyman with an elderly cackle.

"Excuse my intrusion, I'm sure! But I can't sit silent and hear anybody run down Jessie Dark — Miss Matthewson in private life, as perhaps you don't know. No, sir! Why, there's a man at my boarding-place — astonishing young fellow named Hardy, Tom Hardy — who's known her for *years!* As to those stories, sir, I can assure you that she puts in there *exactly the opposite of what she really thinks!*"

"You don't tell me!" said the clergyman encouragingly.

"Yes, sir! Oh, she plays the game — yes, yes! She has her private ideas, her clues, her schemes. The woman doesn't live who is clever enough to hoodwink Jessie Dark. I look for developments any day — any day, sir!"

A new voice joined in. The young couple down the car, their attention caught by the old man's pervasive tones, had been frankly listening: and it was illustrative of the public mind at the moment that, as they now rose for their station, the young fellow felt perfectly free to offer his contribution:

"Tremendously dramatic situation, isn't it, gentlemen? Those two clever women pitted against each other in a life-and-death struggle, fighting it out silently in the underground somewhere — keen professional pride on one side and the fear of the electric chair on the other. Good heavens, there's ——"

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes!" exclaimed the old gentleman rather testily. "But, my dear sir, it's not *professional pride* that makes Jessie Dark so resolute to win. It's *sex jealousy*, if you follow me — no offense, madam! Yes, sir! Women never have the slightest respect for each other's abilities — not the slightest. No mercy for each other, either! I tell you, Jessie Dark'd be ashamed to be beaten by another woman. Read her stories between the lines, sir — as I do. Invincible determination — no weakening — no mercy! You catch my point, sir?"

"It sounds reasonable," answered the Colorado clergyman, with his courteous smile. "All women, we are told, are natural rivals at heart ——"

"Oh, I'm for Jessie Dark every time!" the young fellow broke in eagerly, "especially since the police have practically laid down. But ——"

"Why, she's told my young friend Hardy," the old gentleman rode him down, "that she'll find Hinch if it takes her lifetime! Knows a thing or two about actresses, she says. Says the world isn't big enough for the creature to hide from her. Well! What do you think of that?"

"Tell what we were just talking about, George," said the young wife, looking at her husband with grossly

admiring eyes.

"But, oh, sir," began the old woman timidly, "Jack Catherwood's been dead ten days now, and — and ——"

"Woman got on my car at nine o'clock tonight," interjected the subway guard, who, having flung open the doors for the station, was listening excitedly to the symposium; "wore a brown veil and goggles. I'd 'a' bet every dollar I had ——"

"Ten days, madam! And what is that, pray?" exploded the old gentleman, rising triumphantly. "A lifetime, if necessary! Oh, never fear! Mrs. Victorian was considered pretty clever, eh? Wasn't she? Remember what Jessie Dark did for her? Nan Parmalee, too — though the police did their best to steal her credit. She'll do just as much for Miss Hinch — you may take it from me!"

"But how's she going to make the capture, gentlemen?" cried the young fellow, getting his chance at last. "That's the point my wife and I've been discussing. Assuming that she succeeds in spotting this woman-devil, what will she do? Now ——"

"Do! Yell for the police!" burst from the old gentleman at the door.

"And have Miss Hinch shoot her — and then herself, too? Wouldn't she have to ——"

"Grand Central!" cried the guard for the second time; and the young fellow broke off reluctantly to find his bride towing him strongly toward the door.

"Hope she nabs her soon, anyway," he called back to the clergyman over his shoulder. "The thing's getting on my nerves. One of these kindergarten reward-chasers followed my wife for five blocks the other day, just because she's got a pointed chin, and I don't know what might have happened if I hadn't come along and ——"

Doors rolled shut behind him, and the train flung itself on its way. Within the car a lengthy silence ensued. The clergyman stared thoughtfully at the floor, and the old woman fell back upon her borrowed paper. She appeared to be re-reading the observations of Jessie Dark with considerable care. Presently she lowered the paper and began a quiet search for something under the folds of her shawl; and at length, her hands emerging empty, she broke the silence with a timid request:

"Oh, sir — have you a pencil you could lend me, please? I'd like to mark something in the piece to send to Mrs. Catherwood. It's what she says here about the disguises, sir."

The kindly divine felt in his pockets, and after some hunting produced a pencil — a white one with blue lead. She thanked him gratefully.

"How is Mrs. Catherwood bearing all this strain and anxiety?" he asked suddenly. "Have you seen her today?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I've been spending the evening with her since nine o'clock, and am just back from there now. Oh, she's very much broke up, sir."

She looked at him hesitatingly. He stared straight in front of him, saying

nothing, though conceivably he knew, in common with the rest of the reading world, that Jack Catherwood's mother lived, not on 126th Street, but on East Houston Street. Possibly he might have wondered if his silence had not been an error of judgment. Perhaps that misstatement had not been a slip, but something cleverer?

The woman went on with a certain eagerness: "Oh, sir, I only hope and pray those gentlemen may be right, but it does look to Mrs. Catherwood, and me too, that if Jessie Dark was going to catch her at all, she'd have done it before now. Look at those big, bold blue eyes she had, sir, with lashes an inch long, they say, and that terrible long chin of hers. They do say she can change the color of her eyes, not forever of course, but put a few of her drops into them and make them look entirely different for a time. But that chin, ye'd say ——"

She broke off; for the clergyman, without preliminaries of any sort, had picked up his heavy stick and suddenly risen.

"Here we are at Fourteenth Street," he said, nodding pleasantly. "I must change here. Good night. Success to Jessie Dark, I say!"

He was watching the woman's faded face and he saw just that look of respectful surprise break into it that he had expected.

"Fourteenth Street! I'd no notion at all we'd come so far. It's where I get out too, sir, the express is not stopping at my station."

"Ah?" said the clergyman, with the utmost dryness.

He led the way, limping and leaning on his stick. They emerged upon the chill and cheerless platform, not exactly together, yet still with some reference to their acquaintanceship on the car. But the clergyman, after stumping along a few steps, all at once realized that he was walking alone, and turned. The woman had halted. Over the intervening space their eyes met.

"Come," said the man gently. "Come, let us walk about a little to keep warm."

"Oh, sir — it's too kind of you, sir," said the woman, coming forward.

From other cars two or three blue-nosed people had got off to make the change; one or two more came straggling in from the street; but scattered over the bleak concrete expanse, they detracted little from the isolation that seemed to surround the woman and the clergyman. Step for step, the odd pair made their way to the extreme northern end of the platform.

"By the way," said the clergyman, halting abruptly, "may I see that paper again for a moment?"

"Oh, yes, sir — of course," said the woman, producing it from beneath her shawl. "I thought you had finished with it, and I ——"

He said that he wanted only to glance at it for a moment; but he fell to looking through it page by page, with considerable care. The woman looked at him several times. Finally she said hesitatingly:

"I thought, sir, I'd ask the ticket-

chopper could he say how long before the next train. I'm very late as it is, sir, and I still must stop to get something to eat before I go to bed."

"An excellent idea," said the clergyman.

He explained that he, too, was already an hour behind time, and was spending the night with cousins in Newark, to boot. Side by side, they retraced their steps down the platform, questioned the chopper with scant results, and then, as by some tacit consent, started slowly back again. However, before they had gone very far, the woman all at once stopped short and, with a white face, leaned against the wall.

"Oh, sir, I'm afraid I'll just have to stop and get a bite somewhere before I go on. You'll think me foolish, sir, but I missed my supper entirely tonight, and there is quite a faint feeling coming over me."

The clergyman looked at her with apparent concern. "Do you know, my friend, you seem to anticipate all my own wants? Your mentioning something to eat just now reminded me that I myself was all but famished." He glanced at his watch, appearing to deliberate. "Yes — it will not take long. Come, we will find a modest eating-place together."

"Oh, sir," she stammered, "but — you wouldn't want to eat with a poor old woman like me, sir."

"And why not? Are we not all equal in the sight of God?"

They ascended the stairs together, like any prosperous parson and his poor parishioner, and coming out into Fourteenth Street, started west. On the first block they came to a restaurant, a brilliantly lighted, tiled and polished place of the quick-lunch variety. But the woman timidly preferred not to stop here, saying that the glare of such places was very bad for her old eyes. The divine accepted the objection as valid, without argument. Two blocks farther on they found on a corner a quieter resort, an unpretentious little haven which yet boasted a "Ladies' Entrance" down the side street.

They entered by the front door, and sat down at a table, facing each other. The woman read the menu through, and finally, after some embarrassed uncertainty, ordered poached eggs on toast. The clergyman ordered the same. The simple meal was soon despatched. Just as they were finishing it, the woman said apologetically:

"If you'll excuse me, sir — could I see the bill of fare a minute? I think I'd best take a little pot of tea to warm me up, if they do not charge too high."

"I haven't the bill of fare," said the clergyman.

They looked diligently for the cardboard strip, but it was nowhere to be seen. The waiter drew near.

"Yes, sir! I left it there on the table when I took the order."

"I'm sure I can't imagine what's become of it," repeated the clergyman rather insistently.

He looked hard at the woman, and found that she was looking hard at

him. Both pairs of eyes fell instantly.

The waiter brought another bill of fare; the woman ordered tea; the waiter came back with it. The clergyman paid for both orders with a bill that looked hard-earned.

The tea proved to be very hot: it could not be drunk down at a gulp. The clergyman, watching the woman intently as she sipped, seemed to grow more and more restless. His fingers drummed the tablecloth: he could hardly sit still. All at once he said: "What is that calling in the street? It sounds like newsboys."

The woman put her old head on one side and listened. "Yes, sir. There seems to be an extra out."

"Upon my word," he said, after a pause. "I believe I'll go get one. Good gracious! Crime is a very interesting thing, to be sure!"

He rose slowly, took down his shovel-hat from the hanger near him, and grasping his heavy stick, limped to the door. Leaving it open behind him, much to the annoyance of the proprietor in the cashier's cage, he stood a moment in the little vestibule, looking up and down the street. Then he took a few slow steps eastward, beckoning with his hand as he went, and so passed out of sight of the woman at the table.

The eating-place was on the corner, and outside the clergyman paused for half a breath. North, east, south, and west he looked, and nowhere he found what his flying glance sought. He turned the corner into the darker cross-street, and began to walk, at first slowly, continually looking about him. Presently his pace quickened, quickened so that he no longer even stayed to use his stout cane. In another moment he was all but running, his club-foot pounding the icy pavement heavily as he went. A newsboy thrust an extra under his very nose, and he did not even see it.

Far down the street, nearly two blocks away, a tall figure in a blue coat stood and stamped in the freezing sleet; and the hurrying divine sped straight toward him. But he did not get very near. For, as he passed the side entrance at the extreme rear of the restaurant, a departing guest dashed out so recklessly as to run full into him, stopping him dead.

Without looking at her, he knew who it was. In fact, he did not look at her at all, but turned his head hurriedly east and west, sweeping the dark street with a swift eye. But the old woman, having drawn back with a sharp exclamation as they collided, rushed breathlessly into apologies:

"Oh, sir — excuse me! A newsboy popped his head into the side door just after you went out, and I ran to him to get you the paper. But he got away too quick for me, sir, and so I ——"

"Exactly," said the clergyman in his quiet deep voice. "That must have been the very boy I myself was after."

On the other side, two men had just turned into the street, well muffled against the night, talking cheerfully as they trudged along. Now the clergyman looked full at the

woman, and she saw that there was a smile on his face.

"As he seems to have eluded us both, suppose we return to the subway?"

"Yes, sir; it's full time I ——"

"The sidewalk is so slippery," he went on gently, "perhaps you had better take my arm."

Behind the pair in the dingy restaurant, the waiter came forward to shut the door, and lingered to discuss with the proprietor the sudden departure of his two patrons. However, since the score had been paid with a liberal tip for service, there was no especial complaint to make, so the waiter returned to his table to set it in order.

On the floor in the carpeted aisle between tables lay a white piece of cardboard, which his familiar eye recognized as part of one of his own bills of fare, face downward. He stooped and picked it up. On the back of it was some scribbling, made with a blue lead-pencil.

The handwriting was very loose and irregular, as if the writer had had his eyes elsewhere while he wrote, and it was with some difficulty that the waiter deciphered this message:

> Miss Hinch 14th St. subway Get police quick

The waiter carried this curious document to the proprietor, who read it over a number of times. He was a dull man, and had a dull man's suspiciousness of a practical joke. However, he put on his overcoat and went out for a policeman. He turned west, and halfway up the block met an elderly bluecoat sauntering east. The policeman looked at the scribbling, and dismissed it profanely as a wag's foolishness of the sort that was bothering the life out of him a dozen times a day. He walked along with the proprietor, and as they drew near to the latter's place of business, both became aware of footsteps thudding nearer up the cross-street from the south. As they looked up, two young policemen, accompanied by a man in a uniform like a street-car conductor's, swept around the corner and dashed straight into the restaurant.

The first policeman and the proprietor ran in after them, and found them staring about rather vacantly. One of the arms of the law demanded if any suspicious characters had been seen about the place, and the dull proprietor said no. The officers, looking rather flat, explained their errand. It seemed that a few moments before, the third man, who was a ticket-chopper at the subway station, had found a mysterious message lying on the floor by his box. Whence it had come, how long it had lain there, he had not the slightest idea. However, there it was. The policeman exhibited a crumpled white scrap torn from a newspaper, on which was scrawled in blue pencil:

> Miss Hinch Miller's Restaurant Get police quick

The first policeman, who was both the oldest and the fattest of the three, produced the message on the bill of fare, so utterly at odds with this. The dull proprietor, now bethinking him-

self, mentioned the clergyman and the old woman who had taken poached eggs and tea together, called for a second bill of fare, and departed so unexpectedly by different doors. The ticket-chopper recalled that he had seen the same pair at his station: they had come up, he remembered, and questioned him about trains. The three policemen were momentarily puzzled by this testimony. But it was soon plain to them that if either the woman or the clergyman really had any information about Miss Hinch — a highly improbable supposition in itself — they would never have stopped with peppering the neighborhood with silly little contradictory messages.

"They're a pair of old fools tryin' to have sport with the police, and I'd like to run them in for it," growled the fattest of the officers; and this was the general verdict.

The little conference broke up. The dull proprietor returned to his cage, the waiter to his table; the subway man departed on the run for his chopping box; the three policemen passed out into the bitter night. They walked together, grumbling, and their feet, perhaps by some subconscious impulse, turned eastward toward the subway. And in the middle of the next block a man came running up to them.

"Officer, look what I found on the sidewalk a minute ago. Read that scribble!"

He held up what proved to be part of a bill of fare from Miller's Restaurant. On the back of it the three peering officers saw, almost illegibly scrawled in blue pencil:

Police! Miss Hinch 14th St. subw

The hand trailed off on the *w* as though the writer had been suddenly interrupted. The fattest policeman blasphemed and threatened arrests. But the second policeman, who was dark and wiry, raised his head from the bill of fare and said suddenly: "Tim, I believe there's something in this."

"There'd ought to be ten days on the Island in it for them," growled fat Tim.

"Suppose, now," said the other policeman, staring intently at nothing, "the old woman was Miss Hinch herself, f'r instance, and the parson was shadowing her while pretendin' he never suspicioned her, and Miss Hinch not darin' to cut and run for it till she was sure she had a clean getaway. Well, now, Tim, what better could he do ——"

"That's right!" exclaimed the third policeman. "'Specially when ye think that Hinch carries a gun, an'll use it, too! Why not have a look in at the subway station anyway, the three of us?"

The proposal carried the day. The three officers started for the subway, the citizen following. They walked at a good pace and without more talk; and both their speed and their silence had a subtle psychological reaction. As the minds of the four men turned inward upon the odd behavior of the pair in Miller's Restaurant, the conviction that, after all, something important might be afoot grew and

strengthened within each one of them. Unconsciously their pace quickened. It was the wiry policeman who first broke into an open run, but the three other men had been for twenty paces on the verge of it.

However, these consultations and vacillations had taken time. The stout clergyman and the poor old woman had five minutes' start on the officers of the law, and that, as it happened, was all that the occasion required. At Fourteenth Street, as they made their way arm in arm to the station, they were seen, and remembered, by a number of belated pedestrians. It was observed by more than one that the woman lagged as if she were tired, while the club-footed divine, supporting her on his arm, steadily kept her up to his own brisk gait.

So walking, the pair descended the subway steps, came out upon the bare platform again, and presently stood once more at the extreme uptown end of it, just where they had waited half an hour before. Nearby a careless porter had overturned a bucket of water, and a splotch of thin ice ran out and over the edge of the concrete. Two young men who were taking lively turns up and down distinctly heard the clergyman warn the woman to look out for this ice. Far away to the north was to be heard the faint roar of an approaching train.

The woman stood nearest the track, and the clergyman stood in front of her. In the vague light their looks met, and each was struck by the pallor of the other's face. In addition, the woman was breathing hard, and her hands and feet betrayed some nervousness. It was difficult now to ignore the too patent fact that for an hour they had been clinging desperately to each other, at all costs; but the clergyman made a creditable effort to do so. He talked ramblingly, in a voice sounding only a little unnatural, for the most part of the deplorable weather and his train to Newark, for which he was now so late. And all the time both of them were incessantly turning their heads toward the station entrances, as if expecting some arrival.

As he talked, the clergyman kept his hands unobtrusively busy. From the bottom edge of his black sack-coat he drew a pin, and stuck it deep into the ball of his middle finger. He took out his handkerchief to dust the hard sleet from his hat; and under his overcoat he pressed the handkerchief against his bleeding finger. While making these small arrangements, he held the woman's eyes with his own, talking on; and still holding them, he suddenly broke off his random talk and peered at her cheek with concern.

