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AUGUST 1962

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HUGH PENTECOST

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A KIND OF MURDER

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A DAVIS PUBLICATION

The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

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Winner of a Second Prize

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HUGH PENTECOST**

TITLE: ***A Kind of Murder***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: About 40 years ago

COMMENTS: *An unusual and moving story, told by someone who has lived for many years with a burden on his conscience—the burden of having been responsible for the existence of a walking dead man . . .*

YOU MIGHT SAY THIS IS THE STORY of a murder—although nobody was killed. I don't know what has become of Mr. Silas Warren, but I have lived for many years with the burden on my conscience of having been responsible for the existence of a walking dead man.

I was fifteen years old during the brief span of days that I knew Mr. Silas Warren. It was toward the end of the winter term at Morgan Military Academy. Mr. Etsweiler, the chemistry and physics teacher at Morgan, had died of a heart attack one afternoon while he was helping to coach the hockey team on the lake. Mr. Henry Huntingdon Hadley, the headmaster, had gone to New York to find a replacement. That replacement was Mr. Silas Warren.

I may have been one of the first people to see Mr. Warren at the Academy. I had been excused from the afternoon study period because of a heavy cold, and allowed to take my books to my room to work. there. I saw Mr. Warren come walking across the quadrangle toward Mr. Hadley's office, which was located on the ground floor under the hall where my room was.

Mr. Warren didn't look like a man who was coming to stay long. He carried one small, flimsy suit-

case spattered with travel labels. Although it was a bitter March day he wore a thin, summer-weight topcoat. He stopped beside a kind of brown lump in the snow. That brown lump was Teddy, the school dog.

Teddy was an ancient collie. They said that in the old days you could throw a stick for Teddy to retrieve until you, not he, dropped from exhaustion. Now the old, gray-muzzled dog was pretty much ignored by everyone except the chef, who fed him scraps from the dining room after the noon meal. Teddy would be at the kitchen door, promptly on time, and then find a comfortable spot to lie down. He'd stay there until someone forced him to move.

Mr. Warren stopped by Teddy, bent down, and scratched the dog's head. The old, burr-clotted tail thumped wearily in the snow. Mr. Warren straightened up and looked around. He had narrow, stooped shoulders. His eyes were pale blue, and they had a kind of frightened look in them. *He's scared,* I thought; *coming to a new place in the middle of a term, he's scared.*

I guess most of the other fellows didn't see Mr. Warren until he turned up at supper time at the head of one of the tables in the dining room. We marched into the dining room and stood behind our chairs waiting for the cadet major to give the order to be seated. The order was delayed. Mr. Henry Huntingdon Hadley, known as Old Beaver because of his snowy white beard, made an announcement.

"Mr. Warren has joined our teaching staff to fill the vacancy created by the unfortunate demise of Mr. Etsweiler." Old Beaver had false teeth and his s's whistled musically. "I trust you will give him a cordial welcome."

"Be seated," the cadet major snapped.

We sat. Old Beaver said grace. Then we all began to talk. I was at Mr. Warren's right. He had a genial, want-to-be-liked smile.

"And your name is?" he asked me, in a pleasant but flat voice.

"Pentecost, sir."

He leaned toward me. "How's that?" he asked.

"Pentecost, sir."

Sammy Callahan sat across from me on Mr. Warren's left. Sammy was a fine athlete and a terrible practical joker. I saw a gleam of interest in his eyes. As Mr. Warren turned toward him Sammy spoke in an ordinary conversational tone. "Why don't you go take a jump in the lake, sir?"

Mr. Warren smiled. "Yes, I guess you're right," he said.

Sammy grinned at me. There was no doubt about it—Mr. Warren was quite deaf!

It was a strange kind of secret Sammy and I had. We didn't really know what to do with it, but we found out that night. Old Beaver was not a man to start anyone in

gradually. It would have been Mr. Etsweiler's turn to take the night study hour, so that hour was passed on to Mr. Warren.

He sat on the little platform at the head of the study hall—smiling and smiling. I think there must have been terror in his heart then. I think he may even have been praying.

Everyone seemed unusually busy studying, but we were all waiting for the test. The test always came for a new master the first time he had night study hour. There would be a minor disturbance and we'd find out promptly whether this man could maintain discipline or not. It came after about five minutes—a loud, artificial belch.

Mr. Warren smiled and smiled. He hadn't heard it.

Belches sprang up all over the room. Then somebody threw a handful of torn paper in the air. Mr. Warren's smile froze.

"Now, now, boys," he said.

More belches. More torn paper.

"Boys!" Mr. Warren cried out, like someone in pain.

Then Old Beaver appeared, his eyes glittering behind rimless spectacles. There was something I never understood about Old Beaver. Ordinarily his shoes squeaked. You could hear him coming from quite a distance away—squeak-squeak, squeak-squeak. But somehow, when he chose, he could approach as noiseless as a cat, without any squeak at all. And there he was.

The study hall was quiet as a tomb. But the silence was frighteningly loud, and the place was littered with paper.

"There will be ten demerit marks against every student in this room," Old Beaver said in his icy voice. "I want every scrap of paper picked up instantly."

Several of us scrambled down on our hands and knees. Mr. Warren smiled at the headmaster.

"Consider the lilies of the field," Mr. Warren said. "They toil not, neither do they spin. Yet I tell you that Solomon in all his glory—"

There was an uncontrollable outburst of laughter.

"Silence!" Old Beaver hissed, with all the menace of a poised cobra. He turned to Mr. Warren. "I'll take the balance of this period, Mr. Warren. I suggest you go to your room and prepare yourself for tomorrow's curriculum."

I didn't have any classes with Mr. Warren the next day, but all you heard as you passed in the corridors from one class period to the next were tales of the jokes and disorders in the physics and chemistry courses. Somehow nobody thought it was wrong to take advantage of Mr. Warren.

The climax came very quickly. In the winter, if you weren't out for the hockey or winter sports teams, you had to exercise in the gym. There were the parallel bars, and the rings, and the tumbling mats. And there was boxing.

The boxing teacher was Major Durand, the military commandant. I know now that he was a sadist. Major Durand was filled with contempt for everyone but Major Durand. I saw the look on his face when Mr. Warren appeared.

Mr. Warren had been assigned to help in the gym. He was something to see—just skin and bones. He had on a pair of ordinary black socks and, I suspect, the only pair of shoes he owned—black oxfords. He'd borrowed a pair of shorts that could have been wrapped twice around his skinny waist. Above that was a much mended short-sleeved undershirt. He looked around, hopeless, amiable.

"Mr. Warren!" Major Durand said. "I'd like you to help me demonstrate. Put on these gloves if you will." He tossed a pair of boxing gloves at Mr. Warren who stared at them stupidly. One of the boys helped him tie the laces.

"Now, Mr. Warren," Durand said. The Major danced and bobbed and weaved, and shot out his gloves in short vicious jabs at the air. "You will hold your gloves up to your face, sir. When you're ready you'll say 'Hit!'—and I shall hit you."

I'd seen Major Durand do this with a boy he didn't like. You held up the gloves and you covered your face and then, with your throat dry and aching, you said "Hit!"—and Major Durand's left or right would smash through your guard and pulverize your nose or mouth. It was sheer strength I know now, not skill.

Mr. Warren held up his gloves, and he looked like an actor in an old Mack Sennett comedy—the absurd clothes, the sickly smile.

Durand danced in front of him. "Whenever you say, Mr. Warren. Now watch this, boys. The feint—and the jab."

"Hit!" said Mr. Warren, his voice suddenly falsetto.

Pow! Major Durand's left jab smashed through the guard of Mr. Warren's nose. There was a sudden geyser of blood.

"Again, Mr. Warren!" the Major commanded, his eyes glittering.

"I think I'd better retire to repair the damage," Mr. Warren said. His undershirt was spattered with blood and he had produced a soiled handkerchief which he held to his nose. He hurried out of the gym at a sort of shambling gallop.

That night the payoff came in study hall. Mr. Warren was called on this time to substitute for Old Beaver, who had taken over for him the night before. Sammy Callahan staged it. Suddenly handkerchiefs were waved from all parts of the room—handkerchiefs stained red. Red ink, of course.

"Hit!" somebody shouted. "Hit, hit!" Nearly all the boys were bobbring, weaving, jabbing.

Mr. Warren, pale as a ghost, cotton visibly stuffed in one nostril, stared at us like a dead man.

Then there was Old Beaver again.

Somehow the word was out at breakfast the next morning. Mr. Warren was leaving. He didn't show at the breakfast table. I felt a little squeamish about it. He hadn't been given a chance. Maybe he wasn't such a bad guy.

It was during the morning classroom period that we heard it. It was a warm day for March and the ice was breaking up on the lake. The scream was piercing and terrified. Somebody went to the window. The scream came again.

"Somebody's fallen through the ice!"

The whole school—a hundred and fifty boys and masters—hurried down to the shore of the lake. The sun was so bright that all we could see was a dark shape flopping out there, pulling itself up on the ice and then disappearing under water as the ice broke. Each time the figure rose there was a wailing scream.

Then the identification. "It's Teddy!" someone shouted.

The school dog. He'd walked out there and the ice had caved in on him. The screams were growing weaker. A couple of us made for the edge of the ice. Old Beaver and Major Durand confronted us.

"I'm sorry, boys," Old Beaver said. "It's a tragic thing to have to stand here and watch the old dog drown. But no one—no one connected with the school—is to try to get to him. I'm responsible for your safety. That's an order."

We stood there, sick with it. Old Teddy must have seen us because for a moment there seemed to be new hope in his strangled wailing.

Then I saw Mr. Warren. He was by the boathouse, his old suitcase in his hand. He looked out at the dog, and so help me there were tears in Mr. Warren's eyes. Then, very calmly, he put down his bag, took off his thin topcoat and suit jacket. He righted one of the overturned boats on the shore and pulled it to the edge of the lake.

"Mr. Warren! You heard my order!" Old Beaver shouted at him.

Mr. Warren turned to the headmaster, smiling. "You seem to forget, sir, I am no longer connected with Morgan Military Academy, and therefore not subject to your orders."

"Stop him!" Major Durand ordered.

But before anyone could reach him, Mr. Warren had slid the flat-bottomed rowboat out onto the ice. He crept along on the ice himself, clinging to the boat, pushing it across the shiny surface toward Teddy. I heard Mr. Warren's thin, flat voice.

"Hold on, old man! I'm coming."

The ice gave way under him, but he clung to the boat and scrambled up—and on.

"Hold on, old man!"

It seemed to take forever. Just before what must have been the

last, despairing shriek from the half-frozen dog, Mr. Warren reached him. How he found the strength to lift the water-soaked collie into the boat I don't know; but he managed, and then he came back toward us, creeping along the cracking ice, pushing the boat to shore.

The chef wrapped Teddy in blankets, put him behind the stove in the kitchen, and gave him a dose of warm milk and cooking brandy. Mr. Warren was hustled to the infirmary. Did I say that when he reached the shore with Teddy the whole school cheered him?

Old Beaver, for all his tyranny, must have been a pretty decent guy. He announced that night that Mr. Warren was not leaving after all. He trusted that, after Mr. Warren's display of valor, the boys would show him the respect he deserved.

I went to see Mr. Warren in the infirmary that first evening. He looked pretty done in, but he also looked happier than I'd ever seen him.

"What you did took an awful lot of courage," I told him. "Everybody thinks it was a swell thing to do."

Mr. Warren smiled at me—a thoughtful kind of a smile. "Courage is a matter of definition," he said. "It doesn't take courage to stand up and let yourself get punched in the nose, boy. It takes courage to walk away. As for Teddy—somebody had to go after him. There wasn't anyone who could but me, so courage or not, I went. You'd have gone if Mr. Hadley hadn't issued orders." He sighed. "I'm glad to get a second chance here. Very glad."

Somehow I got the notion it was a last chance—the very last chance he'd ever have.

It was a week before Mr. Warren had the night study hall again. It was a kind of test. For perhaps fifteen minutes nothing happened, and then I heard Sammy give his fine, artificial belch. I looked up at Mr. Warren. He was smiling happily. He hadn't heard. A delighted giggle ran around the room.

I was on my feet. "If there's one more sound in this room I'm going after Old Beaver," I said. "And after that I'll personally take on every guy in this school, if necessary, to knock sense into him!"

The room quieted. I was on the student council and I was also captain of the boxing team. The rest of the study period was continued in an orderly fashion. When it was over and we were headed for our rooms, Mr. Warren flagged me down.

"I don't know quite what was going on, Pentecost," he said, "but I gather you saved the day for me. Thank you. Thank you very much. Perhaps when the boys get to know me a little better they'll come to realize—" He made a helpless little gesture with his bony hands.

"I'm sure they will, sir," I said. "I'm sure of it."

"They're not cruel," Mr. Warren said. "It's just high spirits, I know."

Sammy Callahan was waiting for me in my room. "What are you, some kind of a do-gooder?" he said.

"Give the guy a chance," I said. "He proved he has guts when it's needed. But he's helpless there in the study hall."

Sammy gave me a sour grin. "You and he should get along fine," he said. "And you'll need to. The guys aren't going to be chummy with a do-gooder like you."

It was a week before Mr. Warren's turn to run the study hour came around again. In that time I'd found that Sammy was right. I was being given the cold shoulder. Major Durand, who must have hated Mr. Warren for stealing the heroic spotlight from him, was giving me a hard time. One of the guys I knew well came to me.

"You're making a mistake," he told me. "He's a grown man and you're just a kid. If he can't take care of himself it's not your headache."

I don't like telling the next part of it, but it happened.

When Mr. Warren's night came again, the study hall was quiet enough for a while. Then came a belch. I looked up at Mr. Warren. He was smiling. Then someone waved one of those fake bloody handkerchiefs. Then, so help me, somebody let out a baying howl—like Teddy in the lake.

Mr. Warren knew what was happening now. He looked down at me, and there was an agonizing, wordless plea for help in his eyes. I—well, I looked away. I was fifteen. I didn't want to be called a do-gooder. I didn't want to be snubbed. Mr. Warren *was* a grown man and he should have been able to take care of himself. The boys weren't cruel: they were just high spirited—hadn't Mr. Warren himself said so?

I looked up from behind a book. Mr. Warren was standing, looking out over the room. His stooped, skinny shoulders were squared away. Two great tears ran down his pale cheeks. His last chance was played out.

Then he turned and walked out of the study hall.

No one ever saw him again. He must have gone straight to his room, thrown his meager belongings into the battered old suitcase, and taken off on foot into the night.

You see what I mean when I say it was a kind of murder?

And I was the murderer.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**AGATHA CHRISTIE**
TITLE:	***The $1,000,000 Bond Robbery***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Hercule Poirot
LOCALE:	London
TIME:	A generation ago
COMMENTS:	*"Curious," said Hercule Poirot, his eyes beginning to flicker with the greenish light Captain Hastings knew so well . . .*

WHAT A NUMBER OF BOND ROBberies there have been lately," I observed one morning, laying aside the newspaper. "Poirot, let us forsake the science of detection and take to crime instead!"

"You are on the—how do you say it?—get-rich-quick tack, eh, *mon ami?*"

"Well, look at this last coup—the million dollars' worth of Liberty Bonds which the London and Scottish Bank were sending to New York, and which disappeared in such a remarkable manner on board the *Olympia.*"

"If it were not for the *mal de mer,* and the difficulty of practicing the so excellent method of Laverguier for a longer time than the few hours of crossing the channel, I should delight to voyage myself on one of these big liners," murmured Poirot dreamily.

"Yes, indeed," I said enthusiastically. "Some of them must be perfect palaces; the swimming-baths, the lounges, the restaurant—really, it must be hard to believe that one is on the sea."

"Me, I always know when I am on the sea," said Poirot sadly. "And all those bagatelles that you enumerate, they say nothing to me; but, my friend, consider for a moment the geniuses that travel as it were incognito! On board these floating palaces, as you so justly call them, one would meet the *haute noblesse* of the criminal world!"

I laughed. "So that's the way your enthusiasm runs! You would have liked to cross swords with the man who stole the Liberty Bonds?"

The landlady interrupted us.

"A young lady as wants to see you, Mr. Poirot. Here's her card."

The card bore the inscription: Miss Esmée Farquhar, and Poirot, after diving under the table to retrieve a stray crumb, and putting it carefully in the wastepaper basket, nodded to the landlady to admit her.

In another minute one of the most charming girls I have ever seen was ushered into the room. She was about five-and-twenty, with big brown eyes and a perfect figure. She was well-dressed and perfectly composed in manner.

"Sit down, I beg of you, mademoiselle. This is my friend, Captain Hastings, who aids me in my little problems."

"I am afraid it is a big problem I have brought you today, Monsieur Poirot," said the girl, giving me a pleasant bow as she seated herself. "I dare say you have read about it in the papers. I am referring to the theft of Liberty Bonds on the *Olympia*."

Some astonishment must have shown itself in Poirot's face, for she continued quickly, "You are doubtless asking yourself what I have to do with a great institution like the London and Scottish Bank. In one sense nothing, in another sense everything. You see, Monsieur Poirot, I am engaged to Mr. Philip Ridgeway."

"Aha! and your Mr. Philip Ridgeway—"

"Was in charge of the bonds when they were stolen. Of course no actual blame can attach to him, it was not his fault in any way. Nevertheless, he is half distraught over the matter, and his uncle, I know, insists that he must carelessly have mentioned having them in his possession. It is a terrible set-back in his career."

"Who is his uncle?"

"Mr. Vavasour, joint general manager of the London and Scottish Bank."

"Suppose, Miss Farquhar, that you recount to me the whole story?"