"My good woman, you've scratched your cheek somehow! Why, bless me, it's bleeding quite badly."

"Never mind — never mind," said the woman, and swept her eyes hurriedly toward the entrance.

"But, good gracious, I must mind! The blood will fall on your shawl. If you will permit me — ah!"

Too quick for her, he leaned forward and, through the thin veil,

swept her cheek hard with the handkerchief; removing it, he held it up so that she might see the blood for herself. But she did not glance at the handkerchief, and neither did he. His gaze was riveted upon her cheek, which looked smooth and clear where he had smudged the clever wrinkles away.

Down the steps and upon the platform pounded the feet of three flying policemen. But it was evident now that the express would thunder in just ahead of them. The clergyman, standing close in front of the woman, took a firmer grip on his heavy stick and a look of stern triumph came into his face.

"You're not so terribly clever, after all!"

The woman had sprung back from him with an irrepressible exclamation, and in that instant she was aware of the police.

However, her foot slipped upon the treacherous ice — or it may have tripped on the stout cane, when the clergyman suddenly shifted its position. And in the next breath the express train roared past.

By one of those curious chances which sometimes refute all experience, the body of the woman was not mangled or mutilated in the least. There was a deep blue bruise on the left temple; even the ancient hat remained on her head, skewered fast by the long pin. It was the clergyman who found the dead body at the side of the dark track where the train had flung it — he who covered the still face and superintended the removal to the platform. Two eye-witnesses of the tragedy pointed out the ice on which the unfortunate woman had slipped, and described their horror as they saw her companion spring forward just too late to save her.

Not wishing to bring on a delirium of excitement among the bystanders, two policemen drew the clergyman quietly aside and showed him the three mysterious messages. Much affected by the shocking end of his sleuthery as he was, he readily admitted having written them. He briefly recounted how the woman's strange movements on 126th Street had arrested his attention and how watching her closely on the car, he had finally detected that she wore a wig. Unfortunately, however, her suspicions had been aroused by his interest in her, and thereafter a long battle of wits had ensued between them — he trying to summon the police without her knowledge, she dogging him close to prevent that, and at the same time watching her chance to give him the slip. He rehearsed how, in the restaurant, when he had invented an excuse to leave her for an instant, she had made a bolt and narrowly missed getting away; and finally how, having brought her back to the subway and seeing the police at last near, he had decided to risk exposing her make-up, with this unexpectedly shocking result.

"And now," he concluded in a shaken voice, "I am naturally most anxious to know whether I am right

— or have made some terrible mistake. Will you look at her, officer, and tell me if it is indeed — she?"

But the fat policeman shook his head over the well-known ability of Miss Hinch to look like everybody else in the world but herself.

"It'll take God Almighty to tell ye that, sir — saving your presence. I'll leave it f'r headquarters," he continued, as if that were the same thing. "But, if it is her, she's gone to her reward, sir."

"God pity her!" said the clergyman.

"Amen! Give me your name, sir. They'll want you in the morning."

The clergyman gave it: Rev. Theodore Shaler, of Denver; city address, a number on East 126th Street. Having thus discharged his duty in the affair, he started sadly to go away; but, passing by the silent figure stretched on a bench under the ticket-seller's overcoat, he bared his head and stopped for one last look at it.

The parson's gentleness and efficiency had already won favorable comments from the bystanders, and of the first quality he now gave a final proof. The dead woman's balled-up handkerchief, which somebody had recovered from the track and laid upon her breast, had slipped to the floor; and the clergyman, observing it, stooped silently to restore it again. This last small service chanced to bring his head close to the head of the dead woman; and, as he straightened up again, her projecting hatpin struck his cheek and ripped a straight line down it. This in itself would have been a trifle, since scratches soon heal. But it happened that the point of the hatpin caught under the lining of the clergyman's perfect beard and ripped it clean from him; so that, as he rose with a suddenly shrilled cry, he turned upon the astonished onlookers the bare, smooth chin of a woman, curiously long and pointed.

There were not many such chins in the world, and the urchins in the street would have recognized this one. Amid a sudden uproar which ill became the presence of the dead, the police closed in on Miss Hinch and handcuffed her with violence, fearing suicide, if not some new witchery; and at the station-house an unemotional matron divested the famous impersonator of the last and best of all her many disguises.

This much the police did. But it was everywhere understood that it was Jessie Dark who had really made the capture, and the papers next morning printed pictures of the unconquerable little woman and of the hatpin with which she had reached back from another world to bring her greatest adversary to justice.

Installment Three in the Life and Times of an English Crimeteer; or, Still More Biographical Facts about Mr. Roy Vickers, creator of the Department of Dead Ends:

At the end of our last installment we told you how Mr. Vickers barely escaped with his skin when, as Competitions Editor of a popular weekly, he suddenly found himself with 416 contestants all of whom won first prize! Shortly thereafter (and not under an assumed name, surprisingly enough) Mr. Vickers began selling articles on various subjects at a rate hitherto undreamt of. Indeed, in a period of three years, he wrote 1,000 articles and sold two-thirds of them to English newspapers and magazines. There was no dearth of "ideas" — at least, not for long, and when occasionally Mr. Vickers did run out of themes and topics, why he simply wrote articles on how to get ideas for articles! The thing, to quote Mr. Vickers, got monotonous, so he tried his hand at short stories again. Now a new development occurred: unexpectedly he was hampered by the fact that everything he wrote was accepted!

Mr. Vickers went right on writing short stories and eventually he attained the dizzy height of becoming Editor of a well-known fiction magazine. Then came the Great War and Mr. Vickers was unable for a long time to wield the mightier weapon. Now Mr. Vickers is back at work — short stories, serials, novels — and he is still at it. For which we are grateful: his Department of Dead Ends series is a brilliant contribution to the modern detective short story.

"The Man Who Played the Market" is the tenth to appear in EQMM. It is the story of Derek Branston, a gambling stockbroker and famous amateur athlete, and his wife Tessa. Tessa was a thoroughly respectable woman; in fact, the only "wrong" she ever did was to murder her first husband . . .

THE MAN WHO PLAYED THE MARKET

by ROY VICKERS

TESSA BRANSTON had the moral outlook of a gunmoll, with the education, the tastes and the social prejudices of a thoroughly respectable suburban wife and mother. Her favors were bestowed in wedlock only. In fact, the only "wrong" she ever did was to murder her first husband — that is, if we ignore a half-hearted attempt to plant her crime on her perfectly innocent second husband, for which she subsequently apologized.

For the murder, she used the some-

what unusual method of asphyxiation with carbon monoxide gas, which she stored in the inner tube of a car tire. This is not as ingenious as it sounds; for it happened on June 15th, 1932. On June 6th, the unscientific section of the public had been shocked by the death of Lord Doucester's two chauffeurs who, in the course of repairing the Daimler in his house garage, sat on the running board and had a snack and a chat while the engine ticked over. The gardener found the bodies in that position.

Tessa's second husband — Hugh Anstey, a prosperous solicitor who died some years later — left a monograph emphasizing that she had killed to protect the future of her daughter of nine. He skates over the more obvious motive of her love for himself and the snug existence he could offer. He denies that she used her charm to lure Derek Branston to the attic, where she administered the gas, because "Tessa could never have tricked anybody into anything, for she was without guile. She killed as a desperate child might kill."

As to the lady's guilelessness, let us pick her up at about ten on the morning of Monday, June 18th, when she was driving to the station her nine-year-old daughter, Aline, and her sister-in-law, Beatrice Branston. Derek Branston had then been lying dead in the attic of their house, St. Seiriol's, since the previous Friday night; but no one as yet knew this except Tessa.

They were a little late. There was just time to pop Aline into the down train for Huilford. She was at school at Huilford Abbey, and had come home for the half-term weekend.

"Enjoyed yourself, darling?" asked Tessa, as the guard blew his whistle.

"No, Mummy. Auntie Bee has been ever so kind, but I think it was horrid of Daddy to go away just this one weekend."

The train started.As the two women crossed to the other platform for the London train, Beatrice said:

"Tessa, you're behaving as if you hadn't a care in the world. Now listen to me! I have a little hoard that Derek knows nothing about, and I want you to let me lend you personally the money you need to save the furniture. Whatever yarn you tell Aline, she's bound to find out in time that her parents were sold up by the broker's men."

"It's dear of you, Bee, but we'd only be in the same boat again in three months. St. Seiriol's has twelve rooms and for the last six months I've been managing with an occasional charwoman. I simply can't go on. If you'd like to help a little after Derek has got some kind of job —"

"But the broker's men — Tessa darling, how can you face it! — the men will be there when you get back, won't they?"

"I expect so. I'm past caring. Don't worry about me, dear. I've sort of come to terms with things. Derek and I will have to start again — this time, bang at the bottom. He might do very well working under some-

body. It's as a financier that he's the world's worst."

Tessa seemed to have no difficulty in speaking of Derek as if he were alive. When she had seen Beatrice off, she drove to Buzaglo's Garage. On the way she had to pass St. Seiriol's, an eighteenth century mansion with a mellow brick wall surrounding an acre of garden, now in an advanced state of neglect. She made a little gesture of dislike. She had loved the place ten years ago; but that was when they were living on some three thousand pounds a year. At the big garage she asked for Mr. Buzaglo personally and was shown into his office.

"I've brought the car back," she said in that soft, even voice which so many had remarked. "Do I have to sign anything?"

Mr. Buzaglo felt his eyes moisten. He guessed that this attractive, plucky little woman had brought the car back to save her husband the humiliation. He reminded himself that, in the past, the Branstons had bought several cars from him for cash.

"If your husband would care to retain it for a while —"

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Buzaglo. But the sooner we get the 'bus habit the better. Your offer," she added with the half-smile to which few were insensitive, "is the kind of thing one remembers long afterwards. Good-bye."

Most of the tradesmen felt like that towards Mrs. Branston. At thirty-one, in spite of the worries of the last few years, she still looked younger than her age. In the two studio photographs subsequently published she appears as an ordinarily good-looking woman. The photographs could not register that suggestion of physical exquisiteness, that expression which held both patience and vitality. For the rest, she had good manners and an aptitude for kindly remarks.

It was five minutes' walk back to St. Seiriol's. The furniture was to be sold, not on the premises, but in London. The first pantechnicon was entering the short drive as she returned. She had left the front door open and the foreman was in the hall.

"Good morning. I'm Mrs. Branston. You've come for our furniture, of course. Can I help you in any way?"

"Thank you, madam." The foreman removed his cap. "I'm sorry about this — I mean, I don't think we need trouble you. We shall clear the stairs first, all the way up, then begin with the attic and work down, though I don't suppose there's anything in the attic for us."

"Probably not," agreed Tessa thoughtfully. "Wait, though! There's a Sheraton card table and chairs which we always hated. I expect they're on your list."

They were on his list. The foreman thanked her. He mentioned afterwards that it was she herself who said he would need to go to the attic — thereby helping to build up the general atmosphere of her innocence.

"You'll find a pair of steps," she

told him, "lying against the wall on the top landing." Although the foreman was barely listening he remembered her reference to the steps when, he found, a few minutes later, that there were no steps on the top landing. Tessa added over her shoulder: "If you should want to contact me, I shall be at Todgers' for morning coffee. Afterwards, I shall go to the hairdresser nearly opposite."

The foreman was able to establish later that this conversation took place within a couple of minutes either way of a quarter to eleven. On her way to Todgers', Tessa dawdled, looking in shop windows, buying a local paper. It was a few minutes after eleven when she was served with coffee. It was twenty minutes past eleven when the foreman entered the tea room and asked her, with some agitation, to come with him.

"Certainly! Has anything gone wrong?"

The foreman hesitated, then bent forward and whispered in her ear.

"There's a dead body in your attic. We've 'phoned the police and I thought p'r'aps it'd look better for you to be there."

The foreman meant no more than he said. He was putting himself to trouble solely to be of service to that "plucky little woman."

Tessa was twenty when she married Derek Branston, a stockbroker and a leading amateur athlete. He had a fair practice and a private capital of some fifty thousand pounds securely invested. The year he married, he played Rugby football for England. This kept his practice on the upgrade, though clients would rarely take his advice, which was already known to be tainted with excessive optimism. The house, St. Seiriol's, and the furniture were a gift from Derek's aunt. On her twenty-first birthday Tessa inherited five thousand, without restriction.

She was happy for the first three years. They were popular in that sleek, prosperous townlet of Rillborough, some twenty miles from London. Derek's athletic eminence, Tessa's very considerable attractiveness, with the background of a charming home and an excellent cook, put their own little world at their feet and made Tessa believe that they had an assured and progressive future.

Aline was still a toddler when the first cloud appeared. When Derek necessarily dropped out of international football his practice began to shrink. He had hoped to equate the loss of income by manipulating his capital. There came an evening when he had to ask her to see if she could cut down expenses. Things, he said, were a little tight through an utterly unprecedented collapse of something-or-other on a mysterious something-else called The Market. While he was telling her, he wept, protesting that it hurt him so to hurt her. The sight of his tears, shed because he had had a knock in business, killed her love, though her friendliness of manner remained unchanged to the end.

Next year there was another and equally unprecedented collapse. Indeed, during the years of their married life, The Market would seem to have created a number of such precedents. And each time, Derek wept. Weeping, she observed, seemed to revive his spirits.

"I have deliberately painted everything in its blackest colors!" he would exclaim. "Trust me, darling — the tide will turn! I know it! Why only today a feller in the City made me a very decent offer for what most of those damn fools would call waste paper!"

There was a horrid sameness about these crises which taught her that he was a dreamer, fooled by his own wild tales about The Market. The tales pivoted on the assumption that the acumen of Derek Branston was perpetually thwarted by The Market, which did not, apparently, know the rules of its own game. And there was always that shadowy figure — that anonymous "feller in the City" — nearly as far-seeing as Derek, who always wanted to buy his shares privately, whose offer must always be refused.

The excellent cook vanished after the second crisis and the skilled gardener was asked to resign after the third. With each failure Derek became more subject to depression, which he tried to banish with the aid of alcohol. He became, not a drunkard, but a drinker — with a fatal knack of choosing the wrong time for a drink. The unhappiness he was bringing upon his wife lay heavily on his pride and conscience — the more so as she gave him no word of reproach. So he generally had one or two bracers before coming home in the evening.

Tessa had met Hugh Anstey shortly after Aline was born and knew that he had fallen in love with her, though he said nothing. After the first disillusionment occasioned by Derek's tears she fell in love with Hugh, though she, too, said nothing. It will suffice to say that Anstey was aware of Branston's financial position; and Tessa was aware that, with each fresh disaster, Anstey adored her more for her loyalty to Derek.

Knowing that she had married the wrong type of man, she took it for granted that he would not remain faithful to her. Pending his elopement with another, there was no point in nagging him. Nagging showed in a woman's face — so did good temper. She would maintain her serenity and preserve her good looks for Hugh Anstey.

But here she again misled herself as to Branston's temperament. His romantic absorption in her positively increased as his confidence in himself diminished. He never gave details of his various misfortunes, so she had no clear picture of the actual state of affairs until the last year, when the two semi-trained servants gave place to a daily help. Even then she believed his tale that this was a temporary retrenchment and that things would shortly be very much better —

better, at least, than they had been for the last year. So Aline was duly sent to the expensive boarding school for which they had entered her name when she was a baby.

On the evening of June 6th, 1932, he came into the house whistling a hunting song. She knew that hunting song. It was, as it were, the signature tune of disaster. A little ritual went with the hunting song. Instead of kissing her and asking the fatuous question as to what sort of day she had had, he would say: "Very grimy! Wash and brush up! Join you in a minute. Brought you the evening paper." Then he would go up to his room for a bracer.

Oh, well! Another rigmarole about The Market and the man who wanted to buy the shares and reap where Derek had sown. Perhaps her dress allowance would go this time. She would suggest that the car should be sold first. She picked up the evening paper and read about Lord Doucester's chauffeurs being killed.

On this occasion, he kissed her with nervous violence and told her that he had always been aware that she was a wonderful wife and helpmeet. Perhaps at last, he was going to tell her about another woman. But he said:

"Aline's coming home for half-term on the 16th, isn't she?"

"Yes, and I've asked her Auntie Bee for the weekend — at Bee's suggestion, and I thought —"

"This morning I had a letter from the school which I consider to be definitely offensive."

"*Derek!* You sent them the check at the beginning of the term? You told me —"

"I meant to, darling. But something or other happened — I've forgotten what. I know I meant to mention it to you at the time. But the short of it is that that damned pedagogue says that unless the check is sent within three days, Aline mustn't return after the half-term holiday. I think you'll agree that's a bit thick."

She was preserving her serenity and her looks for Hugh Anstey, but already she was doubting whether she would ever be free of Derek Branston. She held herself on a tight rein, reminded herself that nagging showed in a woman's face and that Hugh adored her for her loyalty to Derek.

"We mustn't let Aline suffer — she has hardly noticed anything yet," said Tessa. "I tell you what we must do, dear. I know you said you wouldn't ever dip into the money father left me, but you've no choice now. Pay it tomorrow out of that. We'd better put a thousand in a special account for Aline — what's the matter?"

"I was just going to say, darling girl, that we couldn't possibly sell any of your stock just now. In fact, the present moment would be about the worst possible time. You see, The Market —"

So her five thousand had gone, too — after the promise he had voluntarily given never to touch it! All she thought then was that she would not

be able to wait for the Other Woman.

"Oh, well. It's lucky Bee is coming. I'm afraid you'll have to borrow it from her, Derek."

"She wouldn't lend. I don't think she could if she wanted to."

The way he said it told her that his sister, too, had been victimized by the deplorable and unprecedented behavior of The Market.

"What could we get for the car?"

"We'd be sent to quod for trying to sell it. It's on instalments, and we're in arrears. It'll probably have to go back to Buzaglo this month."

"Aline simply *must* stay on at school. We shall sell the house and furniture."

"Darling, it's no good talking like this! I naturally thought of all such ways of raising money beforehand."

"*Beforehand?*"

"Well, you see, The Market in houses has fallen lately in an absolutely unprecedented way. There's absolutely nothing moving. Absolutely. A sale now wouldn't clear the mortgages."

She had not known that the house was mortgaged. But already she was waiting for the next blow.

"Has The Market in furniture fallen too?"

"Well — dammit, look here!" He tipped back a wine table. On the underside was a new, clean label. She read it, but he had to explain that it meant he had given a bill of sale on their furniture. She registered that he must have exercised some trickery to get the labels put there without her knowledge.

"The bill matures on the 18th — that's Monday, the day Aline goes back. All it amounts to is that if I don't settle before then they'll take the stuff away. But that won't arise. I have one or two irons in the fire and anything — absolutely anything — may happen at any moment. Unfortunately in the meantime we can't sell the furniture. This brings us back to that damned pedagogue."

He looked at her. She knew what was in his mind, but she let him say it.

"I was wondering, Tessa, whether you'd feel like coming to the rescue — unless, of course — I mean, I haven't seen you wear your jewelry lately."

"It's all right. It's at the bank. I'll do that, of course."

"You don't know what it costs me to talk to you like this, darling. Or perhaps you do. If you're sure you wish to do this, I know a feller in the City, who —"

"No, thanks, Derek. I'll do this myself."

"As you like. But jewelry is a tricky business."

"There won't be any tricks. I shall take it to Hugh Anstey and ask him to fix it."

"I wouldn't do that if I were you, Tessa. You'll think I'm talking rot, but more than once I've seen that feller *looking* at you."

She smiled, took a risk. "Poor old boy! Wouldn't a divorce solve a lot of your anxieties?"

"It would solve yours, but you're too sweet-souled to take it. Trust me

a little longer, Tessa. You don't know what I've been through these last few months. The tide will turn — I know it will." Soon he was clasping her knees and crying into her lap. The salient fact for her was that there was not the very slightest chance of his becoming enamored of another woman. And Hugh Anstey's legal practice would suffer if he were made a corespondent. Also, there was reason to believe that Hugh himself was beginning to lose hope. Recently, whispers had reached her that "that awful Kenwood girl" intended to snap him up.

After the evening meal she returned her attention to the evening paper. It was very sad about those poor chauffeurs of Lord Doucester's. Their fate was made the text of a warning to the public of the danger of letting an engine tick over in a small garage. There was an interview with an eminent scientist, who explained the nature of carbon monoxide gas. She read that, when the heat of combustion had left it, the gas was heavier than air, that it was odorless and gave no warning of its presence. One just felt drowsy and dropped off to sleep — then, with a few more whiffs, one was dead.

She lay awake nearly all night, thinking about the poor chauffeurs. But, after all, it was a freak accident. You had only to avoid sitting in a small garage with an engine ticking over — unless you wanted to commit suicide. A more comfortable way would be to run a hose pipe from the exhaust into your bedroom — which, somehow, sounded absurd. It would be less absurd to fill one of those large children's balloons and take the balloon to bed. Or if not a balloon, which might burst before you were ready —

"Don't worry yourself any more about that school bill, dear," she said at breakfast. "I'll send the check this afternoon and say you've been ill or something. I'll probably be able to get a bit more than the actual bill. You'll need some cash in your pocket and you shall have it tonight. And now I want you to do something troublesome for me."

Having received the obvious assurance she said: "When you come home tonight, bring me an inner tube for the car. I had a puncture yesterday, and the man said the rubber was rotten —"

"But, darling, they'll supply one at the garage. You don't need —"

"I do. The man was most offensive and — never mind the details — I absolutely must drive into that garage with a new inner tube on the seat beside me. It's silly, I know, and there are thousands of simpler ways, but that's what I want to do. Will you bring me that tube, Derek? Or am I being a nuisance?"

In his monograph, Anstey denies that she made Branston buy the tube in order to provide evidence of suicide — she was too guileless. More reasonably, he adds that even if she could have managed the job physically, Derek might have discovered

that the tube was missing from their own spare tire.

When she had thus obtained the tube she found that it was no easy matter to fill it from the exhaust of the car. From schooldays she remembered enough elementary science to know how to separate the oil smoke from the gas. But she had to cobble the apparatus together. She persevered through a number of minor failures which so ran away with her time that she had only a three days' margin before car and furniture, and presumably house, were due to be taken from them — which meant that she had to murder him on the Friday or think of some other way of freeing herself from this blubbering schoolboy who was dragging Aline and herself into poverty.

The attic, like most of its kind, was approached by a trap door in its floor, the floor being the ceiling above the top landing. Tessa lifted the pair of steps that lay on the floor, flush with the wall, entered the attic and refreshed her memory. There were a Sheraton card-table and chairs which they disliked and a few old-fashioned pieces of furniture which they had never used, and the litter of ten years of married life. There were two skylights. In June they would be able to see by daylight until about ten.

Down the steps again to bring up the inner tube, filled with carbon monoxide gas, which she secreted in the attic, after wiping it with a damp cloth. It took her three such journeys to complete her preparations. When she finally descended she left the steps in position.

When Branston came in at six-thirty she received him affectionately, though he had had the usual bracers.

"This is the last evening we shall have together in the old place, Derek, and we're going to enjoy it." The table was already spread with the best the delicatessen store could supply. She produced a bottle of sloe gin. She pretended to drink with him, but managed to empty the bulk of hers into a flower bowl. When they sat down there was a bottle of Chambertin, of which she herself drank only one glass. It was nearly eight by the time the meal was finished.

"You're my guest tonight, Derek — this little binge has come out of the remains of the jewelry. I've got a liqueur for you, but we'll have it in the attic. I was up there rummaging this afternoon and I want your advice. Besides, it'll be rather fun."

"Splendid!" he enthused. "There's some stuff of mine in that old deed box I happen to want."

Together they ascended in the house which, in the absence of servants and guests, seemed to have acquired the dimensions of a palace. Branston had difficulty in negotiating the steps. While he was so engaged Tessa put on a pair of rubber cleaning-gloves.

In the attic she produced a bottle of liqueur.

"What shall we sit on? Oh, d'you remember the canvas bed we had

when we were camping in the New Forest? That's it over there. Let's see if it will still bear us."

They pulled it out and set it up. He was bibulously delighted to find that, after six years in the attic, it still bore their combined weight with scarcely a creak. He failed to remark that the bed and its canvas pillows were free from dust.

He found the old deed box, which had a fastener, but no lock. Inside were some papers encircled with rubber bands, which Tessa did not know to be share certificates.

"Waste paper — that's what any of those shrewd City sharks would call this!" he ejaculated. "And they'd call your husband a fool, darling. Wait and see. The tide will turn. Why only today a feller in the City who had Heard Something offered me a hundred for this little lot! Gave me a tenner in cash at Waterloo Station tonight for delivery tomorrow. It was wrong of me to take it. Not fair to you and Aline! I see that now. Never mind. I'll give him back his tenner tomorrow — otherwise I'd give it to you. I tell you, this little lot may be worth thousands — tens of thousands! Don't want the broker's man to get it. Don't want anybody to get it. Nest egg. Put it among your clothes, darling. These other shares — well, they don't matter so much!"

She paid little heed. He approved the liqueur and she refilled his glass.

"What's that funny-looking thing? Can't be part of a crinoline!" He was pointing at a thin circle of iron, about the size of the wheel of an automobile.

"It's the hoop Aline used to play with. D'you remember the day she fell over it and knocked one of her milk teeth out?"

Soon, the "d'you remember" conversation took an ultra-sentimental turn which Tessa, having the moral outlook of a gun-moll, encouraged.

By nine-fifteen he was drowsy, dozing for a minute or so at a time. She had counted on his falling into a heavy sleep, and for the first time came near to losing her nerve. But before long his breathing steadied and the dozes lengthened. By a quarter to ten he was snoring.

The snoring continued while she took the inner tube from its hiding place and brought it to the bed. There was still too much light. She waited another quarter of an hour, then brought the tube into position and loosened the valve. She kept her own head well above it. The gas was heavier than air. It would not rise up, nor could it descend below the canvas of the bed, provided she kept the attic free from draught.

When she judged that there was no longer a risk of his waking, she placed Aline's iron hoop on the still half-filled tube so that, with an adjustment of the valve, it exerted a gentle pressure.

Down the steps carrying one liqueur glass, leaving the other. From the servant's bedroom she carried a table and a chair. She set the table near the steps, set the chair on the table. Halfway up the steps she stopped.

"Good heavens, I forgot about his clothes!" For a moment cold dread seized her. Her tale would be that Branston had told her he was going away for a business weekend. They might check up on his clothes. She hurried to his dressing room, packed a suitcase as if for a weekend. Up the steps to the attic, carrying the suitcase.

On the floor, near the bed from which they had fallen, were the shares he had asked her to keep. Waste paper that had failed to turn their tide! But his associates would know that the poor fool regarded that kind of thing as his assets. So she put them in the suitcase, to give color to the tale of a business weekend.

Then she drew the steps up into the attic. Aline would be home tomorrow. She was in the tomboy stage — might want to play about in the attic.

Next, she lay down by the trap door and groped for the chair. As to her guilelessness, when her feet were on the chair, she smeared the floor round the rim of the trap door, deleting the outline of the rubber gloves. Then she closed the trap door, climbed down by the table, and replaced table and chair.

All over the twelve-room house to make sure that every window was shut, lest draught penetrate to the attic.

All this was done in near-darkness. Without switching on a light, she undressed and went to bed.

Outside Todgers' Stores the foreman had a car waiting, so Tessa arrived within a few minutes of the police. The broker's men were lounging in the pantechnicon. A constable, left on duty in the hall, would have stopped Tessa, but she told him not to be absurd and ran up the stairs, deliberately inducing breathlessness.

Looking upwards she had a foreshortened view of the local superintendent, Hankers.

"Who is it?" she panted. "Is it my husband?"

"Perhaps you had better come up, Mrs. Branston, if you feel you can stand it." He thought he might as well take her formal identification there and then.

The foreman held the steps, which his gang had provided. Tessa, aware of the danger of overacting her part, gave a single glance at the bed and turned away.

"I had a presentiment," she muttered. "I've been suspecting for months that this might happen."

Hankers urged her to the trap door, virtually passed her to the foreman below, assuring her that he would be down presently. But she had waited more than an hour in the dining room before he appeared, with him Colonel Praceland, the Chief Constable of the county.

Praceland made the usual apology for troubling her with questions. But he meant what he said, because he knew all about the Branston fortunes from local gossip and he, too, thought her a plucky little woman.

"When did you last see your husband, Mrs. Branston?"

"On Friday night, at bed-time, that is, about half-past nine. We have been without a staff and I — I get very tired and go to bed early. He told me he was going to catch the 10.15 to Town and might not come back until Monday — today."

Replying to the usual questions, she said Branston had told her he was going to see a man that night to whom he hoped to sell some shares which would enable him to stave off the broker's men. He took the shares in his suitcase. He was to meet this man in London after the theatre and would probably be asked to spend the week-end. She did not know who the man was — her husband had simply mentioned a man "in the City," and she made it a rule never to question him about his business affairs.

"We had a rather special dinner — oh, that can't be important! — but it ought to have made me suspicious. I think I must have drunk a little too much." She broke off.

"Better to tell us everything, my dear Mrs. Branston," said Praceland. "It'll relieve your mind. My staff will sort it out afterwards. Why ought it to have made you suspicious?"

"Because, you see, although we were so desperately hard up, Derek gave me five pounds on Friday morning and said we would spend it all on dinner. He told me what drinks to buy. It was to be a celebration."

"A celebration of what?"

"I don't know." This gave a chance to employ the half-smile, which duly registered on the Colonel. "We often had celebrations without knowing why.

"When he came home," she continued, "he was a little preoccupied and told me about this man who might help by buying these shares. So I went upstairs at once, before dinner, in case it got left till too late, and packed his suitcase — he was always very bad at packing — and I put the shares in with his clothes. Then I came down and we had dinner. After dinner I got very tired and dizzy. I left the washing-up. I was asleep before he left the house — oh, but he didn't leave the house! I'm sorry. It's difficult to realize."

Prompted by further questions, she explained that the charwoman came for the half-day and helped her tidy up before the arrival of Aline and, later, of Beatrice Branston. They had spent a quiet weekend. She herself had much to do in the house. In the afternoon, Miss Branston had taken Aline on the river and to a movie in the evening.

"And during that weekend you had no occasion to go to the attic?"

"No, but I went to the servant's bedroom just below it and moved a few things about."

"Did you notice that the steps to the attic were missing? I suppose they were kept up there on the landing?"

"Yes, but I'm afraid I didn't notice."

Answering other questions, the hoop had been used by Aline when she was little. She supposed the inner tube had come from the car.

"What was in that tube, Colonel? Wait! I can tell you. Carbon monoxide gas. He talked a lot about Lord Doucester's chauffeurs. I remember his saying that if you could take the exhaust gas from a car and carry it about you could commit suicide comfortably anywhere."

Eventually she signed her statement. At the inquest, she repeated it. A few amplifying questions were asked but she was not cross-examined. The inner tube had been rubber-stamped with the address of the dealer, who testified that Derek Branston had bought the tube in person. To the Coroner's jury the case seemed clear as noonday and a verdict of suicide while of unsound mind was returned.

But that was only because the police did not want to publish prematurely what they knew.

An anonymous letter, traced without serious difficulty to "that awful Kenwood girl," warned them that Tessa had long been in love with Hugh Anstey, which was true, and that Tessa and Derek had led a cat-and-dog life, which was untrue.

Not that the anonymous letter made much difference. But it underlined, as it were, certain discoveries made by the local C. I. D. who, unable to do anything about it, passed a report to Scotland Yard as a matter of form.

Chief Superintendent Karslake could see no daylight and sent the dossier straight to Dead Ends. Indeed, he only spoke about it to Rason a week later, at the end of a conversation about something else.

"That Rillborough case I sent you last week, Rason. You saw it couldn't possibly have been suicide, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

Karslake was disappointed but decided to say his little piece just the same. "No gloves were found in that attic. But there were no fingerprints on the trap door, none on the inner tube, none on the valve, none on the suitcase, none on the brandy bottle, but plenty of prints — Branston's — on the liqueur glass. How could an ungloved hand have touched that tube at all without leaving prints? Alternatively, how could a dead man wash 'em off? But that only proves it wasn't suicide. D'you know what I think happened, Rason?"

"Yes, sir," repeated Rason.

"Oh, you do, do you! Well, the woman fixed the whole bag o' tricks to get rid of the bum husband and marry the other man. And if she could hear us saying it, she'd just grin. No experience, no organization, no plant, yet everything goes according to plan. And we have to watch her getting away with murder."

"That'll be my job, won't it, sir?" As Karslake stared, Rason explained: "I mean — watch her getting away with murder."

After the inquest, Tessa's urgent problem was cash. On Branston's body there had been found nearly eleven pounds, which the police handed to Anstey, together with the

suitcase and other real evidence, on her behalf. Anstey told her that the shares in the suitcase were a City joke, that Branston could not have raised a penny on them. If she happened to be short of cash, perhaps she would let him —

She replied that she was not short of cash — which Anstey records in his monograph as a gallant lie.

At his suggestion, the brokers were commissioned to sell everything in the house and the house itself. Branston, who had always overestimated his profits, had also overestimated his losses. When all just debts had been paid, Anstey collected for her some two hundred and fifty pounds — which kept her in comfort at Brighton until the end of the summer school holidays when Anstey married her and they set up house in St. John's Wood.

Anstey has testified that it was a happy marriage, not in the least marred by the holiday appearances of Aline. As a wife Tessa was loyal and affectionate, as a housekeeper impeccable.

One morning over breakfast in July 1935, when they had been married nearly three years, he waved his newspaper like a banner and exclaimed excitedly: "We're a lucky couple, Tessa. I'm lucky and you're lucky. Jointly and severally. Incidentally, we owe poor Branston an apology. I owe him one. You owe him one. Whoops!"

It was the day the news of the Tricunea boom broke. It was spread over the front page, but she did not understand a word of it.

"The Tricunea Exploration Company," he explained. "Branston landed himself with ten thousand one-pound shares which he bought at half a crown. They fell to threepence the following week and they stayed there until yesterday, though there were rumors from time to time. Now they're at thirty-three shillings and they'll probably go to forty by lunch-time. It means, sweet muddle-head, that the stuff I called waste paper will probably bring you somewhere about twenty thousand pounds."

There was a great deal of small matter about the Company — comments and interviews and success stories — which Anstey did not read, but Detective Inspector Rason did.

On the other hand is the story of a man who missed a fortune. Three years ago, there was an unconfirmed rumor that the gold had been discovered, on the strength of which Mr. X— offered a hundred pounds for a parcel of ten thousand Tricuneas. The offer was accepted and ten pounds was paid, actually at a railway station, as a deposit for delivery the next day. But during the night, the shareholder gassed himself in an attic and the deal was never completed.