"Very well. As you know, the Bank wished to extend their credits in America, and for this purpose decided to send over a million dollars in Liberty Bonds. Mr. Vavasour selected his nephew, who had occupied a position of trust in the Bank for many years and who was conversant with all the details of the Bank's dealings in New York, to make the trip. The *Olympia* sailed from Liverpool on the 23rd, and the bonds were handed over to Philip on the morning of that day by Mr. Vavasour and Mr. Shaw, the two joint general managers of the London and Scottish Bank. The bonds were counted, enclosed in a package, and sealed in Philip's pres-

ence, and he then locked the package at once in his portmanteau."

"A portmanteau with an ordinary lock?"

"No, Mr. Shaw insisted on a special lock being fitted to it by Hubbs's. Philip, as I say, placed the package at the bottom of the trunk. It was stolen just a few hours before reaching New York. A rigorous search of the whole ship was made, but without result. The bonds seemed literally to have vanished into thin air."

Poirot made a grimace. "But they did not vanish absolutely, since I gather that they were sold in small parcels within half an hour of the docking of the *Olympia!* Well, undoubtedly the next thing is for me to see Mr. Ridgeway."

"I was about to suggest that you should lunch with me at the Cheshire Cheese. Philip will be there. He is meeting me, but does not yet know that I have been consulting you on his behalf."

We agreed to this suggestion readily enough, and drove there in a taxi.

Mr. Philip Ridgeway was there before us, and looked somewhat surprised to see his fiancée arriving with two complete strangers. He was a nice-looking young fellow, tall and spruce, with a touch of graying hair at the temples, though he could not have been much over thirty.

Miss Farquhar went up to him and laid her hand on his arm.

"You must forgive my acting without consulting you, Philip," she said. "Let me introduce you to Monsieur Hercule Poirot, of whom you must often have heard, and his friend, Captain Hastings."

Ridgeway looked astonished. "Of course I have heard of you, Monsieur Poirot," he said, as he shook hands. "But I had no idea that Esmée was thinking of consulting you about my troubles."

"I was afraid you would not let me do it, Philip," said Miss Farquhar.

"So you took care to be on the safe side," he observed with a smile. "I hope Monsieur Poirot will be able to throw some light on this extraordinary puzzle, for I confess frankly that I am nearly out of my mind with anxiety."

Indeed, his face looked drawn and haggard and showed only too clearly the strain under which he was laboring.

"Well, well," said Poirot. "Let us lunch, and over lunch we will put our heads together and see what can be done. I want to hear Mr. Ridgeway's story from his own lips."

While we ate the excellent steak and kidney pudding of the establishment, Philip Ridgeway narrated the circumstances leading to the disappearance of the bonds. His story agreed with Miss Farquhar's in every particular. When he had finished, Poirot took up the thread with a question.

"What exactly led you to discover that the bonds had been stolen, Mr. Ridgeway?"

He laughed rather bitterly. "The thing stared me in the face, Monsieur Poirot. I couldn't have missed it. My cabin trunk was half out from under the bunk and all scratched and cut about where they'd tried to force the lock."

"But I understood that it had been opened with a key?"

"That's so. They tried to force it, but couldn't. And, in the end, they must have got it unlocked somehow or other."

"Curious," said Hercule Poirot, his eyes beginning to flicker with the green light I knew so well. "Very curious! They waste much, much time trying to prise it open, and then—*sapristi!* they find that they have the key all the time—for each of Hubbs's locks are unique."

"That's just why they couldn't have had the key. It never left me day or night."

"You are sure of that?"

"I can swear to it, and besides, if they had had the key or a duplicate, why should they waste time trying to force an obviously unforceable lock?"

"Ah, there is exactly the question we are asking ourselves! I venture to prophesy that the solution, if we ever find it, will hinge on that curious fact. I beg of you not to assault me if I ask you one more question: *Are you perfectly certain you did not leave the trunk unlocked?"*

Philip Ridgeway merely looked at him, and Poirot gesticulated apologetically.

"Ah, but these things can happen, I assure you! Very well, the bonds were stolen from the trunk. What did the thief do with them? How did he manage to get ashore with them?"

"That's just it," cried Ridgeway. "How? Word was passed to the Customs authorities, and every soul that left the ship was gone over with a fine-tooth comb!"

"And the bonds, I gather, made a bulky package?"

"Certainly they did. They could hardly have been left hidden on board—we know they were offered for sale within half an hour of the *Olympia's* arrival, long before I got the cables going and the numbers sent out. One broker swears he bought some of them even before the *Olympia* got in. But you can't send bonds by wireless."

"Not by wireless, but did not a tug come alongside?"

"Only the official ones, and that was after the alarm was given when everyone was on the lookout. My God, Monsieur Poirot, this thing will drive me mad! People are beginning to say I stole them myself."

"But you also were searched on landing, weren't you?" asked Poirot gently.

"Yes."

The young man stared at him in a puzzled manner.

"You do not catch my meaning,

I see," said Poirot, smiling enigmatically. "Now I should like to make a few inquiries at the Bank."

Ridgeway produced a card and scribbled a few words on it. "Send this in and my uncle will see you."

Poirot thanked him, bade farewell to Miss Farquhar, and together we started out for Threadneedle Street and the head office of the London and Scottish Bank. On production of Ridgeway's card, we were led through the labyrinth of counters and desks, skirting paying-in clerks and paying-out clerks, and up to a small office on the first floor where the joint general managers received us.

They were two serious-looking gentlemen, who had grown gray in the service of the Bank. Mr. Vavasour had a short white beard, Mr. Shaw was clean-shaven.

"I understand you are strictly a private inquiry agent?" said Mr. Vavasour. "Quite so, quite so. We have of course, placed ourselves in the hands of Scotland Yard. Inspector McNeil has charge of the case. A very able officer, I believe."

"I am sure of it," said Poirot politely. "You will permit a few questions, on your nephew's behalf? About this lock—who ordered it from Hubbs's?"

"I ordered it myself," said Mr. Shaw. "I would not trust to any clerk in the matter. As to the keys, Mr. Ridgeway had one, and the other two are held by my colleague and myself."

"And no clerk has had access to them?"

Mr. Shaw turned inquiringly to Mr. Vavasour.

"I think I am correct in saying that they have remained in the safe where we placed them on the 23rd," said Mr. Vavasour. "My colleague was unfortunately taken ill—in fact, on the very day that Philip left us. He has only just recovered."

"Severe bronchitis is no joke to a man of my age," said Mr. Shaw ruefully. "But I am afraid Mr. Vavasour has suffered from the hard work entailed by my absence, especially with this unexpected worry coming on top of everything."

Poirot asked a few more questions. I judged that he was endeavoring to gauge the exact amount of intimacy between uncle and nephew. Mr. Vavasour's answers were brief and punctilious. His nephew was a trusted official of the Bank, and had no debts or money difficulties that he knew of. He had been entrusted with similar missions in the past. Finally we were politely bowed out.

"I am disappointed," said Poirot, as we emerged into the street.

"You hoped to discover more? They are such stodgy old men."

"It is not their stodginess which disappoints me, *mon ami*. I do not expect to find in a Bank manager a 'keen financier with an eagle glance'—as your favorite works of fiction put it. No, I am disappointed in the case—it is too easy!"

"*Easy?*"

"Yes, do you not find it almost childishly simple?"

"You know who stole the bonds?"

"I do."

"But then—we must—why—"

"Do not confuse and fluster yourself, Hastings. We are not going to do anything at present."

"But why? What are you waiting for?"

"For the *Olympia*. She is due on her return trip from New York on Tuesday."

"But if you know who stole the bonds, why wait? He may escape."

"To a South Sea island where there is no extradition? No, *mon ami,* he would find life very uncongenial there. As to why I wait—*eh bien,* to the intelligence of Hercule Poirot the case is perfectly clear, but for the benefit of others, not so greatly gifted by the good God—the Inspector McNeil, for instance—it would be as well to make a few inquiries to confirm the facts."

"Good Lord, Poirot! Do you know, I'd give a considerable sum of money to see you make a thorough ass of yourself—just for once. You're so confoundedly conceited!"

"Do not enrage yourself Hastings. In verity, I observe that there are times when you almost detest me! Alas, I suffer the penalties of greatness!"

The little man puffed out his chest, and sighed so comically that I was forced to laugh.

Tuesday saw us speeding to Liverpool in a first-class carriage of the L. & N. W. R. Poirot had obstinately refused to enlighten me as to his suspicions—or certainties. He contented himself with expressing surprise that I, too, was not equally *au fait* with the situation. I disdained to argue, and intrenched my curiosity behind a rampart of pretended indifference.

Once arrived at the quay alongside which lay the big transatlantic liner, Poirot became brisk and alert. Our proceedings consisted in interviewing four successive stewards and inquiring after a friend of Poirot's who had crossed to New York on the 23rd.

"An elderly gentleman, wearing glasses. An invalid—he hardly moved out of his cabin."

The description appeared to tally with a Mr. Ventnor who had occupied the cabin C24 which was next to that of Philip Ridgeway. Although unable to see how Poirot had deduced Mr. Ventnor's existence and personal appearance, I was keenly excited.

"Tell me," I asked, "was this gentleman one of the first to land when you got to New York?"

The steward shook his head. "No, indeed, sir, he was one of the last off the boat."

I retired crestfallen, and observed Poirot grinning at me. He thanked the steward, a note changed hands, and we took our departure.

"It's all very well," I remarked heatedly, "but that last answer must

have damped your precious theory, grin as you please!"

"As usual, you see nothing, Hastings. That last answer is, on the contrary, the coping-stone of my theory."

I flung up my hands in despair.

When we were in the train, speeding toward London, Poirot wrote busily for a few minutes, sealing up the result in an envelope.

"This is for the good Inspector McNeil. We will leave it at Scotland Yard in passing, and then go to the Rendezvous Restaurant, where I have asked Miss Esmée Farquhar to do us the honor of dining with us."

"What about Ridgeway?"

"What about him?" asked Poirot with a twinkle.

"Why, you surely don't think—you can't—"

"The habit of incoherence is growing upon you, Hastings. As a matter of fact I *did* think. If Ridgeway had been the thief, which was perfectly possible, the case would have been charming—a piece of neat methodical work."

"But not so charming for Miss Farquhar."

"Possibly you are right. Therefore all is for the best. Now, Hastings, let us review the case. I can see that you are dying to do so. The sealed package is removed from the trunk and vanishes, as Miss Farquhar puts it, into thin air. We will dismiss the thin air theory, which is not practicable at the present stage of science, and consider what is likely to have become of it. Everyone asserts the incredibility of its being smuggled ashore—"

"Yes, but we know—"

"*You* may know, Hastings. I do not. I take the view that, since it seemed incredible, it *was* incredible. Two possibilities remain: it was hidden on board—also rather difficult—or it was thrown overboard."

"With a cork on it, do you mean?"

"Without a cork."

I stared. "But if the bonds were thrown overboard, they couldn't have been sold in New York."

"I admire your logical mind, Hastings. The bonds were sold in New York, therefore they were not thrown overboard. You see where that leads us?"

"Where we were when we started."

"*Jamais de la vie!* If the package was thrown overboard, and the bonds were sold in New York, the package could not have contained the bonds. Is there any evidence that the package *did* contain the bonds? Remember, Mr. Ridgeway never opened it from the time it was placed in his hands in London."

"Yes, but then—"

Poirot waved an impatient hand.

"Permit me to continue. The last moment that the bonds are seen as bonds is in the office of the London and Scottish Bank on the morning

of the 23rd. They reappear in New York half an hour after the *Olympia* gets in, and according to one man, whom nobody listens to, actually *before* the liner gets in. Supposing then, that they have never been on the *Olympia* at all? Is there any other way they could get to New York? Yes. The *Gigantic* leaves Southampton on the same day as the *Olympia,* and she holds the record for the Atlantic. Mailed by the *Gigantic,* the bonds would be in New York the day before the *Olympia* arrived.

"So all is clear, the case begins to explain itself. The sealed packet is only a dummy, and the moment of its substitution must be in the office in the Bank. It would be an easy matter for any of the three men present to have prepared a duplicate package which could be substituted for the genuine one. *Trés bien,* the bonds are mailed to a confederate in New York on the faster boat, with instructions to sell as soon as the *Olympia* is in; but someone must travel on the *Olympia* to engineer the supposed moment of the robbery."

"But why?"

"Because if Ridgeway merely opens the packet and finds it a dummy, suspicion flies at once back to London! No, the man on board in the cabin next door does his work, *pretends* to force the lock in an obvious manner so as to draw immediate attention to the theft, really unlocks the trunk with a duplicate key, throws the package overboard and waits until the last to leave the boat. Naturally he wears glasses to conceal his eyes, and is an invalid since he does not want to leave his cabin and run the risk of meeting Ridgeway. He steps ashore in New York and returns by the first boat available."

"But who—which was he?"

"The man who had a duplicate key, the man who ordered the lock, the man who has *not* been severely ill with bronchitis at his home in the country—*enfin,* that 'stodgy' old man, Mr. Shaw! There are criminals in high places sometimes, my friend. Ah, here we are. Mademoiselle, I have succeeded! You permit?"

And, beaming, Hercule Poirot kissed the astonished girl lightly on both cheeks!

a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **FREDERICK NEBEL**

TITLE: ***Needle in a Haystack***

TYPE: Detective Story

LOCALE: Ocean Cliffs, California

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *What the man with the hoarse voice said to Dade Miller on the phone was enough to terrify Dade's wife, enough to make another man pack up and leave in a hurry . . . but Dade wouldn't quit.*

THE TROUBLE STARTED ABOUT three months after Dade and Jessie Miller had settled in Ocean Cliffs, a busy town of 12,000 on the California coast. It was started by a write-up about them, with pictures, in *The Newcomers' Corner,* a regular feature of the local weekly.

The write-up appeared on a Thursday. It gave human-interest details about their past. It told how long the Millers had been married—five years, most of them spent knocking around the West, wherever Dade's job with a big construction company had taken him. It described the old house, the first one they had ever owned, on Shoal Point. It mentioned the land-survey office that Dade had opened in the Coastway Building, and observed that he was a wiry, good-humored young man of 30. His wife, it reported, was 26, brown-eyed, and vivacious, and was already showing her interest in community affairs by giving one afternoon a week to the Thrift Shop.

The following Sunday afternoon, at four, the telephone rang. Dade was in the kitchen starting water for instant coffee and Jessie was painting a window sash on the front porch. Dade strode to the living room and took the call.

"Mr. Dade Miller?" a hoarse voice asked.

"That's right," Dade said.

"Mr. Miller, I'm looking at your picture in the local paper right now. I recognize you from some years back. You would recognize me. And that makes it a serious mutual problem. I was pretty lucky not running into you these past three months. But I don't want to push my luck."

Dade rolled his eyes toward the ceiling and shook his head. He wondered if he had some mixed-up drunk on the line. He said patiently, "Look, mister, fun is fun, but I've got some painting to finish up —"

"On the house out there? Mr. Miller, you're wasting your time. I'm being fair in telling you that. Because I'm going to have to ask you to get out of that house. I'm going to have to ask you to close down your business. I'm going to have to ask you to clear out of Ocean Cliffs."

"Okay," Dade said, winking at Jessie as she came in from the porch. "It'll all be taken care of promptly tomorrow."

"Mr. Miller, you're making a joke of it."

"How'd you guess? Now let's call it a day—"

The hoarse voice hardened. "Don't joke! I've got too big a stake in this town to get out. I've got nothing against you personally. But you've got to go. I expect to read in the next issue of the Ocean Cliffs *News* that you've put your house up for sale, closed your business, and are moving out—for good."

"And if I don't?" Dade said lightly, and he shrugged at Jessie's look of humorous inquiry. He wasn't listening too closely.

"Mr. Miller, you're making it hard for me. It says here in the paper that in 1956 you married a nice young girl from Beaumont, Missouri. From her picture she's a very striking young woman, and I'm sure you wouldn't want her—"

"Now just a minute," Dade cut in, as the kettle whistled and Jessie ran to the kitchen. "Don't you go threatening my wife."

"You didn't let me finish. Why should I threaten your wife? She doesn't know me. You do. I started to say that I'm sure you wouldn't want her to be a widow. I was going to suggest that you might make a go of your business back in her home town, among friends."

Dade said, "And I suggest you're either drunk or nuts."

"I'm neither, Mr. Miller. I'm a murderer. So I have no choice. You either get out or you get killed. Goodbye."

Hanging up, Dade gave a jerky, incredulous laugh. "Nuts! Absolutely nuts!" He kept glancing at the phone in pop-eyed fascination.

"Coffee's ready," Jessie called from the kitchen; and as he joined her, "What was all that about, hon?"

He said with mocking and casual contempt, "Oh, some kook proba-

bly trying to kill a dull Sunday afternoon." He flapped a hand at her. "Skip it. Any cookies?"

She took a jar down from a shelf above the counter. "But what was it all about?"

He grinned. "How do you expect me to remember a mixed-up jumble of nonsense?" But he found himself trying to remember it, but some of it had gone in one ear and out the other. "Let's drink up," he said, "and get back on the job. I've got another hour up on the ladder."

She sipped her coffee. "But who was it?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. Probably a wrong number. There are other Millers in town."

But not another Dade.

For some vague reason he didn't want to tell her about the threat. It might not come out the same the second time around. He tried to think of it as a bad practical joke, and that reminded him of something. He said, aware of her level, curious gaze, "Remember that time in Casper, Wyoming? Who was it —Harry Stutz? He phoned you and said I was in jail, dead drunk, and you'd better come down and bail me out. He was some joker. This one," he said, nodding toward the phone in the living room, "doesn't like someone named Miller and wants to punch him in the nose. Lot of gibberish. You know."

He finished his coffee, burning his tongue, ended weakly with "Well," and went outside.