"Gassed himself in an attic!" repeated Rason. "Three years ago! Then perhaps he was the man Branston was going to meet for the weekend. Damned awkward if he is — it would more or less prove the woman's tale to be true, and I'm supposed to prove it was a fake."

He rang the newspaper office and asked if "Mr. X —" existed outside the imagination of the reporter. He was invited to ring again the next day. In the meantime the reporter had obtained permission to disclose the identity as that of a Mr. Olivet.

"The name of the feller was Branston," Olivet told Rason. "He was very hard up — that's why I gave him the tenner on account — at Waterloo Station, just as he was going home. We had missed each other twice during the day and I knew he always took that train. I've got his receipt for the tenner. But at the time I couldn't very well sue the widow for the tenner of the shares. I'm taking counsel's opinion now as to whether I can reopen the matter."

No luck! The woman's tale was true.

"I can go on from there," said Rason dejectedly. "Branston promised to meet you after you'd been to the theatre and probably spend the week-end with you."

"That bit's all rot. I spotted there was some muddle about that when I read the report of the inquest. I expect he was spinning his wife some yarn, poor devil! He was to bring the shares to me the next morning — a Saturday, I remember. He had the shares at home among a lot of other things he thought practically valueless."

"How d'you know he kept them at home?" asked Rason.

"Look here!" While he was unlocking a small safe, Olivet added: "I told you I'd missed him during the day. He left this note in his office in case I came back."

Dear Olivet, read Rason. *You shall have the Tricuneas at £100. But they're in the attic at home with some other speculative stuff, and I'll bring them up on Saturday if you are coming up yourself — otherwise Monday. D. Branston.*

Tessa complied with the request to call at Scotland Yard in reference to her Tricunea shares, bringing her husband with her. In Karslake's room, Rason supporting, it was Anstey who opened.

"Before we begin," he said, "I take it there is no suggestion that my wife is in wrongful possession of her shares?"

"The question has been raised," said Karslake carefully, "as to how the shares came into Mrs. Branston's — I should say Mrs. Anstey's — possession."

"There is no question to raise," snapped Anstey. "You can check up on the Company's register that at the time of his death those shares belonged to Branston. The Coroner's report will tell you that they were in the suitcase packed by Mrs. Anstey at Branston's request."

"We asked Mrs. Anstey to come here," returned Karslake, "in the hope that she would tell us all she knows about those shares."

"I'm afraid I shall let you down badly — I'm shamefully ignorant of business." The half-smile came into action, but no one seemed to notice.

"Don't think about 'em as business — think about 'em as a bit of paper." Rason had definitely taken over. "Where were you when Branston gave you that bit of paper to pack for him?"

Tessa's memory was crystal clear of the tale she had told at the inquest. Her thoughts, directed by the detectives, were on her right to the small fortune that had fallen into her lap through the shares.

"We were having a sloe gin together in the dining room."

"Before he gave you that bit of paper, did you see where he had hidden it? Under the carpet? In a secret drawer in the sideboard?"

"That's an offensive suggestion," Anstey rapped out.

"Well, it's such a funny place for a stockbroker to keep share certificates — in his dining room," said Rason.

Tessa was magnificently gracious.

"It isn't offensive at all, Hugh. But Mr. Rason doesn't know how absurd it is to apply that sort of thing to poor Derek." Thinking hard, she remembered the little case in which Derek used to take up sandwiches during the last year to save the cost of lunch. "He used to carry an attaché case. We both went straight into the dining room when he came home. And after he had told me about the weekend he took the shares out of the attaché case —"

"He didn't take the shares out of the attaché case, because he had met the buyer an hour previously at Waterloo Station," said Rason. "He took them out of a deed box in the attic — when you and he were there *together*, Mrs. Anstey, after dinner."

A startled moan broke from Tessa. Before Anstey could protest, Rason thrust at him the note Branston had written to Olivet, then, in his own unorthodox fashion, turned to finish off Tessa.

"You wangled Branston into buying that inner tube. In the attic, you were wearing rubber gloves. You plied him with liqueur on top of the other drinks. With the rubber gloves you placed the tube containing the gas on his chest. You packed the bag *after* he was dead —"

Anstey staggered to his feet. Branston's letter to Olivet had told him at least that Tessa's story was untrue. He confesses in his monograph that the husband in him betrayed the lawyer. It was a shocked and suffering human being who blurted out:

"Tessa, darling! What *did* happen?"

"I don't know — *you* know what happened!" cried the respectable woman with the moral outlook of a gun-moll. "I can't remember anything — it's all a fog!" she shrieked at Rason. "Hugh Anstey hypnotized me because he was madly in love with me and knew I wouldn't leave Derek. Everybody will tell you that Derek and I never quarreled."

There was a torrent of it, which no one attempted to stem. But eventually, on the advice of counsel who did his unavailing best to save her from the gallows, she abandoned the defense of hypnotism.

SPEAKING OF CRIME

A Department of Comment and Criticism

by HOWARD HAYCRAFT

JULY FIRST marks the midpoint of the year for most human activities. But in the world of books it is Labor Day which divides the season into two virtually equal parts. With this issue it therefore seems appropriate to look back at the first "half" of the mystery year 1946.

Listed below in the approximate order of their publication are my nominations for the ten most readable mystery novels of 1946, thus far. Not all the books mentioned have been reviewed previously in this department — what with publishing delays and discrepancies between schedules — and I am glad to have the opportunity to fill in some hitherto unavoidable gaps. Without more ado, the deadly decade:

THE FIFTH MAN by Manning Coles (Crime Club). Tommy Hambledon and his playmates, casual as ever, prove that good espionage didn't go out with the buzz bombs.

THE PAVILION by Hilda Lawrence (S. & S.). Deft characterization and understated terror by an author who in only three books has risen high among American performers.

THE UNSUSPECTED by Charlotte Armstrong (Coward-McCann). Melodrama without mystery, but still tops in the Suspense School.

HE WHO WHISPERS by John Dickson Carr (Harper). Witchcraft-cum-locked-room mystery; ranks close to the best Dr. Fell puzzles. Who could ask for more?

THE HORIZONTAL MAN by Helen Eustis (Harper). Scary psychology, humor springing from character, and the year's finest new writing talent.

BUILD MY GALLOWS HIGH by Geoffrey Homes (Morrow). Because its toughness is internal, not synthetic, this literate and moving hardboiled novel rates cheers — and well above the current quickie crop.

THE INGENIOUS MR. STONE by Robert Player (Rinehart). A leisurely, modern pastiche of Wilkie Collins, by a talented British newcomer, which will delight some readers, infuriate others. I made it on the second try.

HANGMAN'S HILL by Franklyn Pell (Dodd). Fascinating battlefield background almost obscures the puzzle in this well done first-timer.

LET'S KILL GEORGE by Lucy Cores (Duell). This chiseled comedy of bad manners marks another stride by a writer who has been called only a little prematurely the American Allingham.

PUZZLE FOR FIENDS by Patrick Quentin (S. & S.). Peter Duluth, minus memory, gets out of the toughest jam of his career. Amnesia is due for a rest, but good craftsmanship is always a pleasure.

How many of these, I wonder, will survive to make best-of-year?

In addition to the top novels, three of the year's anthologies and collections seem to me exceptional. They are MURDER CAVALCADE by Mystery Writers of America, Inc. (Duell), TO THE QUEEN'S TASTE by Ellery Queen (Little, Brown), and Edward D. Radin's collection of true crime cases, TWELVE AGAINST THE LAW (Duell).

Several of the chosen novels had close competition in their respective fields. I regretted omitting Elizabeth Daly's SOMEWHERE IN THE HOUSE (Rinehart), E. X. Ferrars' CHEAT THE HANGMAN (Crime Club), Richard Sale's ingenious BENEFIT PERFORMANCE (S. & S.), Roy Huggins' THE DOUBLE TAKE (Morrow), William Irish's THE DANCING DETECTIVE (Lippincott), Jonathan Stagge's DEATH'S OLD SWEET SONG (Crime Club), Elisabeth Sanxay Holding's THE INNOCENT MRS. DUFF (S. & S.), Axel Kielland's DANGEROUS HONEYMOON (Little, Brown), Mignon Eberhart's best novel in several years, FIVE PASSENGERS FROM LISBON (Random), A. E. W. Mason's THE HOUSE IN LORDSHIP LANE (Dodd) for nostalgic reasons, Gerald Butler's MAD WITH MUCH HEART (Rinehart), and the Lockridges' MURDER WITHIN MURDER (Lippincott) — to name a few of the runners-up.

If I were charged with spotting the outstanding trend of the season thus far, I would be forced to name the inability of writers (not even excepting all those listed above) to sustain their performances. I can recall no season in which so many mysteries started out like great stuff, only to go — bleh! This was true alike of newcomers and established writers.

The amnesia theme, as intimated, has been overworked this year, and college and hospital backgrounds have been so numerous as to cause serious confusion among readers. Such occurrences, of course, are largely coincidental and unpreventable. So, possibly, is the rash of the-girl-she-done-it solutions afflicting the current output. Publishers have long suspected that there must be some sort of telepathy which makes writers thousands of miles apart select closely similar themes, backgrounds, and devices. It occurs in greater or lesser degree every season, and this year has produced a bumper crop.

As nearly as I can determine, the number of new mysteries issued from January first to date is only slightly above the same period last year — despite earlier predictions in publishing circles that the war's end would bring a sharp and immediate upswing in this respect. On the other hand, the proportion of new writers is up substantially, a circumstance both healthy and directly traceable to the cessation of hostilities. Sales, I am told, are beginning to feel the inevitable levelling-off from wartime highs, but most bookmen do not yet consider the recession to be of serious proportions as regards new books. (Reprints are another story.)

Mystery Mail-Bag: The latest contribution, printed below, to the symposium on mysteries with military backgrounds comes by belated pony express from Ensign James MacConnel, USNR, aboard the "USS Chilton," FPO San Francisco. Having done a hitch in another branch of the service, I can testify to the accuracy of Ensign MacConnel's closing statement. He's right, too, about THE BRASS CHILLS (Dodd, 1943), which I missed when it came out, by reason of the aforesaid hitch.

I know that in your long and (sometimes) tedious reading of the multitude of detective and crime books, you must at one time or another have stumbled upon one called THE BRASS CHILLS by Hugh Pentecost. It is a really excellent book. That is, I liked it. And since I liked it, I feel it my duty to remind you that it, too, has a military background. That is, if you want to consider a Naval Advanced Base during the war as such. That all of the characters involved, including the villain, are either in the Navy or working as construction engineers or laborers for the Navy on this Advanced Base (pardon the caps, but I have a strong feeling towards Advanced Bases) is of course incidental. And so are your commentaries, if you don't own to this book's existence. The only reply I desire is justification of my contentions in your column. After all, the Navy takes care of its own.

Kudos Department: Mystery Writers of America, Inc. has awarded its first annual "Edgars" to the following for meritorious contribution to the mystery field during the year 1945. Best first mystery novel of the year: WATCHFUL AT NIGHT by Julius Fast (Rinehart). Best motion picture of a mystery nature: MURDER MY SWEET (RKO) based on the novel FAREWELL MY LOVELY by Raymond Chandler (Knopf); honorable mention: THE HOUSE ON 92ND STREET (Fox). Best radio mystery program: tie vote; award divided between THE ADVENTURES OF ELLERY QUEEN (CBS) by — of course — Ellery Queen, and MR. AND MRS. NORTH (NBC) based on the stories by Frances and Richard Lockridge; honorable mention: SUSPENSE (CBS). Best mystery criticism: Anthony Boucher for his "Department of Criminal Investigation" in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. . . . Unlike the famous cinema academy "Oscars," the MWA "Edgars" (which take their name from the Father of the Detective Story) are not statuettes. Those awarded for 1945 are copies of a special limited edition of THE PORTABLE POE (Viking), bound by the publishers in red leather and with an insert to commemorate the occasion. . . . In addition to the "Edgars," the committee in charge of the presentations is understood to have proposed a "Poe" to Edmund Wilson as "the non-professional who contributed most to the mystery story during the year." The shape of the latter award has not been revealed and it is doubted that formal presentation is planned.

Among the New Crimes: Several exceptional first efforts, plus solid

performances by old hands, among the early Fall offerings lead me to the belief that the season is Looking Up. . . . Part well-plotted mystery, part bitter satire on too-jolly husband-and-wife whodunits, THE BRASS RING by Lewis Padgett (Duell) marks the book début of a well known magazine fictioneer. You'll want more of his reluctant but effective sleuth, Seth Colman. . . . THIS DEADLY DARK by Lee Wilson (Dodd) tells of Matt Foster, police reporter, brutally and wantonly blinded at the scene of a two-bit murder. How Matt and Clancy, female photog, spot the killer-maimer makes a moving, gripping tale, worthy winner of the Red Badge Prize. . . . Among English post-war entrants, note well the name of Maureen Sarsfield, whose GREEN DECEMBER FILLS THE GRAVE (Coward) will appeal to Marsh and Allingham fans for its accomplished handling of character, scene, and humor, with superior police work by C.I.D. Inspector Lane Parry. . . . Wade Miller's DEADLY WEAPON (Farrar & Straus) introduces a new writer, a new publisher, and the year's most ambitious surprise device. Unfortunately the author's talents aren't equal to the job, but I'll be watching for his next try.

Heading the oldtimer's class is Agatha Christie's THE HOLLOW (Dodd). Poirot is unusually subdued (which readers may or may not regard as a virtue) in this single-murder opus, and nothing much happens, but it's even money Mrs. Christie's solution will lay you by the heels once again. . . . Although Marten Cumberland's Commissaire Dax may not be too serious a rival of Simenon's Maigret, he is a *flic* to be reckoned with, and the author's picture of post-war Paris adds fascination to DILEMMA FOR DAX (Crime Club). What seems an open-and-shut Crippen case turns into an intricate and satisfactory puzzle, stylishly told. . . . Samuel Rogers' YOU LEAVE ME COLD (Harper) is notable for the year's Farthest South in abnormal motives, and not too much else. Mr. Rogers, who has proved his ability in earlier books, coasts a little in his story-telling, as if relying too heavily on the shock of his final chapter. . . . It is difficult to say whether detection or suspense dominates Lawrence Treat's H AS IN HUNTED (Duell). This story of a newspaperman labelled traitor while in a Nazi concentration camp and subsequently hunted for his traducer's murder makes equally good reading either way. . . . The unevenness of Mr. Peter Cheyney has become axiomatic. He has written some superior espionage tales and some bad pseudo-Hammett; but his attempt to glamorize a vicious gunman in DARK HERO (Dodd) hits a new low for something. . . . After Cheyney's cheap heroics, the comfortable corn of R. T. M. Scott's THE AGONY COLUMN MURDERS (Dutton), the first "Secret Service Smith" story in almost twenty years, seems pleasurably wholesome, though chiefly for nostalgiacs.

The second in a new series of Ellery Queen short stories . . . Ellery and Nikki attend a Hallowe'en Party. It is a curious phenomenon of crime fiction that storybook detectives always go to parties against their better judgment and always find themselves involved in —— But read for yourself: the month October has an R in it — so murders are in season . . .

THE ADVENTURE OF THE DEAD CAT

by ELLERY QUEEN

THE SQUARE-CUT ENVELOPE was a creation of orange ink on black notepaper; by which Ellery instantly divined its horrid authorship. Behind it leered a bouncy hostess, all teeth and enthusiastic ideas, who spent large sums of some embarrassed man's money to build a better mousetrap.

Having too often been one of the mice, he was grateful that the envelope was addressed to "Miss Nikki Porter."

"But why to me at your apartment?" wondered Nikki, turning the black envelope over and finding nothing.

"Studied insult," Ellery assured her. "One of those acid-sweet women who destroy an honest girl's reputation at a stroke. Don't even open it. Hurl it into the fire, and let's get on with the work."

So Nikki opened it and drew out an enclosure cut in the shape of a cat.

"I am a master of metaphor," muttered Ellery.

"What?" said Nikki, unfolding the feline.

"It doesn't matter. But if you insist on playing the mouse, go ahead and read it." The truth was, he was a little curious himself.

"*Fellow Spook*," began Nikki, frowning.

"Read no more. The hideous details are already clear —"

"Oh, shut up," said Nikki. "*There is a secret meeting of The Inner Circle of Black Cats in Suite 1313, Hotel Chancellor, City, Oct. 31.*"

"Of course," said Ellery glumly. "That follows logically."

"*You must come in full costume as a Black Cat, including domino mask. Time your arrival for 9.05* P.M. *promptly. Till the Witching Hour.* Signed — *G. Host.* How darling!"

"No clue to the criminal?"

"No. I don't recognize the handwriting . . ."

"Of course you're not going."

"Of course I *am!*"

"Having performed my moral duty as friend, protector, and employer, I now suggest you put the foul thing

away and get back to our typewriter."

"What's more," said Nikki, "you're going, too."

Ellery smiled his Number Three smile — the toothy one. "Am I?"

"There's a postscript on the cat's — on the reverse side. *Be sure to drag your boss-cat along, also costumed.*"

Ellery could see himself as a sort of overgrown Puss-in-Boots plying the sjambok over a houseful of bounding tabbies all swilling Scotch. The vision was tiring.

"I decline with the usual thanks."

"You're a stuffed shirt."

"I'm an intelligent man."

"You don't know how to have fun."

"These brawls inevitably wind up with someone's husband taking a poke at a tall, dark, handsome stranger."

"Coward."

"Heavens, I wasn't referring to myself — !"

Whence it is obvious he had already lost the engagement.

Ellery stood before a door on the thirteenth floor of the Hotel Chancellor, cursing the Druids.

For it was Saman at whose mossy feet must be laid the origins of our recurrent October silliness. True, the lighting of ceremonial bonfires in a Gaelic glade must have seemed natural and proper at the time, and a Gallic grove fitting rendezvous for an annual convention of ghosts and witches; but the responsibility of even pagan deities must surely be held to extend beyond temporal bounds, and the Druid lord of death should have foreseen that a bonfire would be out of place in a Manhattan hotel suite, not to mention disembodied souls, however wicked.

Then Ellery recalled that Pomona, goddess of fruits, had contributed nuts and apples to the burgeoning Hallowe'en legend, and he cursed the Romans, too.

There had been Inspector Queen at home, who had intolerably chosen to ignore the whole thing; the taxi driver, who had asked amiably: "Fraternity initiation?"; the dread chorus of miaows during the long, long trek across the Chancellor lobby; and, finally, the reeking wag in the elevator who had tried to swing Ellery around by his tail, puss-pussying obscenely as he did so.

Cried Ellery out of the agony of his mortification: "Never, never, *never* again will I —"

"Stop grousing and look at this," said Nikki, peering through her domino mask.

"What is it? I can't see through this damned thing."

"A sign on the door. *If You Are a Black Cat, Walk In!!!!!* With five exclamation points."

"All right, all right. Let's go in and get it over with."

And, of course, when they opened the unlocked door of 1313, darkness.

And Silence.

"Now what do we do?" giggled Nikki, and jumped at the snick of the door behind them.

"I'll tell you what," said Ellery enthusiastically. "Let's get the hell out of here."

But Nikki was already a yard away, black in blackness.

"Wait! Give me your hand, Nikki."

"*Mister* Queen. That's not my hand."

"Beg your pardon," muttered Ellery. "We seem to be trapped in a hallway . . ."

"There's a red light down there! Must be at the end of the hall — *eee!*"

"Think of the soup this would make for the starving." Ellery disentangled her from the embrace of some articulated bones.

"Ellery! I don't think that's funny at all."

"I don't think *any* of this is funny."

They groped toward the red light. It was not so much a light as a rosy shade of darkness which faintly blushed above a small plinth of the raven variety. "The woman's cornered the Black Paper Market," Ellery thought disagreeably as he read the runes of yellow fire on the plinth:

TURN LEFT!!!!!!!!!

"And into, I take it," he growled, "the great unknown." And, indeed, having explored to the left, his hand encountered outer space; whereupon, intrepidly, and with a large yearning to master the mystery and come to grips with its diabolical authoress, Ellery plunged through the invisible archway, Nikki bravely clinging to his tail.

"Ouch!"

"What's the matter?" gasped Nikki.

"Bumped into a chair. Skinned my shin. What would a chair be doing —?"

"Pooooor Ellery," said Nikki, laughing. "Did the dreat bid mad hurt his — *Ow!*"

"Blast this — Ooo!"

"Ellery, where are you? Ooch!"

"Ow, my foot," bellowed Ellery from somewhere. "What is this — a tank-trap? Floor cluttered with pillows, hassocks —"

"Something cold and wet over here. Feels like an ice bucket . . . Owwwww!" There was a wild clatter of metal, a soggy crash, and silence again.

"Nikki! What happened?"

"I fell over a rack of fire tongs, I think," Nikki's voice came clearly from floor level. "Yes. Fire tongs."

"Of all the stupid, childish, unfunny —"

"Oop."

"Lost in a madhouse. Why is the furniture scattered every which way?"

"How should I know? Ellery, where *are* you?"

"In Bedlam. Keep your head now, Nikki, and stay where you are. Sooner or later a St. Bernard will find you and bring —"

Nikki screamed.

"Thank God," said Ellery, shutting his eyes.

The room was full of blessed Consolidated Edison light, and various adult figures in black-cat costumes and masks were leaping and laughing and shouting: "Surpriiiiiise!" like

idiot phantoms at the crisis of a delirium.

O Hallowe'en.

"Ann! Ann Trent!" Nikki was squealing. "Oh, Ann, you fool, how ever did you find me?"

"Nikki, you're looking *wonderful*. Oh, but you're famous, darling. The great E. Q.'s secretary . . ."

Nuts to you, sister. Even bouncier than predicted. With that lazy, hippy strut. And chic, glossy chic. Lugs her sex around like a sample case. Kind of female who would be baffled by an egg. Looks five years older than she is, Antoine notwithstanding.

"But it's not Trent anymore, Nikki — Mrs. John Crombie. Johnnnny!"

"Ann, you're *married?* And didn't invite me to the wedding!"

"Spliced in dear old Lunnon. John's British — or was. Johnny, stop flirting with Edith Baxter and come here!"

"Ann darlin' — this exquisite girl! Scotch or bourbon, Nikki? Scotch if you're the careful type — but bourbon works faster."

John Crombie, Gent. Eyes of artificial blue, slimy smile, sunlamp complexion, Olivier chin. British Club and Fox and Hounds — he posts even in a living room. He will say in a moment that he loathes Americah. Exactly. Ann Trent Crombie must have large amounts of the filthy. He despises her and patronizes her friends. He will fix me with the superior British smile and flap a limp brown hand . . . *Quod erat demonstrandum.*

"I warn you, Nikki," Ann Crombie was saying, "I'm hitched to a man who tries to jockey every new female he meets." Blush hard, prim Nikki. Friends grow in unforeseen directions. "Oh, Lucy! Nikki, do you remember my kid sister Lu — ?"

Squeal, squeal. "Lucy Trent! This isn't *you?*"

"Am I grown up, Nikki?"

"Heavens!"

"Lucy's done *all* the party decorating, darling — spent the whole sordid day up here alone fixing things up. Hasn't she done an *inspired* job? But then I'm so useless."

"Ann means she wouldn't help, Nikki. Just a lout."

Uncertain laugh. Poor Lucy. Embarrassed by her flowering youth, trying hard to be New York . . . There she goes refilling a glass — emptying an ashtray — running out to the kitchen — for a tray of fresh hot pigs-in-blankets? — bong! . . . the unwanted and gauche hiding confusion by making herself useful. Keep away from your brother-in-law, dear; that's an upstanding little bosom under the Black Cat's hide.

"Oh, Ellery, do come here and meet the Baxters. Mrs. Baxter — Edith — Ellery Queen . . ."

What's this? A worm who's turned, surely! The faded-fair type, hard-used by wedlock. Very small, a bit on the spready side — she'd let herself go — but now she's back in harness again, all curried and combed, with a triumphant lift to her pale head, like an old thoroughbred proudly pranc-

ing in a paddock she had never hoped to enter again. And that glitter of secret pleasure in her blinky brown eyes, almost malice, whenever she looked at Ann Crombie . . .

"Jerry Baxter, Edith's husband. Ellery Queen."

"Hiya, son!"

"Hi yourself, Jerry."

Salesman, or advertising-agency man, or Broadway agent. The life of the party. Three drinks and he's off to the races. He will be the first to fall in the apple tub, the first to pin the tail on Lucy or Nikki instead of on the donkey, the first to be sick and the first to pass out. Skitter, stagger, sweat, and whoop. Why do you whoop, Jerry Baxter?

Ellery shook hot palms, smiled with what he hoped was charm, said affably: "Yes, isn't it?" "Haven't we met somewhere?" "Here, here, that's fine for now," and things like that, wondering what he was doing in a hotel living-room festooned with apples, marshmallows, nuts, and criss-crossing crêpe-paper twists, hung with grinning pumpkins and fancy black-and-orange cardboard cats, skeletons, and witches, and choked with bourbon fumes, tobacco smoke, and Chanel No. 5. Some Chinese lanterns were reeking, the noise was maddening, and merely to cross the room required the preparations of an expedition, for the overturned furniture and other impedimenta on the floor — cunningly plotted to trap groping Black Cats on their arrival — had been left where they were.

So Ellery, highball in hand, wedged himself in a safe corner and mentally added Nikki to the Druids and the Romans.

Ellery accepted the murder game without a murmur. He knew the futility of protest. Wherever he went, people at once suggested a murder game, apparently on the theory that a busman enjoys nothing so much as a bus. And, of course, he was to be the detective.

"Well, well, let's get started," he said gaily, for all the traditional Hallowe'en games had been played, Nikki had slapped Jerry Baxter laughingly once and British Johnny — not laughingly — twice, the house detective had made a courtesy call, and it was obvious the delightful evening had all but run its course. He hoped Nikki would have sense enough to cut the *pièce de résistance* short, so that a man might go home and give his thanks to God; but no, there she was in a whispery, giggly huddle with Ann Crombie and Lucy Trent, while John Crombie rested his limp hand on her shoulder and Edith Baxter splashed some angry bourbon into her glass.

Jerry was on all fours, being a cat.

"In just a minute," called Nikki, and she tripped through the archway — kitchen-bound, to judge from certain subsequent cutlery sounds — leaving Crombie's hand momentarily suspended.

Edith Baxter said: "Jerry, get up off that floor and stop making a darned fool of yourself!" — furiously.

"Now we're all set," announced Nikki, reappearing. "Everybody around in a circle. First I'll deal out these cards, and whoever gets the ace of spades *don't let on!* — because you're the Murderer."

"Ooh!"

"Ann, you stop peeking."

"Who's peeking?"

"A tenner says I draw the fatal pasteboard," laughed Crombie. "I'm the killer type."

"*I'm* the killer type!" shouted Jerry Baxter. "Gack-gack-gack-gack!"

Ellery closed his eyes.

"Ellery! Wake up."

"Huh?"

Nikki was shaking him. The rest of the company were lined up on the far side of the room from the archway, facing the wall. For a panicky moment he thought of the St. Valentine's Day Massacre.

"You go on over there with the others, smartypants. You mustn't see who the murderer is, either, so you close your eyes, too."

"Fits in perfectly with my plans," said Ellery, and he dutifully joined the five people at the wall.

"Spread out a little there — I don't want anyone touching anyone else. That's it. Eyes all shut? Good. Now I want the person who drew the ace of spades — Murderer — to step quietly away from the wall —"

"Not cricket," came John Crombie's annoying alto. "*You'll* see who it is, dear heart."

"Yes," said Edith Baxter nastily. "The light's on."

"But I'm running this assassination! Now stop talking, eyes closed. Step out, Murderer — that's it . . . quietly! No talking there at the wall! Mr. Queen is *very* bright and he'd get the answer in a shot just by eliminating voices —"

"Oh, come, Nikki," said Mr. Queen modestly.

"Now, Murderer, here's what you do. On the kitchen table you'll find a full-face mask, a flashlight, and a bread-knife. Wait! Don't start for the kitchen yet — go when I switch off the light in here; that will be your signal to start. When you get to the kitchen, put on the mask, take the flashlight and knife, steal back into this room, and — pick a victim!"

"Oooh."

"Ahhhh!"

"Ee!"

Mr. Queen banged his forehead lightly against the wall. How long, O Lord?

"Now remember, Murderer," cried Nikki, "you pick anyone you want — except, of course, Ellery. He has to live long enough to solve the crime . . ."

If you don't hurry, my love, I'll be dead of natural causes.

"It'll be dark, Murderer, except for your flash, so even I won't know what victim you pick —"

"May the detective inquire the exact purpose of the knife?" asked the detective wearily of the wall. "Its utility in this amusement escapes me."

"Oh, the knife's just a prop, goopy

— atmosphere. Murderer, you just tap your victim on the shoulder. Victim, whoever feels the tap, turn around and let Murderer lead you out of the living room to the kitchen."

"The kitchen, I take it, is the scene of the crime," said Mr. Queen gloomily.

"Uh-huh. And Victim, as soon as Murderer gets you into the kitchen, scream like all fury as if you're being stabbed. Make it realistic! Everybody set? Ready? . . . All right, Murderer, soon's I turn this light off go to the kitchen, get the mask and stuff, come back, and pick your victim. Here goes!"

Click went the light switch. Being a man who checked his facts, Ellery automatically cheated and opened one eye. Dark, as advertised. He shut the eye, and then jumped.

"Stop!" Nikki had shrieked.

"What, what?" asked Ellery excitedly.

"Oh, I'm not talking to you, Ellery. Murderer, I forgot something! Where are you? Oh, never mind. Remember, after you've supposedly stabbed your victim in the kitchen, come back to this room and quickly take your former place against the wall. Don't make a sound; don't touch anyone. I want the room to be as quiet as it is this minute. Use the flash to help you see your way back, but as soon as you reach the wall turn the flash off and throw flash and mask into the middle of the living room — thus, darling, getting rid of the evidence. Do you see? But, of course, you *can't*." You're in rare form, old girl. "Now even though it's dark, people, *keep your eyes shut*. All right, Murderer — get set — *go!*"

Ellery dozed . . .

It seemed a mere instant later that he heard Nikki's voice saying with incredible energy: "Murderer's tapping a victim — careful with that flashlight, Murderer! — we mustn't tempt our Detective *too* much. All right, Victim? Now let Murderer lead you to your doom . . . the rest of you keep your eyes closed . . . don't turn ar . . ."

Ellery dozed again.

He awoke with a start at a man's scream.

"Here! What —"

"Ellery Queen, you asleep again? That was Victim being carved up in the kitchen. Now . . . yes! . . . here's Murderer's flash back . . . that's it, to the wall quietly . . . now flash *off!* — fine! — toss it and your mask away . . . Boom. Tossed. Are you turned around, face to the wall, Murderer, like everybody else? Everybody ready? Lllllights!"

"Now —" began Ellery briskly.

"Why, it's John who's missing," laughed Lucy.

"Pooooor John is daid," sang Jerry.

"My poor husband," wailed Ann. "Jo-hon, come back to me!"

"Ho, John!" shouted Nikki.

"Just a moment," said Ellery. "Isn't Edith Baxter missing, too?"

"My wiff?" shouted Jerry. "Hey,

wiff! Come outa the woodwork!"

"Oh, darn," said Lucy. "There mustn't be two victims, Nikki. That spoils the game."

"Let us repair to the scene of the crime," proclaimed Miss Porter, "and see what gives."

So, laughing and chattering and having a hell of a time, they all trooped through the archway, turned left, crossed the foyer, and went into the Crombie kitchen and found John Crombie on the floor with his throat cut.

When Ellery returned to the kitchen from his very interesting telephone chat with Inspector Queen, he found Ann Crombie being sick over the kitchen sink, her forehead supported by the greenish hand of a greenish Lucy Trent, and Nikki crouched quietly in a corner, as far away from the covered thing on the floor as the architect's plans allowed, while Jerry Baxter raced up and down weeping: "Where's my wife? Where's Edith? We've got to get out of here."

Ellery grabbed Baxter's collar and said: "It's going to be a long night, Jerry — relax. Nikki — "

"Yes, Ellery." She was trembling and trying to stop it and not succeeding.

"You know who was supposed to be the murderer in that foul game — the one who drew the ace of spades — you saw him or her step away from the living-room wall while the lights were still on in there. Who was it?"

"Edith Baxter. Edith got the ace. Edith was supposed to be the murderer."

Jerry Baxter jerked out of Ellery's grasp. "You're lying!" he yelled. "You're not mixing my wife up in this stink! You're a lying —"

Ann crept away from the sink, avoiding the mound. She crept past them and went into the foyer and collapsed against the door of a closet just outside the kitchen. Lucy crept after Ann and cuddled against her, whimpering. Ann began to whimper, too.

"Edith Baxter was Murderer," said Nikki drearily. "In the game, anyway."

"You lie! — you lying —"

Ellery slapped his mouth without rancor and Baxter started to cry again. "Don't let me come back and find any other throats cut," said Ellery, and he went out of the kitchen.

It was tempting to assume the obvious, which was that Edith Baxter, having drawn the ace of spades, decided to play the role of murderer in earnest, and did so, and fled. Her malice-dipped triumph as she looked at John Crombie's wife, her anger as she watched Crombie pursue Nikki through the evening, told a simple story; and it was really unkind of fate — if fate was the culprit — to place Edith Baxter's hand on John Crombie's shoulder in the victim-choosing phase of the game. In the kitchen, with a bread-knife at hand, who could blame a well-bourboned

woman if she obeyed that impulse and separated Mr. Crombie's neck from his British collar?

But investigation muddled the obvious. The front door of the suite was locked — nay, even bolted — on the inside. Nikki proclaimed herself the authoress thereof, having performed the sealed-apartment act before the game began (she said) in a moment of "inspiration."

Secondly, escape by one of the windows was out of the question, unless, like Pegasus, Edith Baxter possessed wings.

Thirdly, Edith Baxter had not attempted to escape at all: Ellery found her in the foyer closet against which the widow and her sister whimpered. Mrs. Baxter had been jammed into the closet by a hasty hand, and she was unconscious.

Inspector Queen, Sergeant Velie & Co. arrived just as Edith Baxter, with the aid of ammonium carbonate, was shuddering back to life.

"Guy named Crombie's throat slit?" bellowed Sergeant Velie, without guile.

Edith Baxter's eyes rolled over and Nikki wielded the smelling salts once more, wearily.

"Murder games," said Inspector Queen gently. "Hallowe'en," said Inspector Queen. Ellery blushed. "Well, son?"

Ellery told his story humbly, in penitential detail.

"Well, we'll soon find out," grumbled his father, and he shook Mrs. Baxter until her chin waggled and her eyes flew open. "Come, come, Madam, we can't afford these luxuries. What the hell were you doing in that closet?"