Up on the ladder later, he paused now and then in his painting and stared into space. He tried to concentrate on the telephone conversation, but the only part that stuck in his mind clearly, sharply, almost word for word, was the end. *I'm a murderer. So I have no choice. You either get out or you get killed.*

He wished he had been more attentive. He was nagged by the thought that he had missed or forgotten something significant. He saw Jessie peering up at him with peculiar intensity and made a great show of stirring the paint in his bucket.

They quit at five. "How about a swim?" Dade said. But Jessie, preoccupied, said they were going to have hashed-brown potatoes and she wanted to get them ready.

He put on his trunks and trotted down the switchback path. There was no sand below, just a patch of coarse shingle and a tumble of boulders. Few people came here.

Swimming around, Dade thought how lonely their house looked at the end of the point. But that was one of the reasons they had bought it. And they had put a lot of work into it with their own hands—scraping and painting, a new porch floor, a new roof. They still owed for some of the materials. Then there were the mortgage payments, insurance, the installments on half the furniture and all the kitchen appliances. There was the office rent. There was the two-man payroll.

Why did a crazy, crackpot telephone call make him think of all these things?

"Damn fool!" he said, meaning himself. He was doing fine. He had chosen Ocean Cliffs because it had doubled its population in the past five years. There was no competition. He had started with one man, Earl Johnson, and had taken on another, Ted Coombs, a month later. There was a new zoning map to get out. There was a big acreage survey in Bent Knee Canyon. There was a two-mile right-of-way for a utility company. There were other jobs—storm drains, grading, site improvements. And now some croak-voiced idiot was trying to—

He saw Jessie on the porch steps with Earl Johnson. By the way she stood, quite still, with her arms folded, he knew that she was giving Earl her fixed and silent attention.

He began swimming in, watching Earl's excited gestures—pointing, making a fist, tossing his head. For all his burly bigness Earl Johnson was pretty emotional and it didn't have to be anything important to set him off. But climbing the path, shaking the wet from his hands, Dade felt a creeping uneasiness.

"Hi, Earl," he said, unable to suppress a smile at the big man's red-faced, puffing agitation. "You look real shook up,"

"Who wouldn't be?" Earl bellowed. "Like I told Jessie, this guy with the frog voice phones about half and hour ago and—"

"Oh, that," Dade said offhand, nodding. "He phoned here too. I told Jessie." Being casual was Dade's way of hiding his emotions.

"But you didn't," Jessie said, her arms still folded, "tell me all of it. You didn't tell me that he threatened to kill you."

Dade groaned inwardly. He felt like blowing his top at Earl but he took a breath and tried to keep his thinking on a sane, sensible level. He said, "Take it easy, Earl. Threatening is one thing, doing is another. You'll see me around here for a long time. How about a drink?"

"Damn it," Jessie said, her color high, "will you stop being so casual about it? You're not fooling anybody. I thought there was something wrong after you got that phone call. You were altogether too bouncy and chipper. And up on the ladder you were in a daydream half the time. Dade, this is serious."

"No kidding," Earl said, scrubbing the few hairs on his head. "The guy sounded like a real far-out creep. I know you don't get upset easy, but for Pete's sake don't laugh this off. Believe it or not, I'm not thinking of myself alone—"

"What do you mean?" Dade said.

Earl stamped his foot in mottled embarrassment, but Jessie said, "He means what the man told him. Anyone working with you might get killed by accident. You stop working. You stop everything. Or else.

That's what the man told him." Her voice had tightened; it was almost harsh, but her eyes were filling. "Dade, you can't start that Bent Knee Canyon survey tomorrow. It's too remote. You just can't!"

"We'd be sitting ducks," Earl said. "A ridge road on one side, a ridge road on the other, and us down below. A man with a rifle—"

"Earl," Dade said softly, "just be quiet, will you?" He glanced at Jessie, saw her brimming eyes and her stiffened lips. He pretended not to notice. "Let's sleep on it," he said. "I'm going to take a shower. See you in the morning, Earl."

He used the outside shower, heard Earl drive off, and then he went into the bathroom to shave. When he came out, wrapped in a white terry-cloth robe, Jessie said, "Ted Coombs just called. The man phoned him too." She stared straight ahead, unseeing.

Dade mixed two highballs in the kitchen, carried them into the living room, and handed her one. Could there really be a plan shaping up? Scare his men off, stop his work dead in its tracks? Stop his income? Put him out of business, unless he closed up first of his own free will? He needed both men for field work.

Jessie said, "Ted doesn't think that under the circumstances he wants to work out in Bent Knee Canyon."

"Earl doesn't either, I imagine." He thinned his lips.

"You can't blame them, hon."

"I don't. For wages? Certainly not. But the office stays open and I work in it. There's a lot of paper work to catch up on, and that means income when I finish it. Sit down and enjoy your drink, honey."

"Dade," she said, her eyes grave, "you'd better get dressed."

"After I finish my drink. Sit down, will you? Don't keep straightening those pictures. They're perfectly straight."

"I mean," she said, "after Ted called—well—I phoned the police. They'll be right out."

He looked at her without expression.

Her voice hit a pitch of desperation: "All right, all right—be angry with me! But I'm scared—scared stiff. What does all this matter—this house, our own things around us, everything I've ever wanted—what does it all matter if—if your life—"

"I hope the next time Earl Johnson opens his mouth he chokes."

"You didn't wait for him to finish. You didn't wait for him to tell you what he told me after you stalked off. I hate to think of it. I hate even to repeat it. But when Ted said the same thing—" She broke off, her eyes pleading with him. "Dade, the same kind of thing happened here three years ago. And the man was killed—murdered!"

She was shaking and he wanted to get up and put his arms around her. But he knew if he did that it would shake her up even more and

she would burst into tears. He didn't want tears. He was aware of a compelling need, almost an animal instinct, to remain detached from emotional involvement.

"Okay," he said, "I'll get dressed," and on his way to the bedroom gave her a slap on the backside. "Phone Earl and Ted. Tell 'em to take some time off."

He realized now that he had known the instant the man on the phone hung up that it was bad news. Not a drunken maundering. Not the wrong Miller. Not a bad practical joke. And again the frustrating thought nagged him: something significant, something important, had skimmed past his intermittent attention. His throat felt dry.

He was standing out by the gate, smoking a pipe, his hands in his pockets, when the police car arrived. A uniformed officer remained behind the wheel and a hatless man in a gray suit got out on the other side, said his name was Frank Olds, and shook his head morosely. His head was bald down the middle.

"This sounds like one of those needle-in-a-haystack bits," he said, pulling at his long nose. "Your wife briefed me on the phone and I called the men who work for you and they filled me in too. You get out of town or get knocked off, is that it?"

"That's what the man says. I understand that's what he said three years ago." Jessie came out and stood beside him.

Olds nodded. "Only we didn't know about it until after the killing. I took a quick look at the files. This Jack Broderick was a kind of reckless, free-wheeling character—an auto-body and fender man. He'd worked at his trade pretty much all over the country. He hired a pal from L.A. in the same line of work and opened a shop back of the bus station. The other fellow's name was Clyde Redmond. They not only worked together, they ran around together—girls, fishing, swimming, thinks like that. When this guy with the croaking voice phoned Broderick and gave him the get-out-of-town-or-else rigmarole, Broderick not only told him to go soak his head, he never even mentioned it. Until afterwards."

"Afterwords?" Dade said. "I thought he was murdered."

Olds shook his head. "The guy's a lousy shot. Or Broderick moved—or Redmond. Anyhow, it was Redmond who got it. They were surfcasting at Sandpiper Cove, a lonely spot the north end of town. They sat down together to drink a can of beer. There's a hundred-foot bluff sheer up from the cove. Redmond got the bullet from there and two kids playing in the surf saw him fall against Broderick. And Broderick got the message—he left town."

Dade glanced at Jessie. The color had drained from her face and

she gazed at Olds in a kind of disbelieving consternation. "Can't you do something?" she demanded. "If he phones here again, can't you have the call traced?"

"Sometimes yes, sometimes no," Olds said. "Besides, he'd anticipate that. You see, ma'm, he phoned Broderick only once. Once. He's not a kook or a psycho, I don't think he *wanted* to kill Broderick any more than he wants to kill your husband. I think he's just a very desperate man with an awful lot at stake in Ocean Cliffs. I'm sure he'd much rather your husband would get out of town."

"So would you, wouldn't you?" Dade said with gentle irony.

Olds said, "Just let's say I'd feel a lot easier."

"I guess we're all going to have to feel a little uneasy for a while." Dade told him softly. "We've got a stake here too."

"That's my husband," Jessie said in a bleak small voice. Her lips quivered and all at once she turned and ran inside.

"Well, it's your neck," Olds said. "Try to make like a fast-moving target as much as you can. And I'm going to ask you to do what I asked Broderick. Write down the name of every man you've known well enough that you'd think he'd remember you—and where you knew him. We still have Broderick's list. We'll cross-check. If the same name shows up on both lists we might have something." He looked around and shook his head gloomily. "You people sure picked a lonely spot. We'll cover it the best we can. And the voice you heard today doesn't ring a bell?"

"Not even a little bell."

Olds nodded. "It figures. He disguised it. Broderick couldn't recall it from anywhere, either. So we spent months checking out his list of names—law-enforcement agencies all over—but no dice. Maybe he couldn't remember everybody. But see how you do, huh?" He looked over his shoulder as a car drove up. "The press," he said.

Next morning an L.A. *Post-Express* column head said: *VOICE OF DOOM AGAIN THREATENS.* Radio and TV carried the story against a background of the Broderick case. Their representatives crowded Dade's office seeking more details, and left with his firm statement that he had no intention whatever of leaving Ocean Cliffs.

Tom Winter, the maintenance man, came in and offered Dade the use of a shotgun. Mrs. Winter, his wife, phoned down from the fifth floor; she was secretary to Lincoln Conrad, the owner of the building, and Mr. Conrad wondered if Mr. Miller had adequate police protection. Out at the house, Dade said, and while he was on the road.

Then he went up to the third floor and told Harry Bishop, a building contractor, that there'd be some delay on the Bent Knee Canyon sur-

vey; he didn't have the men. At noon he gave Olds a list of names. None of the names checked with Broderick's list.

That night, late, he got out of bed and looked for Jessie. She was in the kitchen, crying. When she looked at him she cried harder and almost became hysterical. He sat holding her for a while, like a child. In the morning she was grave and composed—and grim. It wouldn't be fun, he thought, but she'd weather it.

By Thursday he was sure she would. And then the bomb scare hit the Coastway Building—an anonymous tip telephoned to a radio station Thursday afternoon. A hoax, the station announced, after the police searched Dade's office.

Next morning Conrad telephoned him to come up. Dade took the elevator to Conrad's suite on the top floor, and Mrs. Winter passed him right in.

"First off," Conrad said, "let me say how sorry I am about the mess you're in." He doodled for a moment on a pad, as if reluctant to go on. He was a thin, quiet-spoken man, with a long face, flat temples, and gray brush-cut hair. "The thing is, that radio broadcast yesterday put a bomb scare into some of the building's tenants. Would it be possible for you to—well, to close your office till this thing blows over?"

"It means an awful lot to me, Mr. Conrad, to keep it open."

Conrad nodded. "I can understand that. Believe me, I was glad to see you open shop here. I've been more than satisfied with the surveying you've done for me, and I certainly hope to have you do some more. But I have to consider the other tenants."

You just can't win, Dade thought, peering out the window. He watched a truck pass through the alley below. He squinted at the back of the Terminal Hotel; at the blank back wall of the bus station; through an opened skylight of a one-storied brick building at a man using a potter's wheel; along the alley to the drug store on the corner. Business as usual. Except his own.

For a moment angry resentment needled him. Earl Johnson and Ted Coombs had chickened out, and now some jittery tenants—but he caught himself, holding his breath. They were right. They knew what had happened three years before. And Earl had a wife and two kids.

"All right," he said quietly. "I'll move what I need out to the house." He tried to salvage some small benefit. "Maybe my wife will like it better that way." After the bomb scare she had begged him not to open the office again. "She's scared stiff when I'm away from home." She had been rigid when he left that morning.

"As a bachelor, I envy you her concern. I had the pleasure of chatting with her one day in the Thrift Shop but didn't know she was your

wife until I saw her picture in the paper." Conrad turned to the intercom. "As of today, Mr. Miller's office will be closed until further notice. Put an appropriate sign on the door, Mrs. Winter." He turned back to Dade. "If you have any heavy stuff to move, Tom Winter can help you with the pickup truck after five."

"I'd appreciate that," Dade said. "I'll like to move out my file cabinet, and it's pretty heavy. Otherwise, I'll be out of the office by noon." His grin was a little haggard. "But I'll be back," he said, and turned and opened the door to Mrs. Winter's office.

"It's just dreadful," she said, her eyes troubled in her gaunt, leathery face. "Be careful, Mr. Miller. And you really ought to let your wife know where you are. She just phoned here when she couldn't get your office. She said to phone Frank Olds."

He thanked her, walked down one flight to the fourth floor, and entered Walter Small's office. Small was a public accountant whom Dade used for bookkeeping and taxes, and he wanted Small to know he was moving out for the time being. He paused for a moment at the window, to watch the potter at his wheel in the building below, then left. Back in his office, he rang Olds.

Olds said, "We're getting help from the sheriff's office. Investigators and deputies around the clock. There's a deputy out at your house right now. You might say we're set for a long siege."

"I feel sunk," Dade said. "Some tenants have been spooked by the bomb scare and I've been asked to get out."

"Understandable," Olds said. "It was a rifle last time, but it doesn't have to be this time. Ring when you're ready to leave and we'll have a car escort you home."

Dade loaded up in the alley back of the office building. He went up to the corner drug store, bought a can of pipe tobacco, and looked around for something to take Jessie. Then he thought of the pottery place and stopped there on the way down the alley. He bought a small ceramic vase. The air coming through the opened skylight was cool. A girl he knew casually was smoking a cigarette at a window in the office building. He waved and she waved back.

The potter grinned. "Flirt with the office help and I'll be getting complaints. Of course, Jack Broderick sang too, at the top of his lungs. He'd belt it out right through that skylight."

"Jack Broderick?" Dade said, his voice rising. "You mean this was his auto-body shop?"

The potter nodded. "And I was in that hole-in-the-wall across the alley. Jack had a year's lease here, and the complaints just made him flirt more and sing louder. The owner tried to break the lease, but

Jack was cute enough to ask where it said he couldn't flirt or sing. There was no other shop in town available. Poor Mrs. Winter!"

"Mrs. Winter?"

"Yes," the potter said. "The owner."

Dade headed back toward his office to pick up his field book, brief case, and odds and ends of papers. He was disturbed, but in a vague, dreamlike way that made no sense in reality. It was as if an intuitive whisper of danger had stirred somewhere remotely back in his mind. He felt an urgent need to be alert, watchful, as he entered the back door of the office building. He found Mrs. Winter thumbtacking a *Closed* sign to his door.

She said, "This will make those tenants feel better, I'm sure. I hope you've no hard feelings, Mr. Miller."

"None at all," he said. "If you'll tell me who complained I'll go around and reassure them."

"I really don't know. They complained to Mr. Conrad."

A strange wariness made him choose his words carefully and fit them to a deliberate offhand manner. "Probably chronic complainers," he shrugged. "Probably the same ones who complained about Jack Broderick's singing and flirting."

"I really don't remember, Mr. Miller. I own that little building, you know—and I had quite a time with Mr. Broderick. He was noisy and loud and fresh—and a bully. He even bullied his friend, that quiet Mr. Redmond, and laughed at his nearsightedness. And then poor Mr. Redmond was murdered instead of him. Just like a bully to have all the luck. Mr. Conrad told him so to his face the day he brought me the shop keys, the day he left town." She touched Dade's arm and her leathery face softened. "The Lord watch over you, Mr. Miller. And Mrs. Miller. I had such a nice talk with her when she phoned and I hope to meet her some day."

Touched by her sympathetic concern, he watched her walk away and for a few moments he lost the thread of his strange wariness. But it came back to him as he shoved his field book and papers into the brief case. He felt as if the building crouched above him, watching, waiting.

Was he too close for somebody's comfort? Had Broderick, perhaps recognized through the skylight from an office window, been too close? Had the complaints about the singing and flirting been a blind, a dodge, a desperate man's device to put Broderick out of business and out of town?

Dade shook his head against his quickened pulse, rejecting the pat and easy answer. He had been a tenant in the building for three months. Day after day he had seen the same faces—in the corridor, the elevator, the cafeteria, the adjoining

parking lot. Besides, it was the write-up in the local paper that had started it all. He was appalled at how he had almost gone off half-cocked.

When he got home Jessie put on a display of indignation over the closing of the office, but his gently mocking smile made her blush and she threw her arms around him. "All right," she said, "I'm glad. I'm a silly woman, but I want my husband near me. And you were sweet and thoughtful to bring me the pretty vase." She looked up at him. "Mrs. Winter thinks you're a very brave man."

"Just stupid, maybe," he said, feeling discouraged at the prospect of waiting days, weeks, perhaps months, for something to break. "H'm?" he said, blinking, missing something she had said.

"Oh, nothing. I was just saying she's probably the first person I've heard out here pronounce the name of my old home town the way it should be. She wondered, with all this, if I was sorry I'd ever left. How could I be? If I hadn't left Beaumont, I'd never have met a certain handsome young engineer—"

"Well, enough of that," Dade said, and carried his brief case into the spare bedroom.

And then it came to him, rising slowly in his consciousness, unfolding, expanding, crowding his throat and roaring in his ears.

He remembered.

He remembered the hoarse, croaking voice on the telephone. He remembered the part he had forgotten.

And all at once—explosively—his vagaries about the skylight and Broderick and the office building made sense.