Edith screamed, "How should I know, you old man?" and had a convulsion of tears. "Jerry Baxter, how can you sit there and —?"

But her husband was doubled over, holding his head.

"You received Nikki's instructions, Edith," said Ellery, "and when she turned off the light you left the living room and went to the kitchen. Or started for it. What did happen?"

"Don't third-degree me, you detective!" screeched Mrs. Baxter. "I'd just passed under the archway, feeling my way, when somebody grabbed my nose and mouth from behind and I must have fainted because that's all I knew till just now and Jerry Baxter, if you don't get up on your two feet like a man and defend your own wife, I'll — I'll —"

"Slit his throat?" asked Sergeant Velie crossly, for the Sergeant had been attending his own Hallowe'en Party with the boys of his old precinct and was holding three queens full when the call to duty came.

"The murderer," said Ellery glumly. "The real murderer, dad. At the time Nikki first put out the lights, while Edith Baxter was still in the room getting Nikki's final instructions, one of us lined up at that wall stole across the room, passed Nikki, passed Edith Baxter in the dark, and ambushed her —"

"Probably intended to slug her," nodded the Inspector, "but Mrs. Baxter obliged by fainting first."

"Then into the closet and away to do the foul deed?" asked the Sergeant poetically. He shook his head.

"It would mean," mused Inspector Queen, "that after stowing Mrs. Baxter in the foyer closet, the real killer went into the kitchen, got the mask, flash, and knife, came back to the living room, tapped John Crombie, led him out to the kitchen, and carved him up. That part of it's okay — Crombie must have thought he was playing the game — but how about the assault on Mrs. Baxter beforehand? Having to drag her unconscious body to the closet? Wasn't there any noise, any sound?"

Ellery said apologetically: "I kept dozing off."

But Nikki said: "There was no sound, Inspector. Then or at any other time. The first *sound* after I turned the light off was John screaming in the kitchen. The only other *sound* was the murderer throwing the flash into the middle of the room after he . . . she . . . whoever it was . . . got back to the wall."

Jerry Baxter raised his sweating face and looked at his wife.

"Could be," said the Inspector.

"Oh, my," said Sergeant Velie. He was studying the old gentleman as if he couldn't believe his eyes — or ears.

"It could be," remarked Ellery, "or it couldn't. Edith's a very small woman. Unconscious, she *could* be carried noiselessly the few feet in the foyer to the closet . . . by a reasonably strong person."

Immediately Ann Crombie and Lucy Trent and Jerry Baxter tried to look tiny and helpless, while Edith Baxter tried to look huge and heavy. But the sisters could not look less tall or soundly made than Nature had fashioned them, and Jerry's proportions, even allowing for reflexive shrinkage, were elephantine.

"Nikki," said Ellery in a very thoughtful way, "you're sure Edith was the only one to step away from the wall while the light was still on?"

"Dead sure, Ellery."

"And when the one you thought was Edith came back from the kitchen to pick a victim, that person had a full mask on?"

"You mean after I put the light out? Yes. I could see the mask in the glow the flash made."

"Man or woman, Miss P?" interjected the Sergeant eagerly. "This could be a pipe. If it was a man —"

But Nikki shook her head. "The flash was pretty weak, Sergeant. And we were all in those Black Cat outfits."

"Me, I'm no Fancy Dan," murmured Inspector Queen unexpectedly. "A man's been knocked off. What I want to know is not who was where when, but — who had it in for this character?"

It was a different sort of shrinkage this time, a shrinkage of four throats. Ellery thought: They *all* know.

"Whoever," he began casually, "whoever knew that John Crombie

and Edith Baxter were —"

"*It's a lie!*" Edith was on her feet, swaying, clawing the air. "There was nothing between John and me. Nothing. Nothing! Jerry, don't believe them!"

Jerry Baxter looked down at the floor again. "Between?" he mumbled. "I guess I got a head. I guess this has got me." And, strangely, he looked not at his wife but at Ann Crombie. "Ann . . . ?"

But Ann was jelly-lipped with fear.

"Nothing!" screamed Jerry's wife.

"That's not true." And now it was Lucy's turn, and they saw she had been shocked into a sort of suicidal courage. "John was a . . . a . . . John made love to every woman he met. John made love to *me* —"

"To you." Ann blinked and blinked at her sister.

"Yes. He was . . . disgusting. I . . ." Lucy's eyes flamed at Edith Baxter with scorn, with loathing, with contempt. "But *you* didn't find him disgusting, Edith."

Edith glared back, giving hate for hate.

"You spent four weekends with him. And the other night, at that dinner party, when you two stole off — you thought I didn't hear — but you were both tight . . . You begged him to marry you."

"You nasty little blabbermouth," said Edith in a low voice.

"I heard you. You said you'd divorce Jerry if he'd divorce Ann. And John kind of laughed at you, didn't he? — as if you were dirt. And I saw your eyes, Edith, I saw your eyes . . ."

And now they, too, saw Edith Baxter's eyes — as they really were.

"I never told you, Ann. I couldn't. I couldn't . . ." Lucy began to sob into her hands.

Jerry Baxter got up.

"Here, where d'ye think you're going?" asked the Sergeant, not unkindly.

Jerry Baxter sat down again.

"Mrs. Crombie, did you know what was going on?" asked Inspector Queen sympathetically.

It was queer how she would not look at Edith Baxter, who was sitting lumpily now, no threat to anyone — a soggy old woman.

And Ann said, stiff and tight: "Yes, I knew." Then her mouth loosened again and she said wildly: "I knew, but I'm a coward. I couldn't face him with it. I thought if I shut my eyes —"

"So do I," said Ellery tiredly.

"What?" said Inspector Queen, turning around. "You what, son? I didn't get you."

"I know who cut Crombie's throat."

They were lined up facing the far wall of the living room — Ann Crombie, Lucy Trent, Edith Baxter, and Jerry Baxter — with a space the breadth of a man, and a little more, between the Baxters. Nikki stood at the light switch, the Inspector and Sergeant Velie blocked the archway, and Ellery sat on a hassock in the

center of the room, his hands dangling listlessly between his knees.

"This is how we were arranged a couple of hours ago, dad, except that I was at the wall, too, and so was John Crombie . . . in that vacant space."

Inspector Queen said nothing.

"The light was still on, as it is now. Nikki had just asked Murderer to step away from the wall and cross the room — that is, towards where you are now. Do it, Edith."

"You mean —"

"Please."

Edith Baxter backed from the wall and turned and slowly picked her way around the overturned furniture. Near the archway, she paused, an arm's length from the Inspector and the Sergeant.

"With Edith about where she is now, Nikki, in the full light, instructed her about going to the kitchen, getting the mask, flash, and knife there, coming back in the dark with the flash, selecting a victim, and so on. Isn't that right?"

"Yes."

"Then you turned off the light, Nikki — didn't you?"

"Yes . . ."

"Do it."

"D-do it, Ellery?"

"Do it, Nikki."

When the darkness closed down, someone at the wall gasped. And then the silence closed down, too.

And after a moment Ellery's voice came tiredly: "It was at this point, Nikki, that you said 'Stop!' to Edith Baxter and gave her a few additional instructions. About what to do after the 'crime'. As I pointed out a few minutes ago, dad — it's during this interval, with Edith standing in the archway getting Nikki's afterthoughts, and the room in darkness, that the real murderer must have stolen across the living room from the wall, got past Nikki and Edith and into the foyer, and waited there to ambush Edith."

"Sure, son," said the Inspector. "So what?"

"*How did the murderer manage to cross this room in pitch darkness without making any noise?*"

At the wall, Jerry Baxter said hoarsely: "Y'know, I don't have to stand here. I don't have to!"

"Because, you know," said Ellery, reflectively, "there wasn't any noise. None at all. In fact, Nikki, you actually remarked in that interval: 'I want the room to be as quiet as it is this minute.' And only a few moments ago you corroborated yourself when you told dad that the first sound after you turned off the light was John screaming in the kitchen. You said the only other sound was the sound of the flashlight landing in the middle of the room after the murderer got back to the wall. So I repeat: How did the murderer cross this room in darkness without making a sound?"

Sergeant Velie's disembodied bass complained from the archway that he didn't get it at all, at all.

"Well, Sergeant, you've seen this room — it's cluttered crazily with

overturned furniture, pillows, hassocks, miscellaneous objects. Do you think *you* could cross it in darkness without sounding like the bull in the china shop? Nikki, when you and I first got here and blundered into the living room — "

"In the dark," cried Nikki. "We bumped. We scraped. I actually fell — "

"Why didn't the murderer?"

"I'll tell you why," said Inspector Queen suddenly. "*Because no one did cross this room in the dark.* It can't be done without making a racket, or without a light — and there was no light at that time or Nikki'd have seen it."

"Then how's it add up, Inspector?" asked the Sergeant pathetically.

"There's only one person we know crossed this room, the one Nikki saw cross while the light was on, the one they found in the closet in a 'faint,' Velie. *Edith Baxter!*"

She sounded nauseated. "Oh, no," she said. "No."

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Baxter. It's been you all the time. You did get to the kitchen. You got the mask, the flash, the knife. You came back and tapped John Crombie. You led him out to the kitchen and there you sliced him up —"

"No!"

"Then you quietly got into that closet and pulled a phoney faint, and waited for them to find you so you could tell that cock-and-bull story of being ambushed in the foyer, and —"

"Dad," sighed Ellery.

"Huh?" And because the old gentleman's memory of similar moments — many similar moments — was very green, his tone became truculent. "Now tell me I'm wrong, Ellery!"

"Edith Baxter is the one person present tonight who couldn't have killed John Crombie."

"You see?" moaned Edith. They could hear her panting.

"Nikki actually saw somebody with a flash *return* to the living room after Crombie's death-scream, go to the wall, turn off the flash, and she heard that person hurl it into the middle of the room. Who was it Nikki saw and heard? We've deduced that already — the actual murderer. Immediately after that, Nikki turned up the lights.

"If Edith Baxter were the murderer, wouldn't we have found her *at the wall with the rest of us* when the lights went on? But she wasn't. She wasn't in the living room at all. We found her in the foyer closet. So she *had* been attacked. She *did* faint. She *didn't* kill Crombie."

They could hear her sobbing in a great release.

"Then who did?" barked the Inspector. His tone said he was tired of this fancy stuff and give him a killer so he could book the rat and go home and get to sleep.

"The one," replied Ellery in those weary tones, "who was able to cross the room in the dark without making any noise. For if Edith is innocent, only one of those at the wall could have been guilty. And that one had to cross the room."

There is a maddening unarguability about Ellery's sermons.

"But how, son, how?" bellowed his father. "It couldn't be done without knocking *something* over — making *some* noise!"

"Only one possible explanation," said Ellery tiredly; and then he said, not tiredly at all, but swiftly and with the slashing finality of a knife, "I thought you'd try that. That's why I sat on the hassock, so very tired. That's why I staged this whole . . . silly . . . scene . . ."

Velie was roaring: "Where the hell are the lights? Miss Porter, turn that switch on, will you?"

"I can't find the — the damned thing!" wept Nikki.

"The rest of you stay where you are!" shouted the Inspector.

"Now drop the knife," said Ellery, in the slightly gritty tones of one who is exerting pressure. "Drop it . . ." There was a little clatter, and then a whimper. "The only one who could have passed through this jumbled maze in the dark without stumbling over anything," Ellery went on, breathing a bit harder than usual, "would be someone who'd *plotted a route through this maze in advance of the party* . . . someone, in fact, who'd plotted the maze. In other words, the clutter in this room is not chance confusion, but deliberate plant. It would require photographing the details of the obstacle-course on the memory, and practise, plenty of practise — but we were told you spent the entire day in this suite *alone*, my dear, fixing it up for the party."

"Here!" sobbed Nikki, and she jabbed the light switch.

"I imagine," said Ellery gently to the girl in his grip, "you felt *someone* had to avenge the honor of the Trents, Lucy."

In our last issue we brought you T. S. Stribling's prizewinning Professor Poggioli story, "Count Jalacki Goes Fishing." You will recall that we commented at length on the "unfinished state" of that story — how Count Jalacki had murdered his father-in-law so that his wife, the Countess, would inherit her share of the millions; how the Count removed the next obstacle from his path by contriving the "accidental" drowning of his step-son; how the Count thus committed "scientific" murders with absolute impunity and how those two murders were merely steps in a larger plan; how at the very end of the story Professor Poggioli realized that there was murder yet to come.

We persuaded Mr. Stribling to finish the tale. "A Note to Count Jalacki" is therefore a sequel to "Count Jalacki Goes Fishing." One point, however, should be emphasized: the Jalacki stories, while connected, do not constitute a two-part serial. Each story stands on its own feet; each story is complete in itself. Your understanding of "A Note to Count Jalacki" in no way depends on your having read the previous tale. You can start reading now and without any further knowledge of the earlier events, enjoy to the fullest degree the duel between Professor Poggioli, master detective, and Count Jalacki, master criminal.

A NOTE TO COUNT JALACKI

by T. S. STRIBLING

IN HIS apartment at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel the financier, Mr. John Everhard II, dialled his sister, the Countess Rosalie Everhard-Jalacki. Mr. Everhard, now senior member of the great Everhard Company, appeared deeply disturbed. He looked at the heavily built man at his side.

"I'll telephone her that you are coming right over, Professor Poggioli." As Poggioli made an inclination of assent the financier continued in his disquiet manner: "Do you suppose you can make certain about little Jon's death . . . in your usual quiet, analytical way. I don't want to disturb Rosalie."

"I see you have settled in your mind that your little nephew did not die of drowning as reported," observed the criminologist.

The financier was surprised. "Why do you say that?"

"Because when a person is drowned, people usually refer to it as a 'drowning;' but any other mode of death is referred to simply as a 'death.' That's how I know you suspect your little nephew was murdered."

For a moment Mr. Everhard made no reply to this odd observation; then he said: "I would like to get a trust-

worthy report on how little Jon died as quickly as I can. I know you can get it from Rosalie. I understand she has the greatest confidence in you, Professor Pog——" Here he broke off to say into the telephone, "That you, Rosalie? I wanted to know how you are feeling. You must be brave and collect yourself, Rosalie. I have a friend here beside me; I want him to go over and talk with you, Rosalie. I know he can help you. . . . It's Professor Poggioli, Rosalie; I know you tried to get him not long ago. . . . What? . . . But Rosalie, I thought you would *want* to see Professor Poggioli. . . . You say it is too late now. . . ." The financier turned to Poggioli, "She says little Jon is dead and you can do no good . . ." This was such an unexpected outcome that the brother returned to his persuasions, "But Rosalie, Professor Poggioli is such a brilliant man. . . . What? . . . *Him?* . . . Naturally, Rosalie, *he* is available, but why should you want to see him? . . . But, Rosalie, *he* is a man of no talent whatever, quite — uh — simple in fact. . . . You say you will not see Professor Poggioli? . . . Everhard waited for several seconds until his sister finished, then covered the telephone, and turned to me with a blank expression: "Rosalie says she would like to see you, if you will come over."

I was the most astounded of the three of us. "Me! Why should . . ."

"She says you are sympathetic and kind," repeated the brother still looking completely at a loss.

We all stood pondering this queer turn; finally Poggioli asked: "Did your sister consult with someone while she was telephoning?"

"I . . . don't know."

"Between sentences, did you hear her put her palm over the receiver?"

"I wasn't listening for . . ."

"Well, she did. She was consulting with her husband. Count Jalacki thinks that if I come over I will find something about him, but if my friend comes over the Count will find out something about us. That's what is behind her selection."

"Well, I'll go," I said, "if it will do any good."

"That's the point," said Mr. Everhard, "whether it will do good — or harm."

"I'll talk to him before he starts," suggested Poggioli, "he won't do any harm." The criminologist turned to me: "You must be cautious about how you answer the Count's questions. Don't let him pump you."

"I really don't know anything for the Count to pump," I said, a little nettled at this unanimous implication that I was a numbskull.

Mr. Everhard disregarded me; he asked in deep disturbance: "Professor, Poggioli, do you consider my sister's life in danger?"

"She can't be in any danger so long as she has not given birth to Count Jalacki's child," pointed out Poggioli. "The child will be the heir to your sister's part of the family estate. Through this child Count Jalacki will come into control of a part of the immense Everhard holdings."

"Yes, yes, of course," agreed the financier nervously. "Well . . . well . . . you can't go over and see Rosalie yourself. . . ." He removed his hand from the receiver which had been blocked all this time. "All right, Rosalie," he said into it, "I'll send him right over. Goodbye and good luck."

Mr. Everhard put the instrument in its fork and stood pressing it down for a moment; then he said slowly that he believed he would write Count Jalacki a note for me to take to him. "Just a line to express my sympathy for his grief," he explained. Slowly and thoughtfully he walked to the door of his secretary's office and went inside.

Poggioli and I looked at each other. To me Mr. Everhard's action seemed just a little odd but I knew that Poggioli's analytical mind dissolved this queerness into particular clues to the millionaire's present thoughts and, no doubt, to his future conduct.

Presently Mr. Everhard returned and handed me an envelope which he asked me to hand to the Count.

With my message of sympathy, Poggioli and I went to the elevator and dropped to the street floor. In front of the hotel, as we waited for a taxi, I expected Poggioli to speak and interpret the hidden meaning of the note; I mean, the motives that had caused Mr. Everhard to write a letter of sympathy to his unspeakable brother-in-law. But he said nothing. He simply stood on the sidewalk, pondering the situation. Finally a bit out of patience, I said: "You were going to give me some instructions, I believe."

"Oh, yes, yes, certainly. . . . Of course you know whom to look for at the villa to get a complete account of little Jon's death?"

I was taken aback. "Whom to look for?" I ejaculated.

"Yes, the person for whom your note is *really* intended."

"Why, I haven't the slightest idea. Isn't it for the Count?"

I think Poggioli was amused inwardly at my bewilderment.

"It is hardly a supposition, it is almost a certainty that Mr. Everhard has some informer in the Jalacki establishment and the note is really for this person."

"Why, that's the weirdest . . . why in the world do you imagine . . ."

"Do you recall this sentence that Mr. Everhard addressed to me? He said, speaking of his sister Rosalie, 'I understand she has the greatest confidence in you, Professor Poggioli.' Now a person uses the phrase 'I understand' only when some third person has given him information about another person or thing. Since the Everhard and Jalacki families have been *incommunicado* for some time, there must be a third person in the Jalacki household who furnishes Mr. Everhard with information. Now that third person is the one you should make contact with to obtain definite information about little Jon's death."

There was, of course, the usual Poggiolian hint of satire in thus reminding me of my errand, as though I were a

little child. I passed over this in my astonishment that he had deduced, in such an exceedingly simple manner, the presence of an informer in the Jalacki household. I could not resist commenting on it, but Poggioli waggled a deprecating finger: "That isn't the puzzle at all."

I asked him what was. He said the real riddle was why Mr. Everhard wanted any proof or any details whatsoever of his little nephew's drowning or murder.

I was amazed. I asked what could be more natural than for an uncle . . .

Poggioli interrupted me to say, "Because I have already given him complete proof that Jalacki murdered his father. He told us outright that he would make no legal move about that on account of the reputation of the Everhard Company. Now what will he do with more proof . . . this time, of his nephew's murder?"

"He simply wants to be sure!" I cried.

The psychologist quirked his lips. "John Everhard never wanted to be sure of anything that didn't have a direct bearing on his plans and schemes for the future."

"If he doesn't really want the details of little Jon's death, what's he sending me to the villa for?"

The criminologist lifted a finger. "There you have asked a question. Why has he? It seems clear to me that the note of condolence is just a ruse to get a message through — to some stool pigeon in the Jalacki villa."

At this moment a taxicab swerved into the sidewalk. I got into it and set out for the Count's establishment. There is no use in my trying to describe the fog of suspicion and puzzlement which Poggioli had created in my head. But I finally decided he was wrong. For him to whip up all these speculations from a casual phrase, a mere word — no, it was fantastic; it was worse than fantastic, it was ridiculous. That was my decision when I dismissed my cab at the great bronze gate of the Jalacki villa.

As I entered the grounds the heavy tropical growth seemed somehow menacing in its gloom. A little way inside I saw a gardener truing the line of grass along the side of the driveway. As I passed him he straightened up and said: "These are private grounds, Mister."

I told him I was on my way to the villa, that I had an appointment with the Countess.

He looked at me suspiciously. "You have?"

"Why, yes," I said, "I've been here before, you must have seen me?"

This eased his suspicion that I was a presumptuous tourist. "No-o, I haven't seen you before, Mister. I just started work here this morning."

I pricked up my ears. It struck me that if Poggioli were here he would make something of this, twist it into some sort of clue. I asked: "Taking the place of the old gardener?"

"Of the assistant gardener."

"When did he leave?"

"Why, I understand he pulled out of here last night. The employment

agency sent me over this morning."

My feeling of having hit on something of importance increased. Right in the midst of this tragedy why should an assistant gardener have flown? Then I asked in a voice as nearly inconsequential as I could make it: "This gardener who went away last night . . . know his name?"

"No."

"Know where he went?"

"Mm-mm, no-o. . . . Took a plane some'ers . . . North, I imagine . . . Did he owe you anything?"

I became quite excited that an assistant gardener had fled by plane. I said, "No, he didn't. Where's the closest phone — I mean, public telephone?"

"Don't have to go to a public phone. There's a telephone right over there in that clump of frangipanni."

"That's just a service line to the house?"

"No, the head gardener dials downtown for whatever he wants. It's a through line."

I thanked him and said I would use it. I was sharply excited that I had stumbled on a new trail the moment I had stepped into the villa grounds. I wanted to get in touch with Poggioli, tell him to go to the flying fields and find out where that assistant gardener had fled. I went over to the clump of trees and with unsteady forefinger dialled my own apartment. Poggioli was home. I kept my voice down so the new gardener would not hear me and then spoke in a roundabout fashion, so if he did hear he would understand nothing.

"Poggioli, I've got it."

"Got it? Got what? The person you were sent out to . . . ?"

Then I remembered I had been sent out to make contact with Mr. Everhard's informer at the villa. So I said, "No, no, not the s.p. I've contacted the . . . the original Mephistopheles, if you know what I mean."

Came a pause and I knew Poggioli's marvellous brain was interpreting my allusion; finally he asked in a flat voice:

"Are you telephoning in the presence of a third person?"

"Well," I said in a low tone, "maybe I am, that's why I have to . . ."

He interrupted me briefly. "Proceed as directed."

"You mean . . . after the s.p.?"

"This third person, does he appear to be a man who doesn't know how to spell simple English words?" asked Poggioli in a disagreeable tone. "Proceed as directed. Goodbye." And he cut me off.

Well, I was almost beside myself. There was what might be the vital clue and — I could have broken Poggioli's neck for his ill-timed irony. I came out of the clump of trees, nodded at the new assistant gardener, and started on for the villa. On my way through the jungly grounds I came upon the kiosk and once more the nurse, Miss Mary Davis, was in it. She had her head down on the rail of the circular seat and was having what women call a good cry. I tried to get past in silence, but I suppose I made some noise for she looked up with

reddened eyes.

"It's you." she said accusatively.

"Yes," I said, pausing.

"What have you come for now?" she asked in a tone that charged me with having brought great harm on the family.

"Miss Davis," I asked, "what are you insinuating? I haven't done anything at all. I was sent here before just as I am sent here now." I stood looking at her for a space, then I asked baldly, "Look here, Miss Davis, what do you know about this business anyway?" I sat down on the other side of the circular seat, facing her.

"Don't talk so loudly," she cautioned, blinking her wet eyes and glancing around.

I lowered my voice. "Very well, now go ahead and tell me . . . was he drowned?"

She straightened. "What do you mean?"

I moved a bit closer to her. "I mean, did he drown himself, or was he drowned, or was he thrown in the sea after he was dead? Hadn't you thought of these questions yourself?"

She gave me a frightened look. "Yes, I had," she whispered.

"Well, you've seen the body . . . since they found it?" I persisted.

She sighed and wiped her eyes. "Yes, of course."

"Well . . . which was it . . . how did he die?"

She bit her lips to keep her face straight. "How would I know?"

"Why, by his face," I said, annoyed at her ignorance. "If it was white it meant he died one way, if it was purple and congested it meant he died another way. It's very easy to tell."

"Well, which is which?" she asked with a gasp.

"That I don't know," I said, "but any criminologist would know at once." Here she put her head down and began weeping outright once more. "Look here, Miss Davis, don't feel so bad. We'll get a coroner's jury on this case."

Here she looked up at me, her face changed. I glanced around in the direction she faced and there stood Count Jalacki quite close to us. How he had got there, why we hadn't seen him before, I hadn't the slightest notion.

In acute embarrassment, mingled I must say with a touch of apprehension, I wondered if he had overheard what we had just said. I supposed he had. I arose and made a feeble attempt at composure by producing my letter and telling him that I had brought a note from Mr. Everhard, his brother-in-law.

He took it and said coldly: "You lingered so long with Miss Davis I thought you weren't coming." That was an odd thing for him to say. How did he know I had lingered with Miss Davis? Then I realized that Mr. Everhard had telephoned the Count I was coming. If he came out to meet me like this, the note I brought evidently was very important. I tried to make some bold deduction, such as Poggioli would have done, but nothing came to me.

Count Jalacki dropped my note in

his pocket and said we would walk to his laboratory through the grounds. Now that was exactly what I didn't want to do. The Count and I had no more in common than a hawk and a haddock. Besides, I wanted to stay and talk with Miss Davis. She had the very information I was after. I tried to excuse myself by saying that the Countess had telephoned for me to come to see her, and that I would go directly to the villa and after I had talked with the Countess, I would come to his laboratory.

To this the Count replied with his faintly ironic courtesy that he would appreciate it if I would delay my visit to the Countess for a while. He said he had just come from the villa and had found her so nervous and disturbed that he had given her a sleeping tablet. He said we would go to the laboratory first, then later go to the villa, by which time he hoped the Countess would be awake.

That, of course, kept me from further talk with Miss Davis. I was regretting this when abruptly a new and profoundly disturbing suspicion seized me. The moment I thought of it I was certain it was true. What could be more in keeping with the Count's serpentine and inhuman psychology, than for him, when Mr. Everhard had telephoned I was coming, to give his wife an overdose of some sedative! What could have been more Jalacki-like? What an appearance of innocence it would give him to tell me about the sleeping potion, have me wait with him until the unhappy woman died, then go to the villa and together find her corpse. His very frankness with me would certainly make any jury believe the overdose was accidental.

A light sweat broke out on my brow and upper lip as I penetrated his design. Also, I will admit, I felt pleased with myself that I had made a deduction quite as clever as any I had ever heard from Poggioli. But unfortunately I could think of no polite way of escaping from this Bluebeard and saving the Countess' life. Futilely I walked on with him to the laboratory.

The Count continued to talk in his usual harsh voice and with his usual smooth irony. Miss Davis, he suggested, was a very interesting woman. I agreed. He wondered if I had ever talked to Mr. Quinn, a very interesting man. I said I had once when Mr. Quinn took me in a car from the villa to town.

Count Jalacki dilated on the point. "Common people," he said, "are always more interesting than the upper classes, or even the intellectuals, because they are not specialized. Take the run of such folk — gardeners, nurses, laboratory assistants. What they know, everybody knows; what they feel, everybody feels. So they are the sympathetic bosom companions of the world at large."

I nodded. I couldn't answer him. It made me nauseated to hear him talk. I knew that in a subtle way he was really bragging to me that at this very moment he was murdering his wife.

In the laboratory we found Mr. Quinn, doing something with chem-

icals. The Count absently reached in his pocket, drew out the note I had brought him, and placed it in a little basket of unopened correspondence. He did this, I am sure, to show me in what esteem he held his brother-in-law, John Everhard II. Then he began telling me about Quinn. Quinn had worked with him ever since Jalacki first entered the Everhard Company's New Jersey laboratory. That was before the Count had married Rosalie. After their marriage he had brought Quinn down here as his laboratory assistant and he had laid out this new laboratory. It was an exact replica of the New Jersey laboratory. In fact, the Everhard laboratories all over the country were precise duplicates, so that a research man could be sent from one to another and always be completely at home.

"That's the American system," I said, half listening to my host.

"Correct," said the Count, "and I admire the American system. It has elevated the virtue of mediocrity to a science. Its glory are multiple parts, identical tools, and mass production. No aristocratic country ever produced inventors who would have thought of equipping other men's laboratories precisely like their own. To an aristocratic thinker his tools are as individual as his ideas, but in the dead level of a democracy identical instrumentation is an obvious and very fruitful step. I yield to none in my admiration for things American."

I listened to this not knowing exactly how much was irony and how much sincere belief when suddenly I heard a loud metallic voice in the back of the laboratory inquire: "Have you any rooted oncidiums?" And another voice answered: "We have a few just grafted to their host but can't guarantee them." One or two more questions and answers about the oncidiums, then, of all odd things, a sale was consummated there in the back of the laboratory. I looked at Count Jalacki who explained casually. "That's the assistant gardener ordering orchids from the florist over his telephone. I check on his purchases with a loudspeaker here in my workshop."

Well, it took fifteen or twenty seconds for the full import of this information to register on me. Then I realized that *Jalacki had overheard my telephone conversation with Poggioli!* I tried to remember what we had said, but I was too confused. What *had* we said? What did the Count know? Now I understood why the Count had come straight to me in the kiosk.

Without warning the Count said it was now time for us to go to the villa and see his wife.

This added to my uncertainty. My theory that he had poisoned his wife with a sleeping potion hinged on the hypothesis that Everhard had telephoned Jalacki that I was coming to the villa. That would have given the Count time to have poisoned his wife and to bring me in as a casual witness and as a proof of his innocence. Now it was apparent that he had come straight from the laboratory to the kiosk and had had no time to poison

his wife. So, I deduced she must still be alive.

I am happy to say that at last one of my deductions proved correct. When we entered the villa I saw the Countess sitting in a great chair, her distended body ill at ease, as she stared, heartbroken at the sea that had drowned her little boy.

I tried to put my sympathy into words. As I did so I found it impossible to believe that Count Jalacki really had murdered his little stepson. No, Poggioli must be wrong, Mr. Everhard must be wrong, Miss Davis must be wrong; little Jon must somehow have got out of his bed and accidentally drowned himself in the surf. I talked a few minutes and then took my leave with what aplomb I could muster.

On my walk back through the jungle I tried again to recall my exact words to Poggioli over the telephone. All I could remember were the letters 's.p.' which I had used as an abbreviation for 'stool pigeon.' I realized that such concealment would not puzzle Count Jalacki even for a moment.

When I reached the kiosk where I had talked to Miss Davis it was empty. The roadway where I had used the telephone was deserted. I walked on and presently came within sight of the fifty-thousand-dollar bronze gateway to the estate. I looked out of the gloom of the jungle onto the sunlit glare of Ocean Drive. As I walked on toward the gate I saw a taxicab waiting outside and I realized that Count Jalacki had called it for me in sarcastic courtesy. When the driver opened his door and I stepped inside, I saw on the back seat a worn leather traveling case and sitting beside it, Miss Mary Davis. I exclaimed: "Miss Davis, did he fire you!"

Her pale blue eyes were angry. "What did you tell him about me?"

I suddenly knew that I had told him she was the Everhard stool pigeon in his home. I had done this in my telephone conversation with Poggioli. I stammered, "I — didn't intend to tell him anything — about anyone."

"You don't have to intend to tell Count Jalacki anything," she said, bitingly.

"Did he tell you to wait for me here?" I asked.

"He told the driver to wait for you. He said you wouldn't be long. He paid both our fares."

I shook my head at this last delicate insult. As we drove away Miss Davis looked back at the fifty-thousand-dollar bronze gate. Suddenly she dabbed her face with her handkerchief.

"I — I've been with Rosalie ever — ever since little Jon was b-born!"

"Well, Miss Davis," I comforted her, "your job was gone anyway. Little Jon is dead."

"But — she's going to have — another baby — to — to take his place with her."

I waited till her spasm of grief had subsided.

"Where are you going now?" I asked her.

"Oh . . . to the air field."

"Going to fly . . . north, I suppose."

"Yes, of course. Where else is there to go?"

Then I realized Jalacki was getting rid of all the servants who knew anything about his little stepson's death. I said:

"Look here, Miss Davis, you know who actually did that, don't you?"

She drew a long breath and closed her eyes. "Of course I do."

"It wasn't . . . the Count himself?"

"Certainly not. His factotum, his man of all work . . . a-l-l w-o-r-k . . . do you understand?"

"Mr. Quinn?"

She lifted her brow in disgust at my southern way of having to say everything in plain words and remained silent.

"Well, look here," I said seriously, "oughtn't you to give me your address, so if this ever comes up in court I can call you for a witness?"

"What good would that do — a trial, court, even a hanging . . . my poor little darling is . . . dead."

I didn't argue, I quit talking. I got out on Acacia Street and hurried to my apartment to tell Poggioli that he must collect these murder witnesses Count Jalacki was scattering all over the United States, get them together and electrocute the inhuman monster. . . . I unlocked the outer door and rushed into my apartment. It was empty. I called Poggioli's name but he was in none of the rooms. I was unable simply to sit and await his return. I looked out the window onto the street with some foolish hope of seeing him. Then in sharp relief I saw a note pinned to the shade of the floor lamp. I unpinned it and read: *Telephoned you at the villa, but you had started home. As soon as you read this, come to the Ritz-Carlton. Mr. Everhard has been shot. H. P.*

With a flood of regret at my own bungling, I perceived instantly the chain of cause and effect that had led to an attack on Mr. Everhard. I had betrayed the fact that Everhard had a spy at the villa and Jalacki had acted at once. He no doubt had dispatched Mr. Quinn to assassinate the capitalist. If only I had not telephoned in the garden. This thought, of my own culpability, drummed in my head all the way to the Ritz.

When I reached the hotel I was detained in the lobby until I could be identified. Finally a young man came down from the Everhard apartment. He was very solemn and turned out to be Mr. Everhard's confidential secretary. I asked him was Mr. Everhard dead or hurt very badly. He said he was not allowed to give out any information. I asked him was Poggioli upstairs. He said Professor Poggioli was closeted with Mr. Everhard and Mr. Leggett.

"Who is Mr. Leggett?" I asked.

"I'm not supposed to give out information but he is the legal representative of the Everhard Company here in Tiamara. He is employed mainly for his influence in the State legislature."

I nodded. "I now see why everything is such a secret," I said, "Can I get into this conference they're having? My information is very important, tremendously important."

"What shall I say you know?"

"Tell them I know who shot Mr. Everhard."

"So does Mr. Everhard, naturally," said the solemn young man.

That took me back somewhat. Of course, after I thought it over, I knew that Mr. Everhard would know who shot him.