They made even more sense, two hours later, when he walked into Frank Old's office. Hot and sweaty, keyed up, he said, "You didn't find anything by checking back on Broderick. I don't think you'll find anything by checking back on me."

"I'm not too hopeful," Olds admitted. "But we've got to try."

Dade said, tight-lipped, "I don't think Broderick was ever meant to be killed. The threat against him was just a trick to lead the investigation up a blind alley. He brought Clyde Redmond to town with him. If he'd left Redmond would have left with him. He didn't leave. Redmond was killed. It was Redmond who was meant to be killed." His lips were dry and he licked them. "And now it's my wife—not me—"

"It tempts me," Olds said, "except for one thing. But go on."

Dade took a slip of paper from his shirt pocket and put it on the desk. "Pronounce that word," he said.

"Beaumont? You mean Beaumont, Texas?"

"That's the way ten people I've asked this afternoon pronounced it—the first syllable like *bo*. But not"—he shook his head—"back in

Beaumont, Missouri, my wife's home town. Back there, Mr. Olds, the first syllable's like in *beau*tiful." He leaned halfway across the desk. "Mrs. Tom Winter is the first person my wife's heard who pronounced it the right way since she left home seven years ago. It's the way the person who threatened me on the phone pronounced it. You'd have to come from there, or near there, to say it that way."

"Oh, come now," Olds pleaded, holding up his hands. "Annie Winter? She's lived here all her life."

"Her present husband hasn't," Dade told him. "Being a stranger in town, I didn't know that until I phoned Earl Johnson. Tom Winter came here about five years ago and they were married four years ago. And I didn't know that Walter Small, the accountant, is her son-in-law, and that he came to town four years ago. I didn't know that Harry Bishop left here in the early Fifties and was gone for three years. You know who Harry Bishop is, don't you?"

Olds nodded. "Building contractor. Son by her first husband."

"And what have they all got in common?" Dade said. "Offices in the Coastway Building. Close to Broderick's shop—to Redmond. Close to me—with always the chance my wife might stop by. And all of them related to Mrs. Winter. Did she," he asked grimly, "learn to pronounce Beaumont that way from one of them?"

"Well," Olds said, spreading his palms, "why didn't you ask her?"

Dade's wariness, almost a hunted look, showed in his eyes. His voice tightened when he said, "Mr. Olds, I just can't trust anybody—not even Mrs. Winter. How do I know what she knows? How can I be sure that if I ask her I won't arouse her suspicions?" He pointed to the door. "If I'm right, if it's one of them, my wife can make the identification. She's with the desk sergeant. The deputy drove us in. Let her have a look at Small and Bishop and Tom Winter."

"You're pushing me," Olds said, but then he sighed and stood up. "But it tempts me." He shrugged. "Let's go."

They all drove over in the deputy's car. As they entered the building Dade put his arm protectively around Jessie and kept looking every which way with a fierce and wary alertness. The thought blared at him again and again that the answer must be here in this building. In a flash of vindictive resentment he ripped the *Closed* sign from his office door, unlocked it, and led the way in. He kicked the door shut with a bang.

"Hon," Jessie said, grave and bewildered, "I've never seen you like this."

Olds said, "He's sure hot as a pistol. But I guess it's not every day a man figures his wife's being set up for a kill. Okay, Mr. Miller, go ask them to come in here. Give 'em

some hanky-panky. Say I'm investigating the bomb scare."

Dade wheeled and was reaching for the knob when the door opened sharply a matter of two feet and remained there at the end of Lincoln Conrad's extended arm. "Mr. Miller," Conrad said, his eyes angry, "I passed here on my way to the bank half an hour ago. The *Closed* sign was on the door. Now it's not. And you're in your office. I thought we agreed—"

"We agreed, Mr. Conrad. Now if you'll please move—"

"Mr. Conrad?" Jessie said, moving to take hold of Dade's arm.

Dade said, "Damn it, Jessie, let go!"

But then he saw the anger in Conrad's eyes dissolve in a blinding sheen of consternation. The man's face went out of shape. Dade could feel the bite of Jessie's fingers on his arm. He turned and saw the twisted grimace at her mouth—anger and dismay and revulsion; and then he heard the choked sound of her voice: "Mr. Beasley!"

"Who?" Dade shouted, groping wildly through his own consternation. "But you've seen him in town! He said he talked to you in the Thrift—" Dade groaned. "He *said!*" And then he was like a man on springs, trying to throw a punch past the vigilant deputy.

"Of course," Olds said, "there's no law against a man changing his name." But Conrad was white with shock—unseeing, unhearing.

"A dead man?" Jessie demanded. "A man everybody in Beaumont thought was done away with ten years ago?" She covered her face with her hands. "I don't want to look. It makes me ill. I want to go home—home!"

That might be a good idea, Olds told Dade, maneuvering the owner of the Coastway Building, a dazed man, to the other side of the office. And when Dade nodded, the deputy let him go and Jessie grabbed him by the hand, fast, because he was still a little on springs, outraged and rebellious. She got him out, and they rode home in a taxi, holding hands.

"He was taken as a hostage," Jessie said, "when the bank was held up. The people in the bank were warned not to call the police for an hour, or he'd be killed. They didn't. He'd been a teller there for fifteen years."

Dade said, "He probably planned the whole thing."

But Frank Olds, when he came out to the house that night, said no, he did not. What the two holdup men didn't know was that Arthur Coyne Beasley was a nut on guns and always carried a small automatic pistol in his hip pocket, hoping some day to foil a bank stickup and get a reward. But when it actually happened he didn't have the chance; he was the first one covered by a sawed-off shotgun. However, thirty miles from Beaumont he got the chance. As they let him

out on a back road he killed both holdup men. He started to drive the bodies back to Beaumont. But then he thought, back to the old grind; back to a small reward—maybe. So he dumped the bodies in a swamp.

"They were never found," Jessie said. "But the car was."

Abandoned, Olds told them, ten miles from the swamp. With a message scrawled on a dollar bill and left on the back seat: *HELP—WILL KILL ME—BEASLEY.* A very shrewd deception.

Jessie nodded. "The week before the Fourth. And he always was in charge of the fireworks every Fourth of July."

Olds gave her a sliding, sidelong look. "He was forty-two, unmarried, unsuccessful—and all at once he had his hands on more than fifty thousand dollars, tax free. He took a bus to Tulsa, Oklahoma. In a cemetery he found a name—Lincoln Simms Conrad, born 1910, died 1914. He got a photostat of the birth certificate from the public records—and had a new identity. He turned up here in Ocean Cliffs a couple of months later and began building his tidy little real-estate empire."

"Where'd he known Redmond?" Dade asked.

"Bowled against him for a couple of years in Springfield."

And yes, he spotted Redmond through the skylight from his office window. He knew Redmond was too near-sighted to recognize him at that distance; but in the alley, on the street—the risk was too great. And yes, Annie Winter recalled that he had fussed a great deal about Broderick's carrying-on and suggested she try to break the lease. And he was very meticulous about spelling and pronunciation. When she read him the write-up about the Millers he corrected her pronunciation of Beaumont.

Olds said, "He disguised his voice by gargling a lot with a harsh astringent. By morning it was back to normal."

"I've been thinking," Dade said. "Wasn't he stupid in one important thing? He threatened Broderick—and killed Redmond. He threatened me. If—God forbid—he'd killed Jessie, wouldn't the parallel have made you wonder? Wouldn't you have checked on her?"

Olds said, "Absolutely. I told you I was tempted except for one thing—and that was it. And if you hadn't come to me with your story, and if he'd killed you both—*both,* Mr. Miller—I'd have checked on you, not your wife." Olds was grim. "He had to get you both."

"With all the police around?" Jessie said. "Both of us? Never."

Old's eyes were level, somber. "Yes, both of you. Right through all the police. He was convinced after a few days that you people would never leave. He started the bomb scare—to get your husband out of the building. He figured your husband would work at home—and would need some office

equipment. It wasn't just seeing you, Mrs. Miller, that sent him into shock. It was," he said, turning to Dade, "the filing cabinet you were going to bring out here. And afterwards people would have said our search of your office yesterday was downright careless."

Olds looked hard at Dade. "After you closed the office at noon he went in and planted an explosive charge in that cabinet big enough to blow this house and both of you to smithereens—timed for midnight. We found one fingerprint on the mechanism. He talked."

Impulsively Dade and Jessie reached for each other's hand and sat for a minute in a long, suspended silence. Then Jessie said, "Yes, I remember. He sometimes made his own fireworks."

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **DYLAN THOMAS**

TITLE: ***The Old Woman Upstairs***

TYPE: Murder Story

LOCALE: Wales

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *In which the brilliant and imaginative Welsh poet, acclaimed the greatest lyric poet of his generation, tells us an extraordinary lot about three people—all in his own fashion, and all in 1500 words.*

THE OLD WOMAN UPSTAIRS HAD been dying since Martha could remember. She had lain like a wax woman in her sheets since Martha was a child coming with her mother to bring fresh fruit and vegetables to the dying. And now Martha was a woman under her apron and print frock, and her pale hair was bound in a bunch behind her head. Each morning she got up with the sun, lit the fire, let in the red-eyed cat. She made a pot of tea, and, going up to the bedroom at the back of the cottage, bent over the old woman whose blind eyes were never closed. Each morning she looked into the hollows of the old woman's eyes, and passed her hands over them. She could not tell if the old woman breathed. Eight o'clock, eight o'clock now, she said. And the blind eyes smiled. A ragged hand came out from the sheets, and stayed there until Martha took it in her little, padded hand and closed it around the cup. When the cup was empty Martha filled it, and when the pot was dry she pulled back the white sheets from the bed. There the old woman lay, stretched out in her nightdress, and the color of her flesh was gray as her last hairs. Martha tidied the sheets and attended to the old woman's wants. Then she took the pot away. Each morning she had her meal with the boy who worked in the garden. She went to the back door, opened it, and saw him in the distance with his spade. Half-past eight now, she said. He was an ugly boy, and his

eyes were redder than the cat's, two cuts in his head forever spying on the first shadows of her breast. Marthat put his food in front of him, and sat sideways with her hands near the fire. When he got up he always said, Is there anything you want me to do? She had never said yes. The boy went back to dig potatoes out of the patch or to count the hens' eggs; and if there were berries to be picked off the garden bushes, she joined him before noon. Seeing the little red currants pile up in the palm of her hand, she would think of the money under the old woman's mattress. If there were hens to be killed she could cut their throats far more cleanly than the boy who let his knife stay in the wound and wiped the blood on the knife along his sleeve. She caught a hen and killed it, felt its warm blood, and saw it run headless up the garden path. Then she went in to wash her hands.

It was in the first week of spring. Martha had reached her twentieth year, and still the old woman stretched out her hand for the cup of tea, still the front of her nightdress never stirred with her breathing, and still the fortune lay under the mattress. There was so much that Martha wanted. She wanted a man of her own and a black dress for Sundays and a hat with flowers. She had no money at all. On the days that the boy took the eggs and the vegetables to market, she gave him a six-penny piece that the old woman gave her, and the money the boy brought back in his handkerchief she put into the old woman's hands. She worked for her food and her shelter as the boy worked for his, though she slept in a room upstairs and he in a bed of straw over the empty sheds.

On a bright market morning she walked out into the garden so that her plan might be cooled in her head. She saw two clouds in the sky, two unshapely hands closing round the head of the sun. If I could fly, she thought, I could fly in at the open window and fasten my teeth in the old woman's throat. But the cool wind blew the thought away. She knew that she was no common girl, for she had read books in the winter evenings when the boy was dreaming in the straw and the old woman was alone in the dark. She had read of a god who came down like money, of snakes with the voices of men, and of a man who stood on the top of a hill, talking with a thing of fire.

At the end of the garden, where the fence kept out the wild green fields, she came to a mound of earth. There she buried the dog she had killed for catching and killing the hens in the garden. Peace in Rest, the cross said, and the date of the death was written backwards so that the dog had not died yet. I could bury her here, said Martha to herself, by the side of the dog, under the manure so

that nobody could find her. And she patted her hands, and reached the back door of the cottage as the two hands got round the sun.

Inside there was a meal to be prepared for the old woman, potatoes to be mashed up in the tea. The knife made the only sound, the wind had dropped down, her heart was as quiet as though she had wrapped it up. Nothing moved in the cottage; her hand was dead on her lap; she could not think that smoke went up the chimney and out into the still sky. Her mind, alone in the world, was ticking away. Then, when all things were dead, a cock crew, and she remembered the boy who would soon be back from market. She felt her hand die again in her lap. And in the midst of death she heard the boy's hand lift up the latch.

He came into the kitchen, saw that Martha was cleaning the potatoes, and dropped his handkerchief on to the table. Hearing the noise of the money in the cloth, she looked up at him and smiled. He had never seen her smile before.

Soon she put his meal in front of him, and sat sideways by the fire. As she bent over him, he smelt the clover in her hair, and saw the damp garden soil behind her fingernails. She rarely went outside the cottage into the unusual world but to kill or pick the berry bushes. Have you taken up her dinner? he asked. She did not answer. When he had finished his meal, he got up from the table and said, Is there anything you want me to do? as he had said a thousand times. Yes, said Martha.

She had never said yes to him before. He had never heard a woman speak as she had spoken. The first shadows of her breast had never been so dark. He stumbled across the kitchen to her, and she lifted her hands to her shoulders. What will you do for me? she said, and loosed the straps of her frock so that it fell about her and left her breast bare. She took his hand and put it on her breast. He stared like a fool at her nakedness, then said her name and caught hold of her. What will you do for me? she said. Thinking of the money under the mattress, she held him close and let her frock fall on the floor and ripped her petticoat away. You will do what I want, she said.

After a minute she struggled out of his arms and ran softly across the room. With her naked back to the door that led upstairs, she beckoned him and told him what he was to do. We shall be rich, she said. He tried to finger her again, but she held his fingers. You will help me, she said. The boy smiled and nodded. She opened the door and led him upstairs. You stay here quiet, she said. In the old woman's room she looked at the cracked jug, the half-open window, and the text on the wall. One

o'clock now, she said into the old woman's ear, and the blind eyes smiled. Martha put her fingers round the old woman's throat. One o'clock now, she said, and knocked the old woman's head against the wall. It needed but three little knocks, and the head burst like an egg.

What have you done? cried the boy. Martha called for him to come in. He opened the door and, staring at the naked woman who cleaned her hands on the bed, and at the blood that made such a round, red stain on the wall, he screamed out in horror. Be quiet, said Martha; but he screamed again at her quiet voice and ran downstairs.

So Martha must fly, she said to herself, fly out of the old woman's room into the wind. She opened the window wide, and stepped out. I am flying, she said.

But Martha was not flying.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **NORMAN DANIELS**

TITLE: ***Strictly a Neighborhood Problem***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Marty Hayden

LOCALE: Your neighborhood?

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Marty Hayden, detective second-grade, had a take-home pay that was less than a bus driver's. And for that the residents of the neighborhood expected him to risk, even give up, his life . . .*

THE STRANGEST THING IS THAT you come to me for help," he said.

"Okay, okay, you're a cop, ain't you? You got a badge, and more important, you got a gun. Why shouldn't I come to you?"

"Detective Second-Grade Marty Hayden," the young man at the kitchen table said. He looked across that table at Beth, his lovely wife. "Recently on the sick list, eh, darling?"

She nodded. "The injured list. Three and a half weeks in the hospital."

The man who stood beside the table was Rocco Lano. He held his hat in his hand and acted nervous.

"Marty, he's on the top floor of my tenement house. He's locked himself in there and he's got a gun. He says he's gonna shoot anybody who comes up the stairs. He's really gone off his rocker this time."

"Anybody going up that narrow staircase will be a perfect target," Marty said thoughtfully.

"So what're you gonna do about it?" Lano demanded.

Marty finished drinking his coffee. "I'll make up my mind pretty soon."

"Pretty soon! Pretty soon! What kind of talk is that?"

"I'll be over," Marty promised.

Lano jammed his hat on. "You ain't there in three, four minutes,

we're gonna call the precinct."

"Why didn't you do that in the first place?"

"Because this is a neighborhood affair. You live here—you're a cop. I live here—I run a store that sells groceries and fruits. If you want them, you depend on me. My brother Pete, he runs a barber shop. You want a haircut, you go to him. Now we need a cop, so we go to you."

Marty poured more coffee. Then he looped his tie around his collar, worked it under, tied it, and looked in the mirror, all between sips of steaming coffee.

"You're very convincing, Mr. Lano," he said. "The fact is, however, you don't want any precinct men buzzing around that tenement house of yours because they'll find sixty violations."

Lano shoved his face close to Marty's. "I'm going back. You be there, see? Anybody is hurt in the meantime, *you* take the responsibility."

"I'll be there," Marty said, "soon."

He walked with a decided limp and the angry scar on his right cheek was still vivid.

"Two minutes, three, you better hurry," Lano warned again; and then he was gone, slamming the door behind him and clumping down the stairs.

Marty unlocked the special drawer in the kitchen and took out the .38 police positive which he fitted neatly into the holster just above his hip.

"Are you going in after Frankie?" Beth asked. There was no fear in her voice. She'd learned how to hide it long ago.

Marty shook his head sorrowfully. "Poor guy. They shouldn't have let him out."

Beth stood up and kissed him. "Be careful, Marty."

"Since last month," he said, "I've been the most careful cop in the city—in the whole world."

"I remember now—there's a back way to the top floor of that tenement house."

"I know," he said.

Rocco Lano's tenement house was in the middle of the block which ended in the river. An ancient, narrow, dark street, it was lined with small stores above which were the tenement apartments. Gathered near the stone steps which led up to the front of Lano's house were about two dozen people, mostly residents of the building.

"One minute that cop has got left—just one minute," Lano shouted so that everyone could hear. "Then I call the precinct and Marty's in trouble—bad trouble. That's the way he wants it, that's the way he gets it."

Someone saw Marty then. The detective was walking casually down the sidewalk after having just around the corner. Lano looked at his watch again.

"This is an emergency. We got a dangerous man up there and the cop takes twenty minutes . . ."

Marty's eyes were frosty as he looked at the group. The eyes of those who lived in the house turned away.

"Well," Lano said harshly, "you going in and take him or ain't you?"

Marty walked toward the steps and the crowd parted for him. He sat down on the bottom step and calmly lit a cigarette.

Lano, having assumed the role of spokesman, retained it. "What do you think you're doing, Marty? Every minute that guy gets time to remember how much he hates everybody, the more dangerous he gets."

Marty drew deeply, blew out the smoke, and leaned back. "Let me get this straight." He was looking at the entire group, addressing them all. "On the top floor, in that cubbyhole of a room you call an apartment, Lano, there's a man waiting. He's insane. Nobody doubts that poor Frankie needs help. To give it to him we have to take him, but he says he'll shoot anybody who comes up the stairs. Is that the problem, Lano?"

"Talk, talk," Lano shouted. "All you do is talk!"

"Relax," Marty said. "I'm a cop, so you wait for me to do the job. Now, Frankie thinks he hates everybody. So he'll shoot me if I go up there. Right?"

"So get some help. Get some tear gas," Lano said.

"You forget, Lano," Marty said, "there are no windows in that cubbyhole you call an apartment. Just a skylight and that's covered with wire because kids used to break the skylight and crawl in. You can't lob tear gas into a place without windows or through the wire mesh of a skylight."

"Never mind how you do it," the owner shouted. "Just do it!"

"We're taxpayers." Joe Briggs, who ran the neighborhood radio repair shop, spoke up. "We pay your salary. It's your duty."

"You're talking about duty?" Marty asked quietly. "You, Joe?"

"This guy is sore," Alfie Kelman joined in. Alfie was a gawky, disheveled man who clerked in the hardware store.

Marty laughed. "It occurs to me I have reason to be."

"A cop can't get sore and not do his job," Alfie insisted. "You don't do something, somebody's gonna get killed if Frankie comes barreling down here with that gun of his."

"Quite likely," Marty agreed. He caught a glimpse of Beth, though she remained in the background; but it was comforting to Marty to know she was there.

"Then we send to the precinct," Joe shouted. "We turn you in, Marty."

"You do that," Marty said. "Yes, you do that, Joe."

Lano took control again. "You mean, you ain't going in?"

Marty said, "If I walk up those steps, Frankie'll hit me before I even get near him."

"You gotta take that chance," Lano said. "You know Frankie, the way he is. He never stays holed up long. He'll be getting out soon."

"If he does, he has to come through me," Marty said quietly.

Lano nudged a waddling woman beside him. "Theresa, run and tell the precinct."

"Run all that way?" she protested.

"Use the telephone," Lano yelled. "You got any brains?"

"Gimme the dime," she said. "That proves I got brains all right."

She waddled away. It would take her a long time to complete a job that should have been an emergency call. Lano was obviously stalling, but trying to make it look good.

"If I go up there, I'll get myself killed." Marty talked as if he were thinking aloud.

"Somebody's gotta do it, Marty," Joe Briggs said. "It's a job for a cop. It's your job."

Suddenly Beth was at his side, facing them. "You're a fine lot to be asking Marty to go in there and get shot. He's just out of the hospital. Three and a half weeks and he's just returned to duty. You're certainly a fine lot to ask a favor of him—any kind of a favor. But asking him to risk his life—that's the biggest laugh around here since that family moved their furniture out the back window and got away without paying their rent."

"You have to remind me of that?" Lano asked irritably.

"Mr. Lano," Beth said, "why don't *you* go and bring Frankie down?"

"Why should I go up there?" Lano demanded. "I don't get paid for it."

The group has grown and was now beginning to show excitement. But Marty stayed where he was, seated on the cold step, smoking calmly.

"Let's go back a little," Marty said. "To a month ago. I was off duty, as I am now. I was home and some of you came and told me there was trouble."

Nobody said a word. Marty studied the faces—the Italian, Irish, German, Swedish faces. Second generation, for the most part. He liked these people because they were a part of this polyglot neighborhood, as he and Beth were. But he hated them too. He hated them with the pain of a bloody face, internal injuries, bruises and cuts. He hated them with the kind of hate that comes from lost pride.

"Marty," Joe said, "that's over with. This is now—and there's a killer up there and you gotta go get him."

"First," Marty said, "let's analyze the situation. I'm a policeman. I have a good education—two and a

half years in college before I was called into service. That's okay, I wasn't the only one who lost out because of that cockeyed war in Korea. After that I became a cop and I worked hard at it because I thought being a cop might not pay much, but it gets a man respect from his neighbors. That's how it worked too, but the respect turned out to be a series of favors. Fix a ticket, get my brother out of the drunk tank, see what you can do for poor sixteen-year-old Ollie who is in the can for armed robbery. Poor Ollie, a victim of his environment. Poor Ollie—with seven arrests in his sixteen years. Poor Ollie who's going to kill somebody some day and I'm supposed to ask that they go easy on him."

"Marty, Marty," Lano implored. "This is your neighborhood. Sure we come to you, out of great respect for you."

"So last month you came and said some kids were smashing up Kelly's Bar because he wouldn't sell them a drink. I went down and there were seven of them. Seven kids—giants of kids, strong as horses even if they never did an honest day's work in their lives. Seven stupid, senseless, thick-headed kids and they all lit into me. They got my gun and then they beat me up. You were all there. You wouldn't even spend a dime to call the precinct because you didn't want to miss a second of the fun. I called on you for help. There must have been fifteen, twenty of you, and there were seven crazy kids—but nobody, not one of you, would give me a hand. It happens all the time. All over the country. Cops are beaten up, but the people they sometimes give their lives to protect, they won't raise a hand to help—not one of them."

"Marty," Alfie said, "we're sorry. We just didn't want to get mixed up in it."

"We figured you could take care of them," Joe said.

"Take care of seven of them? Two would have been hard to handle, but there were seven of them, and they all hated cops."

"You saying we're responsible for what happened?" Lano demanded.

"Certainly I say so. If I'd had help, I wouldn't have been beaten up and sent to the hospital."

"A cop has to take chances like that, Marty," Lano said.

"For the pay we get? Take-home less than ninety a week. You call that good pay for getting beaten up? Or shot? Or even hated?"

"Marty," Joe said, "we don't hate you."

"You may not hate Marty as a man," Beth said, "but you hate him as a cop because he represents what keeps you in line. But I don't think it's worthwhile his being killed for people like you, at less than a bus driver makes."

"Look, look, now," Lano said. "Can't we settle this later? Go get

Frankie before the precinct captain gets here and makes trouble for you, Marty."

"The only trouble he can make for me," Marty said, "is to take my badge away, and losing it would be no hardship. I can get another job in twenty-four hours with starting pay more than I get as a second-grade detective."

The fat woman waddled back and shouted importantly that the precinct said they'd take care of it.

"You see," Lano said sorrowfully. "Now you're in trouble."

Marty looked up at him with a smile. "What I'd like to see right now is Frankie come barging out with his gun blazing."

Four of the crowd melted away, and a dozen drew farther back. Lano, Joe, and Alfie eyed the front door apprehensively.

"Well," Marty said, "I guess we'll go home, Beth."

Lano's big hand gripped Marty's coat as the detective stood up. "You can't do that! Sometimes it takes a while for the cops to get here. Marty, you got a gun . . . if Frankie comes out and you aren't here, it'll be like a shooting gallery."

Marty put an arm around Beth's waist. "I asked you people for help when I needed it desperately," he said. "I got no help. Now you want me to go get myself shot—perhaps killed. You want me to do my duty. I was trying to do just that last month and you laughed. A lousy cop was getting his brains beaten out. And by kids. It was very funny."

"We're sorry," Lano said desperately. "We all beg your pardon."

"You're sorry now when there's trouble and I can take the brunt of it. But when we tried to get you to testify against those kids, none of you admitted seeing a thing."

"We just didn't want any trouble," Alfie protested.

"That's right. You didn't want trouble. The parents' of those kids didn't want trouble. Not with anybody, especially with their own kids. What do those kids believe in? Nothing! Patriotism? They never heard of it—that's square stuff, cornball stuff. Kindness? There's not a speck of it in any of them. Brains? How can they think what's right and what's wrong when nobody ever bothered to teach them? You've got kids like them—all of you. So when they beat up a cop, it's funny—very funny."

"Why don't you get those kids to go after Frankie?" Beth said. "Strong, brave kids who aren't afraid of a cop—when the odds are seven to one. Don't any of you mention Marty's courage in front of me. Don't you say he's afraid to go up there, because every single one of you is and you know it."

"There oughta be a radio car." Alfie looked up and down the street. "Where're the cops?"

Marty's eyes roamed over the crowd. "So I go up there and

Frankie gets me. You'll all be so sorry—but that's what a cop gets paid for. Let me say this, and get it straight, all of you: go get Frankie yourselves."

"Where's the cops?" Lano almost screamed.

Marty unbuttoned his coat. "Well, Beth," he asked, "what'll I do? You're in this too."

"Go in and get Frankie," Beth said. "Poor guy . . . and please don't hurt him."

Marty looked around. "I'll need somebody to back me up. Who's going in with me?"

Lano said, "Marty, we ain't going in there."

"Why not? You want Frankie to come out and maybe shoot your wife or your cousin? We have to get him before he can do that, don't we? We have to sacrifice something. Do you know what sacrifice is, Lano? It's giving something of yourself—like your life or your scrambled guts. Are you coming in?"

"No," Lano shouted.

The others were backing off. Marty sat down agai.

"We're right back where we started," he said.

"The other cops." Alfie kept looking wildly for them. "Why ain't they here?"

"What a bunch of heroes you are," Marty said with a hollow laugh.

Then he jumped to his feet, forgetting the pain in his leg. He walked up the stairs, drawing his gun as he entered the hallway. Lano went after him slowly, warily. Alfie followed. Joe hung back, then he entered the building too.

They reached the fourth floor. The cubbyhole was on the fifth, and the door was at the top of the stairs.

Marty called out, "Frankie, Frankie, don't do anything foolish. We want to talk to you. It's me—Marty the cop. And Lano who owns the joint and Alfie and Joe. Frankie—"

"Don't use my name," Lano whispered hoarsely. "For God's sake, Marty, don't tell him I'm here. If he gets loose, he'll come after me."

"But I'm right here to stop him," Marty said.

"Where's the cops from the precinct?" Joe groaned. He was on the lower landing, looking up.

"Let's go," Marty said. "He can't shoot all of us at one time."

The ancient handrail trembled under Lano's grasp. Marty went up the stairs, gun thrust forward, moving carefully. As he progressed, Lano started moving backward. Alfie, behind him, also retreated. Joe stayed where he was, on the landing; he was half turned so that if he had to dive down the steps he wouldn't break his neck.

Marty didn't look around. "This is what it feels like to be a cop. It's an exciting life, boys, isn't it? You still with me?"

He was now at the top, crouched, but if that door opened he was still directly in the line of fire. Anybody who could point a gun and had the strength to pull the trigger couldn't miss him. Or miss Lano or Alfie.

Lano gave a wild yell and fled down the steps, almost getting entangled with Alfie who didn't move quite as fast. Marty watched them for a moment; then he burst out laughing and kicked open the door.

"Look out!" Lano screamed.

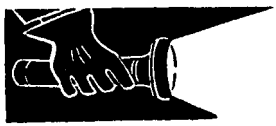
Marty turned his back on the open door and walked down. "The party's over," he said. "Frankie's been locked up at the precinct for the last half hour or more. I went in the back way and took him out though the alley where I turned him over to a patrol car. He didn't resist. He just cried and said he was sorry for all the trouble he'd caused."

"You . . . cheated us," Lano said shrilly. "You let us think he was up there."

"I wanted you to find out how it felt to be a cop and the precinct commander went along with me," Marty said. "I wanted all of you to know how it felt to need help—and not get it. Fun wasn't it? Why should a cop be afraid of a little thing like a crazy man with a loaded gun? He gets his week's pay, so why should he call on anybody for help? Why? Answer me, Lano. And you, Alfie, and you Joe, 'way down there."

Joe fled. Alfie examined each step as he went down the stairs. Lano wouldn't look at Marty; he stepped aside and let him go down first. Beth was waiting. The word had been passed around. Nobody had a word to say. Marty put his arm around Beth and they walked down the street toward their own walkup.

[—Please see page 55]



BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

The fiction of Jorge Luis Borges, Argentina's most important living writer, first appeared in English in EQMM (Aug., 1948); and there's a wealth of treasure for connoisseurs of the imaginative and off-beat detective story (along with other unique and flavorful Borgian specialties) in the first English collection of Borges' work: LABYRINTHS, edited and translated by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New Directions, $5.50).

★★★★ **BEWARE OF THE TRAINS, by Edmund Crispin** (Walker, $3.50)
16 stories (6 from EQMM), mostly about Gervase Fen and Inspector Humbleby, which are models of the devious but strictly fair deductive puzzle. [Queen's Quorum, #110]

★★★★ **PERFECT PIGEON, by Richard Wormser** (Gold Medal s1201, 35¢)
Deft story of con men and con games, with the cleverest plot that 1962 has yet produced.

★★★ **DEATH ON THE AGENDA, by Patricia Moyes** (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $3.50)
Geneva and international narcotics control provide interesting background for the solid formal detection of Chief Inspector Tibbett.

★★★ **HAND IN GLOVE, by Ngaio Marsh** (Little, Brown, $3.95)
Perhaps not one of Superintendent Alleyn's most dazzling cases, but a delightfully smooth, gently satiric novel about genteel snobbery.

★★★ **THE EMPTY HOURS, by Ed McBain** (Simon & Schuster, $3.50)
First trio of 87th Precinct novelets, two of them characteristically admirable. And don't overlook the reissue of 4 early novels of the 87th (Permabooks, 35¢ each.)

Distinguished fact-crime, new: William Bradford Huie's THE HERO OF IWO JIMA (Signet D2091, 50¢), with some healthy corrective notes on Caryl Chessman; the late Lord Birkett's SIX GREAT ADVOCATES (Penguin 1702, 95¢), with illuminating sidelights on great murder trials. *Reprints:* Miriam Allen deFord's justly Edgar-winning THE OVERBURY AFFAIR (Avon F-125, 40¢); and a colorful selection from the 18th-century NEWGATE CALENDAR (Capricorn CAP 57, $1.45).

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 233rd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . An impressive "first," with sharply delineated characters and subtle overtones—and the symbol of a frothy pink dress that will stir your emotions . . .

The author is in her early forties—a housewife who "likes to write" and now has the time "to try her luck." Her only daughter is in college, and her husband is away at work most of the day. She tells us she has sent "a few stories to publishers and received them back promptly." We have a hunch that with the appearance of "On the Road to Jericho," at least some publishers will now be more interested . . .

ON THE ROAD TO JERICHO

by L. E. BEHNEY

THERE ISN'T ANY REASON WHY I couldn't have it. You're just mean, that's all!" Sue Ann's whiny voice melted into a tearful wail.

Her Aunt Ida turned around on the front seat of the old brown station wagon. Her plump face was flushed with heat and exasperation. "Sue Ann, you behave yourself. We told you you couldn't have the dress and it won't do you any good to keep begging."

"I just want to know why, that's all—why can't I have it."

"You know very well. It costs too much, we couldn't afford it—"

"The other girls get to have charge accounts. It's only a couple dollars a week. Please!"

"—and besides, it wasn't a fitting dress for you to wear."

"I'm not a child!"

"By thunder, you sure are acting like one!" Uncle Dan bellowed. "Quit pestering your Aunt and straighten up! I don't want to hear another peep out of you about that danged dress!" Uncle Dan's usually quiet voice was thick with anger.

Sue Ann sat silently, glaring at the back of his balding head. He was a small, thin, gray man and even the back of his neck and his narrow stooped shoulders had a look of stubborn resilience.

Daniel Martin was a stubborn man. He farmed his small upstate farm near Jericho with a team of horses and an old-fashioned plow, and he still used kerosene lamps

even though the power line crossed his lower pasture. He had finally purchased the old car in a resentful concession to the pressures of time but he made no such concessions to his womenfolk.

Aunt Ida still wore her thin gray hair long and her full-skirted dresses reached the tops of her high shoes. Aunt Ida was plump and uncomplaining, but she tried to ease Daniel's strictness where the girl was concerned.

She leaned over the back of the front seat and patted Sue Ann's knee. "I'll make you a lovely dress, dear, you'll see."

"It'll have a high neck and long sleeves."

"I'll fix a lace collar."

"Don't bother, Aunt Ida. I won't get asked anyway. I never do."

"You're too young to be going out with boys. Wild young hoodlums—you stay home and tend to your homework!" Uncle Dan risked a quick glance at her over the seat back. "Quit that pouting and straighten up, young lady or I'll take a strap to you when we get home."

The car swerved dangerously and the man fought with the steering wheel as though it were an enemy to be subdued. Having won the battle, he hunched over the wheel, his eyes fixed on the road.

They had left the flat valley and were now climbing the first of the rolling foothills. The road wound around the tawny slopes above the willow-lined river bed. Dry in the summer, the river was a cascade of gravel and water-washed boulders, as though the bones of the mountains were washed bare to bleach in the yellow sunlight. A faint breeze stirred the leaves of the willows and made them ripple with silvery waves. The same hot breeze carried the smell of dry grass and pine resin. Behind them a plume of dust streamed upward from the powdery road.