"It was Mr. Quinn, wasn't it?" I asked.

"It was not Mr. Quinn."

By this time we had reached the Everhard apartment. The solemn young man went into the conference room to see if I could be admitted. Presently he came back and said that Poggioli had vouched for me.

When I entered the conference room I found the three gentlemen — Poggioli, Everhard and Leggett — seated around a table, talking and smoking with an air of distinct cheerfulness. Mr. Everhard had his left arm in a black silk sling, but he was the most cheerful of the three, his mood of gloom having vanished completely. I must admit that this fact, from which Poggioli later drew such an amazing conclusion, suggested absolutely nothing to me.

Mr. Everhard was saying in a comfortable, almost a gratified, voice that he agreed with Mr. Leggett, no good would come out of a criminal prosecution. Then he went on to suggest: "We can announce for publication that my assailant's pistol went off accidentally and inflicted a flesh wound in my left arm."

To this Mr. Leggett shook a negative finger. "I don't think we had better use your name, Mr. Everhard. We don't want to attract any attention whatever to this matter. I think we had better make an impersonal statement to the newspapers, something like this: 'An accidental shot fired in the lobby of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel slightly wounded an employee of the Everhard Company.' "

Poggioli came out of a profound study to ask: "Won't the reporters find out the details?"

Mr. Leggett smiled complacently at the criminologist. "Our organization is prepared for such incidents as this, Professor Poggioli. Our company owns two of the papers here in Tiamara outright and fifty-one per cent of the stock in the third."

This decision seemed to break up the conference. Mr. Leggett and Poggioli arose to go. Mr. Everhard turned his chair gently about and sat with bandaged arm, smiling at his confrères. No one took any notice of me or the solemn young man who had brought me up. I followed Poggioli out and went down the elevator with him. I was puzzled.

"Mr. Quinn didn't do the shooting?" I asked in the descending cage.

Poggioli came out of deep concentration. "Oh, no, no, Jalacki would never have been that obvious. The assailant was a foreigner named

Schwartzen; he could hardly talk English."

"But you do think he was Jalacki's tool?"

Poggioli nodded his head.

"Well," I said, "that clears up the mystery."

"Clears it up?" ejaculated the criminologist.

"Certainly, it explains everything."

Poggioli gave a short laugh. "What I have pointed out is merely the obvious. There is still the *real* riddle."

Our elevator reached the street floor, the door opened, and I could say nothing further in the lobby of the Ritz. When we walked out into the sunlit street and were sufficiently isolated in the crowd, I asked my companion what was this new riddle — the *real* riddle he had referred to.

"I'm sure you noticed it yourself," said Poggioli. "It is Mr. Everhard's feeling of relief, of satisfaction — even of cheerfulness — which he shows plainly enough *now that he has been shot.*"

I thought this over. "I believe I've got the answer," I said.

"What is it?"

"He believes Jalacki has shot his bolt and now he, Everhard, is out of danger."

"Shot his bolt?"

"Yes, made a last attempt on Everhard's life."

Poggioli looked at me in some surprise. "That's an idea . . . a last attempt. Now if this is a last attempt, Everhard must have done something to put Jalacki out of the fighting. What could he have done?"

"Mm — mm, I don't see how he could have done anything to him. The Count doesn't admit strangers into the villa grounds. Mr. Everhard certainly didn't go himself. The only thing he did was to send a note over by me."

Poggioli pondered. "That is a fact. That is all he has actually done. Did you deliver the note?"

"Yes, to the Count himself."

"Uh . . . do you know what was in the note?"

"Naturally not. Mr. Everhard placed it in my care."

Poggioli lifted a brow. "In criminology we treat any communication between the parties involved in a crime simply as evidence, not as matters of personal privilege. But go on: what else happened at the villa?"

Of course the first thing that leaped to my mind was my telephone conversation with Poggioli in which I said I was hunting for Mr. Everhard's stool pigeon, and which the Count had overheard in his loudspeaker; then how Jalacki came out and found me talking to Miss Davis, who was in fact the s.p., and how he had immediately discharged her. But I was still so chagrined over my *faux pas* on the telephone that I couldn't bring myself to mention it. I got around it by saying: "When Jalacki read my note he discharged the nurse, Miss Davis."

"He did! Why did he do that?"

"Well . . . he must have thought she was Mr. Everhard's stool pigeon."

"What earthly reason would he

have to pick on a nurse?"

I grew very uncomfortable. I thought to myself: shall I tell him or shall I not tell him what an imbecile . . . I knew how sarcastic he could become.

Fortunately we were interrupted at this moment — rather I should say, shocked by the scream of a police siren. As the police car came howling past, I cried out on a sudden inspiration: "I'll bet they are headed for the villa!"

Poggioli evidently agreed, for the next moment he sighted a taxi and hailed it. As we drove off a sudden dismaying explanation came to me. I said to Poggioli, "This will be the Countess."

My companion was telling the driver to follow the police car in front of us. "No, no," he objected, "the Count would certainly do nothing to her until *after* her baby is born."

"Then it *has* been born," I cried, "and he's murdered her!"

"Maybe that police car is not going to the villa," said my friend tensely, watching the police car ahead of us; but even as he said this, it swerved into the great bronze gate of the Jalacki estate.

We whisked through the gate and were within forty yards of the police when they tumbled out at the villa.

A shocking sight met our eyes. The Countess Everhard-Jalacki came stumbling toward us from the laboratory. She was screaming, weeping, and laughing — all mixed in one hysteria. A little distance from the police she flung her arms toward them and fell writhing on the ground.

Fortunately for her the police of Tiamara are equal to any situation, even to midwifery on a hysterical woman. I stared horrified.

"Why should she call the police at such a . . ."

"It's premature," snapped Poggioli.

"Why do you think it's . . ."

"Because her obstetrician is not here. He knows the date. No, she saw something in the laboratory that caused this. We must get there before the police," and we started running for the laboratory.

I followed. Whether he knew what to expect or not, I don't know. I did not. We entered the laboratory together.

The first thing we saw was one of the maids kneeling beside a workbench with a glass of water in her hand. Then we realized she was beside a man's body and the next moment I recognized the prostrate figure of Count Jalacki. In response to a sharp question from Poggioli the girl gasped out, "I'm trying to bring him to!"

Poggioli knelt beside her, took the Count's wrist, put a hand under his shirt. "There's nothing you can do. Don't pour any more water on his face. How long have you been here?"

"I . . . don't know . . . I came . . ."

"An hour?"

"No, sir, not an hour. We couldn't get him on the telephone, so the Countess sent me here to bring him to her bedroom. I found him like this and telephoned her. She got up, came

here and saw him. It upset her terribly. I telephoned for the police."

Poggioli got to his feet and looked about, "The Count was alone, here in the laboratory?"

"I suppose so, sir. When I came after him he was just like he is now."

"He was dead when you got here?"

"Is he *dead?*"

"Yes. Where was Mr. Quinn?"

"He went to town, sir, at about ten o'clock this morning." Poggioli asked her how she knew the hour. She said Mr. Quinn had stopped by the main house to report to the Countess that he was going to the city.

"Was it Mr. Quinn's custom to report to the Countess?"

"No-o . . . at least, I never knew him to do it before."

"Does Mr. Quinn ever run any errands for the Countess so that she would need to know where he went?"

"Oh no, sir. He is the Count's man," she looked intently at Poggioli for a moment. "Do you think . . . *he* did this?"

"Certainly not. How could he have done this when he went to town at ten o'clock this morning? That will do — you may go."

The girl set the glass on the bench, dropped a little pale-faced curtsey, and went out. Poggioli turned to me.

"Isn't that like a beginner in crime . . . bungle it so even the maid suspects him?"

I was shocked. "You think Quinn . . . ?"

"Quinn was merely the tool, that's all. The source of the assassination was Everhard."

"*Everhard!*" I repeated in amazement. "What makes you think . . ."

"His change of mood. His gloom and oppression when he dispatched you with the note to Jalacki — his cheerfulness only a few minutes ago. That note, of course, was Jalacki's death warrant. It was meant to be read and acted on by Quinn."

I was so bewildered at this I could simply stare. Poggioli went on: "The point that oppressed Everhard was this: he was not absolutely sure that Jalacki was the murderer of his nephew. He sent you to investigate and make certain, but at the same time he was, as I say, sending Jalacki's death warrant. It was an odd situation. Mr. Everhard felt that he must act at once. However, when Jalacki's tool, Schwartzen, shot at Everhard and wounded him, then the financier was positive. That is why his mood changed from depression, uncertainty and gloom to satisfaction and confidence. It was an odd situation, Jalacki giving Everhard sure grounds for a death warrant which Everhard had *already* written."

"But how did Mr. Quinn actually kill the Count when he was in the city all morning?"

"He followed directions in the note you delivered to the Count."

"But why should Everhard take for granted that Jalacki would give the note to Quinn?"

"Because he knew the Count was extremely systematic. He knew Quinn was his laboratory assistant and secre-

tary, that Quinn read and answered all the Count's letters and that he would read . . . and answer . . . this one."

"But Quinn has been an intimate friend of the Count's for years. He was appointed the Count's assistant even before the Count married the Countess. Why did he desert his almost lifelong boss and murder him?"

Poggioli shook his head. "That goes deep into human psychology. Men somehow cling to abstractions, not to individuals. The Everhard Company is an abstraction. It is neither the men nor the materiel in it that hold loyalty, for both of these commodities are constantly renewed. It is an idea. For this abstraction Mr. Everhard did not punish the murderer of his father or of his nephew. But when Jalacki attacked the Company itself, he had to die. Quinn was just as loyal to the Company as Everhard. Quinn had been placed as a kind of watch-dog over Jalacki when the Count first entered the Everhard laboratories as a research chemist. No doubt the Company impressed it on Quinn that Jalacki was a foreigner and gave him detailed instructions how to act in almost any emergency, how to block Jalacki, and yet not draw the Everhard Company into the evil publicity of a criminal action. Well, the time finally came for Quinn to act . . . and he did."

I stood looking at the dead man who had worked for years beside his final executioner. "Of course he would have the utmost faith in Quinn, after he had worked beside him for so long," I said slowly.

Poggioli shook his head. "No, that to me is the most elusive riddle in the whole case. Why did Jalacki ever completely trust Quinn? Jalacki was bred in the doctrine that nobody is really trustworthy. Not only that but Jalacki was a brilliant scientist. He must have known that Everhard's letter was an attack . . . a letter of condolence, that was absurd on its face. . . . It seems to me . . . in fact, I am sure . . . that something happened here in the villa that abruptly transferred Jalacki's normal suspicions of Mr. Quinn to *someone else*, and somehow those suspicions fell on, of all persons, the nurse, Miss Mary Davis. One of the queerest mistakes I have ever known a brilliant mind to make . . . and it cost him his life."

I became very uncomfortable again. I considered telling Poggioli what I knew but decided against it. Instead I said: "Well, how did Mr. Quinn actually kill the Count?"

"If you'll find me the note, I'll read it and tell you."

The note was not hard to find. It was lying in plain view on the bench among some bottles and pliers and retorts. I started to hand it to Poggioli but he stopped me.

"I don't suppose it is poisoned. That would have been too obvious — it wouldn't have caught Jalacki. But to play safe, hand it to me with those pliers." I did so, rather gingerly, because after all Jalacki was dead. Poggioli proceeded, pointing to some

spots on the paper where liquids had dried. "You see Jalacki himself tested the note with reagents to see if it was poisoned. He decided it was not."

The note was typewritten on the face of a folded sheet. My companion held it flat with his pliers and I read aloud:

"Dear Ercole,

May I express my whole family's sorrow over the drowning of little Jon. I want you to know our heartfelt sympathy for you and Rosalie in this mutual grief."

This was single spaced. Then came a double-spaced interval and a second paragraph.

"We loved little Jon as warmly as one of our own children. I hope his going will unite our two families in our common grief.

Your sorrowing friend and kinsman,
John Everhard II."

I don't know exactly what I had expected, but I said, "That's just a simple note of consolation . . . exactly what Everhard said it was."

Poggioli stood glooming at the missive. "That's true . . . but Jalacki's dead."

"Maybe it's a code," I suggested.

"It's too brief to have a running letter code. Let us approach it this way: do you notice anything odd about this note?"

"Mm — mm, no-o . . . except it is a note of consolation and typewritten."

"That's a point," agreed Poggioli, "and do you observe it has a double space between the two paragraphs?"

"Yes, I see that."

"Both those details are unconventional: a note of sympathy, written on a typewriter, and a brief note like that broken into two paragraphs with a double space between them. Not only unconventional, but entirely unnecessary — unless Everhard was trying to convey secret instructions under Jalacki's guard. . . ." The criminologist shook his head. "That's what I can't understand . . . why a man like Jalacki didn't think of it instantly, and look *between the paragraphs!* Something happened here in the villa to mislead the Count, to lull him into . . ."

I became nervous about my own dumb part in the matter.

"Let's get on with the note," I suggested. "What do you find *between* the paragraphs?"

Poggioli visibly put aside his riddle, drew a magnifying glass from his pocket, and examined the empty space in question. Apparently he found nothing. He reflected a moment, then opened the folded sheet and examined the place *on the second page* that fell underneath the interparagraph space on the first sheet. Presently he looked up.

"Here it is," he said. "Everhard wrote it *with blank keys and no ribbon on the under sheet.*"

I was amazed with the certainty and ease with which Poggioli had arrived at this detail. I said as much.

"What else was there to think or suspect," answered the criminologist simply. "A child would have guessed

. . . really, this is the most puzzling thing . . . a brilliant man like Jalacki . . ."

A light sweat broke out on my face. "Listen," I begged, "What does the note say?"

"Oh, I don't know . . . bring me some powdered emery dust and let's read it."

I found some of this abrasive, Poggioli sprinkled some on the faint impressions, breathed on them, and the lines marking the edge of the indentations became faintly visible. It read: "34x2365."

I don't know what I expected, but certainly not two numbers to be multiplied together.

"There's your code," I said.

"Not likely," objected Poggioli, "Quinn wouldn't have such a code at his fingertips."

"Well, what does it mean?" I asked.

Poggioli glanced over the bench, then he pointed. "That bottle marked Tincture Merthiolate hasn't it got a number under the name?"

I looked. It had and with an indrawn breath I said, "And it's number thirty-four."

I started to hand it to him but he stopped me quickly. "No, my friend, don't touch that. That's a business double. It has killed one man already. Now see if you can find bottle number twenty-three sixty-five?"

I started searching through the laboratory with a kind of flustered concentration.

The number was not difficult to find. Every item in the place was arranged according to a numerical system. I found the bottle and called to Poggioli

"This one is Potassium Cyanide."

"I see. Well, it *isn't* Potassium Cyanide," analyzed Poggioli at once. "That is your simple antiseptic, Merthiolate. This container marked Merthiolate is the Cyanide. When you and Jalacki left the laboratory this morning, Quinn read this note and *switched the contents of the two bottles* — then replaced them according to their numbers. The poison, masked as an antiseptic, simply waited till Jalacki should scratch a hand or a finger and need to dab the scratch with Merthiolate. He must have done that fairly soon after he came back from the villa, directly after he had discharged Miss Davis for being a spy. Miss Davis. . . . Miss Davis. . . . Do you know, I believe that somehow or other Count Jalacki overheard our conversation on the telephone this morning . . . it's the only possible solution. Let's look around this laboratory and see if we can find a loudspeaker somewhere. . . ."

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—Continued from back cover

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Well, let her shoot her mouth off—if she *dares* to! There's nothing I can do about it. Not now anyway. I must be getting close to the cottage by this time. I wish this was all over with! Can't see any lights in the place! Has something gone wrong? And that sickening smell of gas coming out of the place—what does *that* mean?

Say—this is getting out of hand! I can see a ...a BODY...through this window. This looks like MURDER. How did *murder* get into this thing? I'd better get out of here—*fast!* But *WHERE?* Should I run TO the police...or FROM them?

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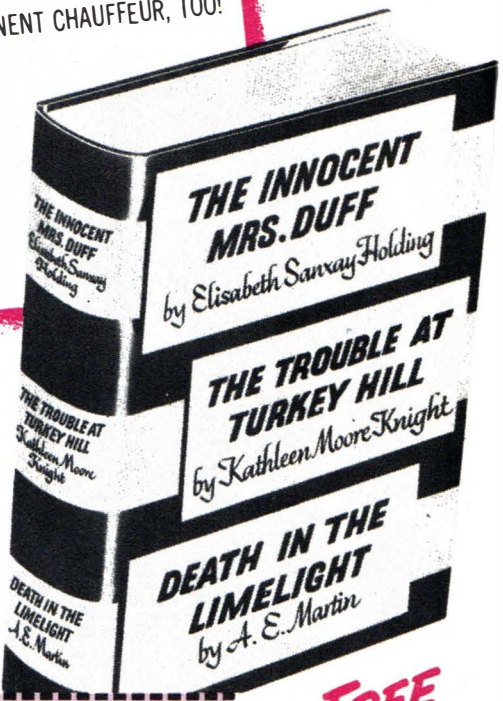

THIS is *it!* Jacob Duff tells himself. Too late to call a halt now—even if I wanted to. That sneaky Nolan fellow—my chauffeur—is already on his way. He just drove by; gave me the signal.

Better give him ten minutes start. Then I'll follow. I'll look in the window of the cottage and see them both there together. My "innocent" wife Reggie and that Army fellow she's been running around with . . . giving my money to! Then I'll telephone the police.

—Continued on inside cover

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