It was hot with a scorching burn that was like the heat from a forge. Sue Ann stared out of the open window at the river bed below. She was half listening to the talk of her aunt and uncle and half daydreaming, her favorite pastime. She heard her aunt say, "All the girl wants is something pretty and nice. It's natural for a girl her age to like pretty things, Daniel."

"Pretty things, all right! But she isn't going to run around looking like a painted hussy while I've got anything to say about it!"

Pretty things . . . Sue Ann thought of the dress. It hadn't been out of her mind since she had seen it that morning in the shop window in Jericho. A pale-pink froth of silk with a darker rose design, it had a tiny bodice and almost no shoulder straps at all. There were little pink satin shoes to go with it, shoes with high, pencil-thin heels.

Sick with longing, she had stood in the street staring into the magical window. She could see herself

sweeping into the school dance, tall and slim and beautiful in the pink dress. The boys would look at her as if she really existed. They would crowd around and ask to dance and their eyes would warm her. She would move in an enchanted world of soft lights and muted music, of whispered compliments and admiring glances. . . .

An impossible dream—but if she only had the dress, the dream might come true.

The car slowed and Sue Ann's mind lurched back to reality.

Her uncle said, "Now what d'ya suppose is the matter with him?"

Ahead of them a shiny red pickup was parked along the road with the hood up and a young man in white shirt and blue levis was waving his hand at them.

"The poor man will get heat stroke without a hat," Aunt Ida said with concern. There was something tensely urgent about the man's quick gestures.

Uncle Daniel braked to a jerky stop. "Dang fool contraptions," he growled. "Always something going wrong with 'em."

The young man looked up and down the road with a furtive glance and came over to the car. "Thanks for stopping," he said with a nervous grin.

"What's wrong?" Uncle Daniel asked.

"If I knew, I wouldn't be here, gramps," the young man said. He leaned down and looked into the station wagon with an oddly intent expression. He had very pale eyes—almost as if the color had been washed out, leaving only the tiny glittering blackness of the pupils. He was thin and muscular, with a thick neck sloping into powerful shoulders. He was darkly tanned and had wiry black hair cut very short.

His glance passed quickly over Sue Ann, took in the clutter of feed sacks and grocery bags in the back. He opened the rear door and slid into the seat beside Sue Ann. Then, reaching into his shirt front, he took out a blue-steel revolver.

"Get this heap started and drive, Old Man," he said in a voice that was cold and still as winter fog.

Uncle Daniel swung around to stare at him. "You get out of there," he yelled. "What right you got gettin' into my automobile?"

The young man shook the gun. "This right. Drive. Get this heap rolling."

Uncle Daniel's face flushed angrily. "I will not! I'll throw you out, you young punk!" He grabbed the door handle and began to open the front door.

"Wait, Pop!" The stranger leaned forward and pressed the barrel of his revolver against Aunt Ida's head. "You behave, Old Man, or I kill her. And don't think I don't mean it."

Uncle Daniel was suddenly motionless. His faded old eyes leaped back and forth between the stran-

ger's face and his threatening hand. Aunt Ida was rigid with fright. Her eyes were round and staring behind her gold-rimmed glasses; her mouth hung open and she made faint groaning sounds.

Uncle Daniel lunged across the seat, trying to reach for the man's gun hand. He shouted, "Run, Ida!"

Ida Martin screamed and kept screaming as her hands tore at the car door. She finally got it open and tumbled out into the dusty road. The two men fought for possession of the gun. Back and forth across the seat they struggled, Daniel Martin in silence, the young man with a stream of obscenities.

The old man was strong from his years of farm work, but the other was young, and the gun slowly swung against the old heart. The shot was a thunder of sound and the old man sagged against the back of the seat, his head hanging limply between his arms. Blood trickled down onto the worn floor mat.

The killer slid out of the car with the agility of a cat. He bounded down the road after the fleeing woman.

Sue Ann watched paralyzed with fright. She knew dazedly that she ought to run, but she couldn't move. The man caught Aunt Ida by the arm. His hand rose and fell in a chopping motion and the woman crumpled in the dust. The man pulled the body into the cover of brush at the roadside and came back toward the car.

Sue Ann heard a whimpering cry and knew that she was making the sound. She was incapable of motion and stayed crouched in the corner of the back seat, as nearly invisible as it was possible for her to be. Only her wide frightened eyes moved as she watched the killer approach.

He moved with a furtive quickness, with long effortless strides that reminded Sue Ann of a stalking cat. He glanced at her, then crossed to the red pickup and opened the door. He reached inside and took something from the seat. Then he released the brake and let the pickup roll over the bank into the river bed. There was a terrible finality to the splintering sound of metal crashing against the rocks, and then the silence and the heat closed in like a choking hand. The dry grass whispered in the faint breeze; high and thin in the shimmering air a hawk screamed . . . sounds of silence and aloneness.

The killer walked back to the car and peered in at Sue Ann. His eyes were pale sparks in the grim and twitching darkness of his face. The girl knew instinctively that he would kill her if she showed fear. She sat quietly staring back at him, motionless and silent until he spoke and jerked his head at her.

"Get out," he said, "and come around here."

She went around the car and stood before him, feeling the blaze of the sun like a fire on her shoul-

ders. The young man looked her over—the lank dark hair that hung like black wings down her back; the skin, tanned as an Indian's; the thin, long face; the slender, flat body concealed in the shapeless, faded dress.

"You ain't much to look at," he said with careless distaste. "You seen what happened. You do like I say, or you'll get it too. Hold this and stay right there."

Sue Ann nodded. Her head rocked up and down and wouldn't stop. Her neck felt weak, her head light, as though it were about to break off and go floating away.

The man dragged Uncle Daniel's body from the car and slid it over the bank; then he found an old blanket and covered the front seat. He got in under the steering wheel and ordered Sue Ann into the seat beside him. He was a much better driver than Uncle Daniel and the battered old car moved smoothly up the road.

Sue Ann sat as far away from him as she could, but she watched him with a chilled fascination—the way a trapped squirrel watches an approaching rattlesnake. His hands were strong and covered with fine black hairs, and when he moved his arms the muscles of his shoulders rippled beneath his thin shirt. He wasn't old—perhaps twenty; it was hard to tell because of the harshly cruel look of his mouth. His pale eyes flickered from the road to the rear-view mirror and he drove as rapidly as the old car would go on the narrow twisting road.

After they had gone several miles he seemed to relax and glancing at her he asked, "Do you know the roads up here?"

Sue Ann nodded.

He frowned. "Can't you talk?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where's the road we take to go to Merced?"

"I—I think it's about five miles farther. There's a sign."

After a while he said, "You don't have to sit in the corner. I won't bite you."

Sue Ann didn't move.

He said, glancing quickly at her, "Your folks?"

"My aunt and uncle."

"I'm sorry about it. I am, truly. If the old man hadn't got smart, I wouldn't have hurt them. I'm no killer. Hurting people makes me feel bad, but I didn't have any choice. You can see that, can't you?"

Sue Ann nodded her head.

"Sure you do. You're a smart kid. Live around here?"

"We—I live up the road about ten miles."

"Do you go to school?"

"I'm a sophomore next year at Senior High."

He glanced at her. "Why don't you get fixed up a little? Do you have to go around looking like a damned witch?"

"My Uncle Daniel didn't think nice girls used lipstick and stuff."

He gave a short bitter laugh.

"That was the way my Pa was—wouldn't let us kids do nothin'. He was a devil, my Pa, stricter than hell. Do you think lipstick and stuff is okay?"

"S—sure!"

"Help yourself. Be my guest. That bag belonged to the dame in the red pickup. I bet it's full of stuff. She was painted up like a floozy."

Sue Ann dropped her eyes to the purse. It was fine leather with a hand-tooled oak-leaf design—a beautiful, expensive bag.

Sue Ann stroked the smooth leather gently, then opened the silver latch and looked inside. The sweet scent of perfume filled the air. There was a lace handkerchief, a notebook, a gold pen, a comb, a wallet, a round compact, and a lipstick in a jeweled case. Nice things, beautiful things. . . .

Sue Ann peered at herself in the compact mirror and used the bright color on her lips. She used the comb to fluff her long hair. She looked different, all right, like some pretty stranger.

"You're not so bad," the man said approvingly. "If you had some decent clothes and your hair fixed up fancy you'd be a good looker. Little skinny for my taste but you'd fill out."

Sue Ann closed the handbag and held it carefully. "What happened to her?" she asked.

"Who?"

"The lady that had the pickup and these things."

He said defensively, "She wouldn't behave. All I asked her to do was drive me out of here. She wouldn't do it, started yelling. She wasn't smart like you. The cops would spot that red pickup in five minutes once the alarm got out. I had to ditch it."

"Was she pretty?"

"Yeah, she was pretty. Hair the color of copper wire and a cute figure. She was wearing tight levis and one of those cowboy shirts. I sure hated to let her have it."

Sue Ann stroked the soft leather. The woman with the copper-colored hair seemed very real, almost as though she were sitting beside Sue Ann on the front seat.

The young man swung the car around a sharp turn and his shirt gaped open, showing his tight muscled brown skin and the butt of the revolver.

"Will you kill me if I don't do what you say?" Sue Ann asked.

"I'd hate to, kid, but I sure would."

Sue Ann slid over closer to him.

He glanced at her and his pale eyes glittered. "Don't get some crazy idea about trying something. I got away from prison camp this morning and I ain't going back. Quick as the guards check they'll miss me and the hills will be crawling with cops. You're my insurance, baby, and you're staying right there. They won't spot this old car real soon and when they do you'll be right with me."

Sue Ann's hands were sweating and her throat was dry, but she managed to smile at him. "You do think I'm pretty?" she asked.

"Sure do, baby."

"If you were a boy in school would you date me?"

"Sure would."

"I'm going to get a dress. It's low-cut and it's pale pink. There's shoes too, pink ones, with real high heels."

"You'll be a walking dream, baby."

Sue Ann put her hand on his arm. The touch sent shivers up her back—the feel of his hard body, the feel of his warm skin. She half closed her eyes and let her painted mouth open slightly.

The man gave her a startled look. He pulled the car to the side of the road and stopped. He swore quietly. "Baby, you had me fooled. I sure thought you were a dead one."

Sue Ann let her head fall back and looked at him through her eyelashes. When she spoke she made her voice husky and low. "And now," she said, "what do you think now?" She had sneaked out to a few movies in her life, entertainment forbidden by Uncle Daniel. Her seductive act was amateurish but the man didn't laugh. The hot, animal look in his pale eyes frightened Sue Ann, yet fascinated her.

She couldn't look away from his eyes, and her body warmed and her breath came quickly. She was too young and too inexperienced to know, except by instinct, the meanings of the turmoil that churned her whole being. The man was no longer a monster who had coldly killed her aunt and uncle and the woman with the copper hair; he was a man who looked at her with desire—a man whose eyes spoke of beauty, and her parched femaleness answered him.

He touched her shoulders almost with gentleness. The harshness had left his face and he looked young and sad. "Oh, baby," he said, "it's been a damn long time. You never been in prison. You don't know."

"I've been in prison," she said, "all my life."

He pulled her against him and kissed her. The strength of his lips, the roughness of his cheek, aroused her and yet frightened her. She was a child suddenly discovering what it is to be a woman. Most girls date and explore; Sue Ann leaped the gap between child and woman in one kiss.

The man felt the bite of the gun against his side and forgetful of everything except the girl's soft lips and the supple yield of her slender body, he pulled the weapon from his shirt and placed it on the floor. His hands stroked her body, his face buried against her throat, and he did not see or feel the girl's right hand fumbling, reaching, straining toward the gun.

Sue Ann thought she would never find it. He would surely sense her purpose and close his strong hands around her throat. Then her

searching fingers touched the gun and she raised it and pressed the muzzle against his side and pulled the trigger.

She fired again and again until the hammer clicked emptily.

She hardly heard the roar of the shots in the thunder of her own mind, yet it was something she had to do. In her way she was as stubborn as Uncle Daniel.

The young man slid limply out of the car and crumpled to his knees and toppled over backward. He put his hands to his side and blood welled between his brown fingers. His lips moved, but no words came out—just a wordless whispered scream.

His eyes stared at her, the pupils widening until his pale eyes looked black in the glare of the sun. A gray veil came over his eyes, his head fell limply aside, and suddenly she knew he was dead.

Sue Ann took the blanket from the car seat and covered him; kneeling beside him she began to cry, and the tears were for him—the first man who had looked at her as though she were desirable and beautiful—and for the uncle and aunt who had loved her—and for the woman with the copper-colored hair.

After a time Sue Ann wiped her face on her sleeve, got up, and took the purse from the car seat. She opened it and took out the wallet. In the wallet was a roll of bills. Carefully Sue Ann counted out the $45 it would take to buy the pink dress and the high-heeled pink shoes. She folded the bills and hid them inside her dress. Then she put the purse back on the car seat and climbed to the top of a large boulder beside the road to wait.

[—Please see page 65]

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 234th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . an adventurous "crook's tour" of Greece at Easter-time, written by someone who obviously has been there—an extremely solid story for a "first."

The author (whose name we find most appealing) writes pithily about himself: "Early thirties. Rhenish-Welsh ancestry to which he fondly adds a touch of Seminole. His job takes him to many curious parts of the world [just what is his job?] where he insists on ascribing sinister motives to innocent strangers [just what is his job?]. Hobbies: cross-country running [just what is his job?] and collecting cities for a Musée Imaginaire."

Perhaps the cross-country running will never get into one of Mr. Ludens' stories—but the Musée Imaginaire? Ah, we are piqued . . .

THE RED EGGS

by MAGNUS LUDENS

All afternoon Vissarion Evdokimovich Toumanov had eaten *bougatch* until he now felt it was running out of his ears. An ex-Pioneer, Komsomol, and graduate of a curious finishing school for promising youths, he had not dared to warm up on Slivowitz, let alone the Cuban comrades' hot rum-and-lemon.

He sat with three other men at a marble-topped table where they could see Skoplje's piazza and its big station hotel shivering in the wind.

"Laki," one of the men said to him in Greek, "you know explosives and riot engineering, sure. But you're not Greek. You could make a mistake."

"I was coached. And besides, Marina's Greek," Toumanov said patiently.

"Marina's unreliable. She's not even a Party member."

"She's reliable enough for one trip. Plenty of Greeks will come in afterwards!"

They all laughed.

The hotel's blue neon sign grew brighter. A small dilapidated truck stopped outside and the driver joined them. "I brought the eggs, comrades," he said in Greek.

They laughed again.

"You ought to take them in over

the other frontier, where the comrades are waiting," the driver went on worriedly. "You know the government doesn't want trouble with NATO countries now."

"That's why we go through here," Toumanov smiled. "The guards know 'traitors' don't come through, so they pay no attention."

He turned to watch the girl who was pushing her way in. She wore a shapeless blue dress, an enormous black knitted shawl, and her hair was done in a tight bun; but the set of her head lacked the peasant's stiff half-stoop.

Toumanov rose and paid the *bougatch* man with a slow fumbling and counting of dinars. He buttoned up his sheepskin jacket, straightened his U. S. Army surplus cap, and took the girl's arm. They went out, climbed into the truck, and drove off.

Toumanov waited until they were clear of Skoplje, then pulled up on the side of the road, produced a battered flashlight, and jumped out. He went around to the back and let down the rickety tailgate. The truck smelled of chicken droppings.

On a layer of dirty straw there were wooden cases piled a foot above the truck sides, covered with a patched tarpaulin. They were flimsy lattice-type cases from which wisps of straw stuck out. The creamy gleam of eggs shone between the top strip of wood and the lid. Stenciled letters on the middle strip of each side stated these were strictly fresh eggs from the Glorious October Collective Farm, For Export Only. Toumanov grinned, fastened back the tail gate, and climbed behind the wheel again.

"Two hundred and sixty kilometers to Salonica," he said cheerfully. "Even with this truck we ought to make it before midnight."

An hour later they crossed the bridge into Tito Veles. A whole fleet of ancient trucks, from which forlorn bleating issued, crowded the wind-whipped piazza while their drivers were fortifying themselves with Slivowitz. Toumanov drove through the town and onto the road that twists maddeningly with every curve of the alder-choked Vardar.

"There'll be trucks for miles around Gevgelia," he muttered. "Better get through while we can."

The girl nodded.

If Greeks are content all year round with a hunk of bread and a handful of olives, every family wants a whole lamb to barbecue at Easter, red-dyed eggs by the basketful, pyramids of cakes, and gallons of wine. On Easter Sunday a breeze blowing from Greece carries the aroma of one gigantic, belly-bursting banquet to last the year through. During Holy Week every boat, every train, every truck carries live, indignant sheep, cases of eggs, barrels of wine. Vissarion Ev-

dokimovich Toumanov slid his truck neatly into the holy-day pattern.

Harassed border guards (wisps of wool stuck to their trousers, caps pushed back) poked flashlights underneath the truck bodies, stamped cards, and waved the raucous drivers on. A dark strip of road and then the queue began again at the Greek border.

Unmelodious sound blared from the Greek post. Toumanov frowned. He turned to the girl and saw tears spilling down her face. She tried to smile. "It's Good Friday," she explained, "the Liturgy of the Epitaphion, the Dirge. I'm crying because I'll be home for Easter."

Toumanov shrugged. Guards came up, glanced at the eggs, peered under the truck, then took his papers over to the warm room where a radio bellowed.

"Laki and Marina Karayannis? You didn't come over with this truck, did you?" asked the pockmarked captain who stamped the papers.

"Indeed not, Sir Captain," Toumanov used his best grin and the head jerk which is Greek for "no." "My sister and I went by train. Costa who drives this truck broke his fool ankle coming back from too much Slivowitz and now we get a free ride home for Easter, God be praised!" He laughed.

The captain laughed too. "With that load I bet you won't lack for red eggs!" he joked.

Toumanov looked startled, then laughed again. "All-Holy Virgin! We'll have red eggs for all the neighbors this year!" He jumped up into the cab, the guards touched their caps at the girl, and the next moment they were in Greece.

"An hour and a half to Salonica." Toumanov smiled.

"I want to thank you for bringing me home, Laki," the girl said after a while. "I should never have left Salonica with my brother. After he died I found the foreign ways too hard for me. Now I will stay with Mother in Salonica and work for my dowry. And I rather like the idea."

Toumanov smiled again. "First, you go with me to Athens, Marina."

"Athens? But I live in Salonica! And you're safe now. You speak Greek, you know the road . . ."

"You forget the eggs."

"The eggs? But you can sell them in Salonica, or leave them anywhere and go on by train. What are a few cases of eggs?"

"You'll stay with me until Athens in case of highway patrols, Marina. Because tomorrow night, while all Athens is at Midnight Mass, the Athenian comrades and I will bring red eggs to the radio station, to the newspaper offices, to the monument of the Unknown Soldier below Parliament, to the Evzone barracks—the King will come there on Easter to crack red eggs with them, but we'll crack a few first, and starch their pleated skirts for them! And

we'll bring some to the big subway station underneath Omonia, and to Kolonaki where the millionaires live . . ."

His face had flushed and he gestured with one hand. Marina looked at him from under the shawl into which she seemed to have shrunk. "You've crossed the frontier with a truckload of propaganda leaflets that could get you shot?"

Toumanov opened his mouth to answer, closed it, glanced across at her. "Yes," he said at last, looking straight ahead. "To soften up the opposition. Before the big drive of our comrades who wait behind the frontier. Leaflets."

They came into Salonica. "Laki and Marina Karayannis" shared a room in a small clean hotel. Toumanov took the mattress from his bed and placed it across the door. He lay down and winked at Marina. "An old habit," he grinned. And slept.

Shouts woke Marina early the next morning. She opened her eyes and saw Toumanov crouched at one side of the door. His left hand slipped under the sheepskin jacket and came out holding a ridiculously shiny gun.

The shouts informed the entire hotel that the night porter was trying to explain to an impecunious and stubborn foreigner that the extra charge on his bill was government tax. Those who knew English could likewise learn that the foreigner had not foreseen the extra charge, had just enough money to pay for his bus ticket to Athens, that the American Express office was closed for the holidays, and that he was not going to pay. Both stopped for breath and when they started again the word "police" came through clearly in two languages.

Toumanov frowned, then strode out. He went up to the night porter and addressed him politely. "Health to thee," he began. "Shall we bring the police into this house on Holy Saturday? I have a truck, God be praised. I will take the man to Athens and he will have enough left over for coffee for all of us now and maybe a drink for me in Athens!"

"Go towards the Good!" the night porter assented. "I'll make coffee."

Jeff Penning had followed this exchange with interest. Toumanov turned to him. "You pay money she is tax," he boomed. "I go you Athens within my truck. All times we stop you pay me coffee, okay?"

The American looked relieved at escaping the necessity for humiliating explanations before a gaggle of policemen. "Okay," he agreed.

"We can't afford the police here," Toumanov told Marina when Jeff had gone to fetch his rucksack. "Besides, he'll be good if we are stopped."

Jeff Penning lugged the rucksack

out and pitched it over the tailgate. There was a crash and Toumanov came running, pale and furious. "Halt!" he shouted. "She is eggs! What inside you bag?"

"Books," Jeff apologized, wedging the rucksack more gently between two cases. "I'm a computer programmer right now, but I write too." He pointed. *"Iliad*. Plato's *Dialogues*. Books."

They all climbed into the cab, Marina between the two men. She turned to Jeff as they left Salonica. "Breakfast in Kozani," she explained. "Lunch in Larissa. Dinner in Livadia. And tonight, Athens."

"Sounds pretty good. How far's Kozani?"

"A hundred and thirty-three kilometers. With the truck, maybe two hours and a half."

Almond trees bloomed against the slopes, anemones filled the roadside ditches. Marina had started humming one of the minor-key songs that Greeks use to while away time. After an abstracted interval Jeff began declaiming:

"Windflower in the wind
Marble is frailer
Crumbles to memory
A dust of drawings
Anemones erect
Their architecture
Each
And every spring."

"I'll title it, 'And Every Spring'," Jeff caroled on. "Make the imagery a trifle starker, perhaps, and try *Botteghe Oscure* for publication."

Marina smiled. By the time noon and Larissa rolled along she and Jeff had discovered common tastes for the Sixth Book of the *Iliad,* grilled shrimp, Fats Domino records, and skindiving. Jeff had congratulated Marina on her English and Marina had praised Jeff's knowledge of Greek classics.

All the way across the broad Thessalian plain, while winds from hills covered in narcissi made them slightly drunk, Toumanov and Marina taught Jeff a Greek song about a little fishing boat putting out to sea to look for sponges and pearls. The highway patrol that stopped them for a routine check just outside the village of Brallos could not keep from laughing at the American's efforts, and sent them on their way with friendly gibes.

They drove between the first neat houses of Livadia, the town's famous streams loud in the still gold of late afternoon. Buses bound for Delphi packed the piazza to let tourists enjoy Livadia's flowers and its shishkebab grilled right on the street.

Toumanov parked farther down. He looked distrustfully at the children playing about. "The foreigner and I will go and eat first," he told Marina. "Stay with the truck."

Left alone, Marina climbed down and stretched. The air smelled of incense, of cakes baking, and of the mountains. She went around the truck and leaned against its side,

watching the children's game. A wisp of straw stuck out in front of her face, where the tarpaulin was torn, and she pulled it out mechanically. The children sang and Marina smiled while her fingers kept time and pulled out more straw.

Then she stopped. "It is only eggs after all," she muttered angrily.

She drew the edges of the tear farther apart and a level ray of late sunlight picked out rich oily highlights on the carefully packed grenades.

As she wedged straw from the truck floor into the case with clumsy fingers, Toumanov spoke behind her. "A shout gets me arrested, Marina. And if I am arrested, thy Mother dies in Salonica. Also, my English is excellent. Now get back in."

To Jeff's questions, Marina replied she had a headache and wasn't hungry.

The road between Livadia and Thebes runs straight through the Copaic basin. Wind blew more gently than in the North. Red poppies shone through the falling dusk, young green wheat waved all the way to the hills.

Toumanov drove fast, the truck rattled, Jeff dozed. He woke up as they climbed the two sharp turns into Thebes. Night had fallen; the town's yellow lights shone invitingly. Toumanov went straight through and onto the hills beyond.

"Hey, how about stretching a bit?" Jeff asked Marina.

The girl did not answer at once. "Later," she said finally, in a flat voice. "Thebes is not interesting."

Jeff pushed his hands through his hair and yawned. He looked at Toumanov hunched over the wheel, then at the girl whose face was paper-white in the dim dashboard light. He chuckled. "Boy, do you look tired. I bet you'll be glad to get to Athens. Say, what do you do there, anyway?"

"I work as a chambermaid," she replied in the same flat voice. A puzzled line appeared on Jeff's forehead. After a while the girl leaned her face against the window. "I can smell dry stones and pines. Two more ridges, then Eleusis. One ridge after that, Athens."

Toumanov now looked at his watch every few minutes. They topped the first ridge. Far below, the white gleam of a house—the only one in that small valley—shone dimly. As they got nearer they could see a great plane tree patterning the house's whitewash, and below a bracket bulb, a painted sign advertising homemade cheese. Toumanov abruptly pulled up under the tree.

"We are an hour early," he told Marina. "We can't make the truck conspicuous by reaching Athens before ten thirty. Remember, comrades watch thy Mother's house. Entertain thy little foreigner." He climbed down stiffly and followed Jeff and the girl through the double doors into the house.

The naked bulbs hanging down in the big whitewashed room picked out a few small scrubbed wood tables, rush-bottomed chairs, and a garish wall calendar, but left big pockets of shadow in the rear where kitchen arrangements could be guessed at. Marina told Jeff in her new flat voice that the egg dealer expected them later, that they would warm up before going on.

Suddenly Toumanov seemed in ferocious fettle. He greeted the old woman who hobbled toward them, and called for hot coffee and whatever else there was in the house.

"There's little left today," the woman said. "But I'll make coffee and bring lentils."

Jeff moved toward the door. Toumanov whirled. "Where you go?" he asked. The American looked over his shoulder. "Sweater. Cold." Toumanov shrugged and let him go.

Jeff was a long time getting the sweater. He came back stiff-legged and white around the mouth.

Toumanov rocked back in his chair, grinning. "More fun for me now that you have found out," he began in English. "A fascinating problem for a computer programmer. Kilometers from anywhere, not a word of Greek, alone with a witless crone, a useless girl, and . . ." His left hand, with his cap over it, lifted slightly. "And a well-armed saboteur and his truckload of grenades."

The old woman came back with coffee and a dish of lentils. Toumanov poured with his right hand. "This will be such a fantastic coup," he continued, "that you really should know about it, as a writer. All the important officials will be in Athens for Easter. When the cannon booms at midnight, all the best places for panic and propaganda will be hit with grenades."

He tried a mouthful of lentils, spat it out. The girl sat against the wall, Jeff stood in the middle of the room. The old woman had taken a stick with a bundle of wool tied to it and was spinning, hunched over a charcoal brazier.

"Yes, grenades," Toumanov mused aloud. "You are too young to have been in the War. Perhaps Korea?" His eyes were vague but the gun barrel under the cap did not waver. "Grandmother!" he bellowed suddenly in Greek, "bestir thyself! I can't eat this stuff! Hast thou nothing else?"

"My husband died," the woman whined. "My two sons are in town with the mule, they will bring food tomorrow. What should I have?"

Marina's voice floated out, small and cold and indifferent. "Grandmother," she said slowly, "surely thou hast *mayiritsa?*"

"What is that?" Toumanov snapped in English.

Still in that remote voice, without turning her head, Marina explained that it was meat soup made everywhere in Greece on Holy Saturday.

The old woman had put down her wool. "Yes," she admitted finally. "I have a big pot of *mayiritsa.* And perhaps you would like red eggs, and wine?"

Toumanov chuckled. "Come, Christ, and All-Holy Virgin!" he cried. "That's more like it!" The old woman left and he shifted back into English. "Sit down against the wall next to Marina, Jeff, and I'll tell you all about the red eggs. At midnight I'll send word to the comrades in Salonica and across the frontier. They will come while the capital lies paralyzed. You wouldn't think a single truckload of grenades could hobble a city the size of Athens, would you? You know nothing about the way a city lives! Used in a street riot, grenades kill just a few hundred. But for really efficient sabotage they're better than plastic. You have to go and stick plastic on your objective. Grenades you lob. If you have any skill at all—you'd be surprised how many Athenian comrades play baseball—you can pitch a grenade inside a window, under a train, through a steel fence—places where you cannot go with plastic. You can carry grenades in shopping bags and brief cases—they are not as conspicuous as guns. And they really make a most satisfactory noise. No mistaking them for backfires or slamming doors. Always something catastrophic about them, if you follow my meaning."

The old woman came back with a round loaf of bread and a basket of red eggs. Then she brought three deep earthenware dishes brimming with *mayiritsa,* retreated to the other end of the room, and bent over a tin basin to rinse glasses.

Toumanov glanced at the distance between him and the American. Gently he laid the gun and cap in front of him. He picked up a knife in his right hand and made the sign of the cross over the bread with it, saying, "God be praised!" in Greek. He cut thick slices and called Marina over to get food for herself and for Jeff.

The girl obeyed. Toumanov's hand stole under the cap again. When she had sat down he began to eat with vast enjoyment. Jeff tapped his egg against the side of his dish, but Marina just stared at the bread in her hand.

The old woman brought the glasses over and went to fetch wine. When she finally came back, out of breath, carrying a dusty demijohn, she poured wine from it into a heavy tin measure and placed it before Toumanov. Then she went back once more to her spinning.

Toumanov poured the wine into his glass and lifted it to his mouth. Jeff threw his dish at him.

Toumanov's reflex jerk shook the small table and the gun slid to the floor. Jeff launched himself at the saboteur and landed on top, his knees effectively pinning down Toumanov's arms in their thick sheepskin sleeves. He started pound-

ing Toumanov's head on the floor.

"Marina!" Toumanov forced the name out through the mist that was rising about him. "If thy mother is to live, hit the foreigner on the head —with the wine measure!"

Jeff went on pounding, then bent forward suddenly, coming to rest with his face against Toumanov's shoulder. Toumanov rolled over, reached for the gun, and stood up. He staggered to a chair and sat down, head bent low, breath coming raggedly. Then he shook himself and sat straight.

"Grandmother," he said gently, "I know thou wearest six petticoats. I need two of them. Take them off and tear them into strips. Who will come if thou criest out, or if I shoot?"

The old woman crossed herself and with much unlacing and tugging stepped out of two starched underskirts. She tore them into neat strips.

"Marina! Sit in that chair. Grandmother! Tie her wrists each to one side of the back, and her ankles each to one of the back legs of the chair!"

While the old woman was bending over the last ankle knot, Toumanov came up quickly behind her and tapped her with his gun butt. He checked Marina's knots, then tied the old woman to another chair and Jeff more strongly to a third. Then, with a sudden grin, he grabbed three red eggs and shoved them with some difficulty into the three mouths.

He took his glass over to the demijohn, filled it with wine, looked at his watch, and drank. Jeff's eyes opened.

"Farewell, Mister Robot Nursemaid," Toumanov grinned. *"Ya kay Hara*—Health and Happiness, Marina. Remember me when you hear the cannon!" He adjusted the cap on his head and went laughing to the big double doors. There he checked his step and turned around slowly, facing them with a sad expression on his face and the gun in his left hand.

Two shiny policemen with starched caps and soft black mustaches pushed in and grabbed his arms. A third one, glittering with silver braid, moved past them to the prisoners.

The three policemen had taken away Toumanov and his truck. Jeff sat drinking wine while the old woman rubbed some aromatic stuff into his scalp. She spouted Greek at a worried-looking official in civilian clothes while a pink and smiling Marina translated for Jeff.

"I've seen *andartes* who fought the Germans and *andartes* who fought the King," the old woman began dramatically. "My husband was killed in the hills. I know the look of a man pulling a gun! But what was it to me? Then the girl asked for *mayiritsa*. Doesn't every Greek, no matter what crimes he may commit all year, keep Holy Saturday Fast? Doesn't he know

that *mayiritsa* simmers all night until we come back from Midnight Mass? Doesn't he know," she let go of Jeff's head to gesture freely, "that red eggs are first broken by the light of the new tapers?" She reached for more salve and went on matter-of-factly. "When I heard the girl, I understood that he was a foreigner, like the American. But the American did not pretend and call on the All-Holy Virgin. So I went for wine and looked in the truck. When I saw the grenades I went to my husband's room—God keep him!—and telephoned."

Jeff laughed. "She spins," he asked Marina, "and she telephones too?"

"I spin," the old woman said with dignity, "as my own Grandmother taught me. The Devil finds work for idle hands. But I telephone too. Great is God. If He gave us the telephone, should we scorn His gifts?"

The police car purred smoothly over the Eleusinian plain and began to climb the last ridge. The official had thanked them, telephoned for police to guard the house of Marina's mother, and offered to drive them to a hotel in Athens. He hoped Mr. Penning would forgive and forget a regrettable incident. He looked at his watch suddenly, asked the driver to stop, and motioned them out.

Jeff stood on the grass verge, his feet deep in anemones, his arm around Marina's shoulders. Athens must lie out there, in the dark plain at their feet.

A cannon boomed. A thousand-thousand fireflies appeared below as the sound of bells filled the air. From every church starry taper flames spilled out to trickle down every hill, to outline every street . . .

"Christos Anesti, Alithos Anesti," Marina half sang. "Happy Easter, Jeff."

[—Please see page 82]

We present herewith a brand-new translation of a once-famous story that has apparently passed into biblivion. The story was first published in Europe about 1848. It has appeared, so far as we know, in three American anthologies, but to the best of our ability to check, all three anthologies have long been out of print. So we now offer you this old wine, this once-classic tale which probably represents the earliest use of a theme that has had its modern versions, but not as often as one would think—a theme that Anthony Boucher has referred to as a sort of "detection-by-unconscious ESP."

Erckmann-Chatrian is the pseudonym of two Nineteenth Century French writers—Emile Erckmann (1822-1899) and Alexandre Chatrian (1826-1890). Their collaboration was so amazing that they have been called "the Siamese twins of literature" (forerunners of E.Q.?). Both were natives of Lorraine which is not far from the Franco-German border. The two friends collaborated for more than 40 years—think of it!—producing historical novels, plays, short stories, and political propaganda. "The Mysterious Sketch" was one of their earliest short stories . . .

THE MYSTERIOUS SKETCH

by ERCKMANN-CHATRIAN

(translated by Gordon B. Ringgold)

OPPOSITE THE SAINT SEBALDUS Chapel in Nuremberg, at the corner of the Street of the Halberdiers, stands a little inn, narrow and high, with indented gable, dusty windows, its roof topped by a plaster Virgin. There I spent the saddest days of my life. I had gone to Nuremberg to study the old German masters; but lacking money I had to do portraits . . . and what portraits! Huge goodwives with cats on their laps, aldermen in wigs, burgomasters in three-cornered hats, and all illuminated with splashes of ochre and bright red pigment.

From portraits I descended to sketches, and from sketches to mere silhouettes.

There is nothing so pitiable as to have constantly on one's back an innkeeper with thin lips, shrill voice, and an insulting air who

tells you every day, "Come now, monsieur, shall you soon be paying me? Do you know what your bill has gone up to? No, that does not bother you. Monsieur eats, drinks, and sleeps without worry. The Lord feeds the little birds. Monsieur's bill is now two hundred florins and ten kreutzers—not worth speaking of!"

Those who have not heard that tune sung to them cannot appreciate it; love of Art, sacred enthusiasm for the Beautiful—all dries up at the whisper of such a knave. You get awkward, timid; all your creative energy evaporates, as well as your sense of personal dignity, and you bow respectfully from a distance to every Mister Burgomaster!

One evening, not having a penny, as usual, and threatened with prison by the worthy Mr. Rap, the innkeeper, I resolved to put him into bankruptcy by cutting my throat. With this pleasant thought, sitting on my straw pallet, I gave myself up to a hundred philosophical reflections. "What is man?" I said to myself. "An omnivorous animal; his jaws, furnished with eyeteeth, incisors, and molars, prove that well enough. The eyeteeth are used to tear meats; the incisors to cut into fruit, and the molars to grind, chew, and pulverize animal and vegetable substances which are pleasant to the taste and to the sense of smell. But when there is nothing to chew, man is a veritable absurdity in nature, a superfluity, a fifth wheel on a carriage."

Such were my reflections. I dared not open my razor lest the invincible force of my logic inspire me with the courage to make an end to it all. Having thus argued at length, I blew out my candle and put everything off till the next day.

That abominable Rap had completely numbed me. In affairs of art I could see no further than silhouettes, and my sole desire was to get money to rid myself of Rap's hateful reminders. But that night there occurred an odd revolution in my mind. I woke up about one o'clock, lit my lamp, and putting on my gray smock, I slapped on paper a hasty sketch in the Dutch style . . . something strange, queer, that had no relationship with my usual concepts.

Imagine a dark yard, closed in by high decrepit walls. These walls are fitted with hooks, seven or eight feet up from the ground. You guess at once that it is a butchery. At the left extends a wooden trellis; you perceive through it a quartered beef hanging from the arch by enormous pulleys. Wide puddles of blood are flowing on the flagstones and join in a gutter full of rubbish. The light comes from above, between the chimneys, whose weathercocks show up against a bit of sky about as big as your hand, and the roofs of the neighboring buildings boldly pile their shadows one above the other. At the back of

this hole stands a shed; under the shed is a stack of wood, and on the wood are some ladders, a few bundles of straw, some rope, a chicken crate, and an unused rabbit hutch.

How did all these curious details come to my imagination? I don't know; I had no recollection of ever seeing them, and yet each crayon stroke was like an observed fact. Not a particular was missing!

Except for one thing. The lower right corner of the sketch remained blank—I didn't know what to put there. Then something began to stir in my mind, and all of a sudden I saw a foot there, an upside-down foot, above the ground. In spite of this improbable position I followed my inspiration. This foot was attached to a leg . . . on the leg, tensed with effort, soon floated a piece of skirt . . . finally, an old woman, wan, wasted, disheveled, emerged—bent over the edge of a well and struggling against a hand that was squeezing her throat.

It was a scene of murder that I was sketching.

The crayon fell from my hand.

This woman, in the most striking attitude, her face contorted with terror, her hands clenched on the murderer's arm, terrified me. But the man, the murderer, was not clearly visible.

"I am tired," I said to myself, my forehead bathed in sweat. "All that is really left is his face, and I'll do that tomorrow."

And I went back to bed, frightened by my vision. Five minutes later I was sleeping heavily.

The next day I was up at daylight. I had just dressed and was getting ready to resume my interrupted work when two short knocks sounded on my door.

"Come in."

The door opened. A tall, thin old man, dressed in black, appeared on the threshold. The man's face, his close-set eyes, his huge eagle-beak nose under a broad, bony forehead, had something severe about it.

"Mr. Christian Venius, the painter?" he said.

"That is I, sir."

He added gravely, "Baron Frederic Van Spreckdal."

The appearance in my poor hovel of the wealthy art patron Van Spreckdal, a judge of the criminal court, impressed me greatly. I could not help casting an embarrassed glance at my old worm-eaten furniture, at the damp wallpaper, and at the dusty floor. But Van Spreckdal paid no attention to this shabbiness, and sitting down before my little table he said, "Master Venius, I come . . ."

At this moment his eyes rested on the unfinished sketch, and he did not finish his sentence. I had sat down on the end of my dilapidated bed, and the sudden attention this man gave to my drawing made my heart pound with an apprehension.

After a moment Van Spreckdal

raised his head, and watching me carefully he said, "Did you draw this sketch?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is its price?"

"I do not sell my sketches. It is the design for a painting."

"Ah!" he said, lifting the paper with the tips of his long yellow fingers. He took out a magnifying glass from his vest pocket and began to study the sketch silently. The sun by then was slanting into the garret. Van Spreckdal did not say a word; his huge nose curved like a claw, his wide eyebrows contracted, and his chin, pointed up like a slipper, furrowed his thin cheeks with a myriad of little wrinkles. The silence was so deep that I heard distinctly the plaintive buzzing of a fly, caught in a spider's web.

"The dimensions of the painting you have in mind, Master Venius?" he finally asked.

"Three feet by four."

"The price?"

"Fifty ducats."

Van Spreckdal put the sketch down on the table and drew from his pocket a long purse of green silk, stretched out in the form of a pear; he slipped the rings . . . "Fifty ducats," he said. "Here they are."

I was completely overwhelmed.

The baron stood up, bowed to me, and I heard his heavy ivory-headed cane thump on each step all the way down to the bottom of the stairs. Then, recovering from my stupor, I remembered that I had not thanked him, and I went down the five floors like lightning; but, reaching the outer door and looking both ways, I found the street deserted.

"Well!" I said to myself. "That's odd."

And I went back up the stairs, panting.

The astonishing way in which Van Spreckdal had just appeared put me into a wonderful mood. "Yesterday," I said to myself, staring at the pile of ducats gleaming in the sunlight, "I was contemplating cutting my throat because of a few wretched florins, and today a fortune falls upon me from the clouds. Certainly I did well not to open my razor, and if ever the temptation to finish with things comes to me again I shall be careful to postpone it until the next day."

After these sound thoughts I sat down to finish the sketch. Four crayon strokes, and it would be done. But here I found an inexplicable disappointment. It was impossible for me to make those four crayon strokes.

I had lost the thread of my inspiration—the mysterious man in the sketch would not come out from the limbo of my brain. No matter how I tried, again and again, the faces I drew no more fitted the rest of the picture than a Raphael face in a Teniers tavern.

At the height of my efforts Rap

opened the door without knocking, as had become his unpleasant habit. His eyes fastened on my pile of ducats, and in a yapping voice he cried out, "Eh, eh! I've got you! Will you still say, Mister Painter, that you don't have any money . . ." And his hooked fingers reached out with the nervous trembling that the sight of gold always produces in misers.

I stood there stupefied for a few seconds.

The memory of all the insults this fellow had inflicted upon me, his greedy look, his impudent smile—all put me in a state of extreme exasperation. In one bound I seized him, and pushing him out of my room with both hands I flattened his nose with the door. It was done with the snap and the speed of a Jack-in-the-box.

Outside the old usurer was shrieking, "My money! Thief! My money!"

The other tenants came out of their rooms and asked, "What's the matter here? What's going on?"

I opened my door suddenly and launched a kick at the base of Mr. Rap's backbone which sent him tumbling down the stairs. "That's what's going on!" I cried, beside myself. Then I closed and locked my door, while my neighbors' bursts of laughter saluted Mr. Rap as he tumbled by.

I was pleased with myself, and rubbed my hands. This episode had put me back in good spirits. I took up my work again and was about to finish the sketch when an unusual noise came to my ears. Rifle butts were banging on the pavement of the street.

I looked out the window and saw three policemen, carbines at their feet, cocked hats awry, standing guard at the entrance.

"Did that scoundrel Rap injure himself?" I wondered, frightened.

See the inconsistency of the human mind: the night before I was ready to cut my throat and now I shivered to the marrow of my bones thinking I might be hanged if Rap had broken his neck.

The stairway filled with confused noises. There was a wave of mounting steps, of clicking of arms, of brief words. Suddenly someone tried to open my locked door.

"Open in the name of the law!"

I stood up, my knees trembling.

"Open!" bellowed the same voice.

The idea of running away over the roofs came to me. But scarcely had I put my head out of my little hinged skylight than I drew back, dizzy. I had seen in a flash all those windows below with their shimmering panes, their flower pots, their bird cages. And lower, the balcony; still lower, the lamppost; lower yet, the sign of the Little Red Cask adorned with spikes; and finally the three gleaming bayonets waiting only for my fall to run me through lengthwise like a spit.

You can't imagine what clarity, what power and rapidity of per-

ception the eye can achieve under the stimulation of fear.

A third summons: "Open—or we'll break it in!"

Seeing that flight was impossible I staggered to the door and slid back the bolt. Two heavy hands at once came down on my collar. A stocky little man who smelled of wine said to me, "You are under arrest!" He wore a bottle-green frock coat and a stovepipe hat; he had huge brown side-whiskers, rings on all his fingers, and his name was Passauf. He was the Chief of Police.

Five bulldog heads, with little flat caps, noses like pistol barrels, and lower jaws projecting fangs, watched me from outside.

"What do you want?" I asked Passauf.

"Downstairs," he ordered signaling to two of the men to take hold of me. They dragged me away more dead than alive, while the others searched my room thoroughly. I went downstairs, supported under the arms like a last-stage consumptive, staggering at every step. They threw me into a hack between two husky fellows who let me see two heavy billies attached to their wrists by leather loops. Then the carriage started off.

"What have I done?" I asked one of my guards.

He looked at the other one with a peculiar smile and said, "Hans, he wants to know what he's done!" That smile made my blood freeze.

Soon a dark shadow enveloped the hack, and the horses' steps resounded under an arch. We were going into the central jail, where they say: *In this den I see very well how one enters, and see not at all how one gets out.*

All is not rosy in this best of all worlds: from the claws of Rap I was falling into the depths of a cell whence few poor devils have had the luck to get out.

Great dark yards; windows aligned as in a hospital; not a sprig of grass, not a loop of ivy, not even a weathercock in sight. Here was my new lodging. It was enough to make me tear out my hair by the handful. The policemen, accompanied by the jailer, pushed me in a cell.

The jailer, as far as I can remember, was named Kasper Schlussel; with his gray wool cap, his short pipe between his teeth, and his ring of keys at his belt, he produced on me the effect of the owl god of the Caribbean. He had the huge, round, golden eyes which see in the dark, a nose like a comma, and a neck sunk in his shoulders. Schlussel locked me in quietly, as one puts socks away in a closet, thinking of something else.

As for me, my hands clasped behind my back, my head bowed, I stood still in the same spot for more than ten minutes. At the end of this time I made the following obsercations: "Rap, in falling, must have cried out, 'I'm being murdered!' but he didn't say by whom. I'll say that

it was my neighbor, the old spectacles peddler; they'll hang him instead of me."

This idea relieved my heart, and I let out a long sigh. Then I examined my cell. It had been newly whitewashed, and its walls had no markings yet except in one corner where a gibbet had been roughly drawn by a predecessor. Daylight came through a small round window located some nine or ten feet up; the furnishings were a straw pallet and a bucket.

I sat down on the straw, my hands around my knees, in a frightful state of dejection. I could hardly think. But fearing suddenly that Rap, before dying, might have denounced me, I felt a tingling in my legs, and I jumped up coughing, as though the hempen rope had already tightened around my neck.

Almost at the same moment I heard Schlussel crossing the corridor; he opened the cell and told me to follow him. He was accompanied by the two policemen with billies, so I resolutely fell into step.

We went down long corridors, lighted every now and then by a few inner windows. I saw behind one cell door the notorious Jic-Jac who was to be executed the next day. He was wearing a straight jacket, and singing at the top of his lungs, "I am the King of the Mountains!"

On seeing me he called out, "Eh, comrade, I'll keep a place for you at my side!"

The two policemen and the owl god looked at one another smiling, while goose flesh crawled down my back.

Schlussel pushed me into a high, dark room, furnished with benches in a semicircle. The sight of the deserted room, with its two high, barred windows, with its Christ in old browned oak, arms extended, head painfully inclined on one shoulder, inspired me with I don't know what religious fear which harmonized with my present situation. All my ideas of false accusation disappeared, and my lips trembled, uttering a prayer.

Opposite me, on a raised platform, were seated two individuals with their backs to the light. I recognized Van Spreckdal by his Roman profile lighted by a slanting beam from the window. The other man was fat; he had full, plump cheeks and short hands, and wore the robes of a judge, as did Van Spreckdal. Below sat the clerk, Conrad; he was writing on a small table, tickling the lobe of one ear with the feather of his pen.

They told me to sit down, and Van Spreckdal, raising his voice, said to me, "Christian Venius, where did you get this sketch?"

He showed me the sketch I had done during the night, now in his possession. They passed it to me. After examining it I answered, "I drew it."

There was a long silence. The

clerk, Conrad wrote down my answer. I heard his pen scratch over the paper, and I thought, "What does this question mean? It has no connection with the kick I gave Rap."

"You are the artist," Van Spreckdal went on. "What is the subject matter?"

"It is just a fancy."

"You did not copy these details?"

"No, sir, I imagined them."

"Accused," said the judge in a severe tone, "I call upon you to reflect. Do not lie!"

I flushed, and in an angry tone I cried out, "I have told you the truth."

"Write, clerk," said Van Spreckdal. The pen again ran over the paper.

"And this woman," the judge went on, "who is being murdered at the edge of a well—did you imagine her, too?"

"Certainly."

"You have never seen her?"

"Never."

Van Spreckdal rose as though angry. Then, sitting down again, he seemed to consult in a low voice with his colleague.

"What do they want of me? What have I done?" I murmured.

Suddenly Van Spreckdal said to my guards, "You will take the prisoner to the carriage. We are going to Metzerstrasse."

Then, addressing me, "Christian Venius, you are in a serious predicament. Ponder. Think that if men's justice is inflexible, there remains God's mercy. You can earn it by confessing your crime!"

These words struck me like a hammer. I jumped backward with my arms outstretched, crying "What a frightful dream." And I fainted.

When I came to, the carriage was rolling slowly along the street. Another preceded it. The two policemen were still with me. One of them, on the way, offered a pinch of snuff to his companion. I put my hand out toward the snuff box, but he pulled it back quickly.

The carriage came to a stop and one of them got out while the other held me by the collar. Then, seeing his comrade ready to receive me, he pushed me out. These constant precautions to be sure of my person presaged nothing hopeful. But I was far from foreseeing the whole seriousness of the accusation which hung over me, when a frightful circumstance finally opened my eyes and cast me into despair.

They had just pushed me into a low entrance-way, with rough, broken cobblestones. Along the wall flowed a yellowish ooze giving off a fetid odor. I walked amid shadows, the two men behind me.

Farther on appeared the chiaroscuro of an inner yard. As we went forward, terror penetrated deeper and deeper in me. It was no natural feeling—it was a fierce anxiety, as much beyond nature as a nightmare, and at each step I tried to hang back.

"Get along!" cried one of the policemen.

Then I saw it: there, at the end of a corridor, was the very yard I had sketched the night before—the very yard, its walls fitted with hooks, with its piles of old iron, its hen crate and rabbit hutch—and not a single detail missing!

I was thunderstruck by this strange revelation.

Near the well stood the two judges, Van Spreckdal and the fat one. The old woman was on the ground at their feet, lying on her back, her long hair disheveled, her face blue, her eyes wide open, her tongue caught between her teeth.

"Well!" said Van Spreckdal in a solemn accent. "What have you to say?"

I could not answer. I could not say a word.

"Do you admit having thrown this woman, Theresa Becker, into this well, after strangling her to steal her money?"

"No!" I cried. "No! I do not know this woman, I have never seen her before. May God help me!"

"That's enough," he replied in a dry voice. And without adding a word he went rapidly out with his colleague. The policemen then put shackles on me and took me back to the central jail.

In the eyes of the guards I was a condemned man.

I shall not relate to you my emotions that night when, seated on my straw pallet, the little window above me, the gibbet in prospect, I heard the night watchman cry in the silence, "Sleep, people of Nuremberg, the Lord watches! One o'clock! . . . Two o'clock! . . . Three o'clock past!"

Each one of you can form his own ideas of such a night. No matter how one says that it is better to be hanged innocent than guilty. . . . For the soul, yes; but the body knows no difference. On the contrary it balks, it curses fate, it tries to escape, knowing very well that its role ends with the rope. Add that it repents for not having enjoyed life enough, for having listened to the soul which has preached abstinence . . .

"Ah, if I had only known!" it cries. "You would not have kept me on a leash with your fine words, your beautiful phrases, your magnificent maxims! You would not have deluded me with your empty promises. I would have enjoyed some good times which will never come again. It's over—all over! You used to say to me, 'Overcome your passions!' Well, I overcame them. And look at me now! They're going to hang me and later they'll call you a sublime soul, a stoic soul, a martyr to the miscarriage of justice. There will be no thought of *me!*"

Such were my poor body's sad reflections.

Day came; first pale and undecided, it lit up the little overhead window with its vague glimmers—

the bars in the form of a cross—then designed a star on the back wall. Outside the street became active—it was Friday, a market day. I heard the carts of vegetables passing, and the good country people from the Black Forest, loaded down with their baskets. A few crates of hens went cackling by, and the women who sold butter chattered among themselves.

Finally full daylight came, and the great murmur of the growing crowd, of the housewives who were gathering, their market baskets under their arms, going, coming, arguing and bargaining, told me that it was eight o'clock in the morning.

With the coming of light, confidence took hold of my heart. A few black ideas disappeared, and I wanted to see what was going on outside. Other prisoners before me had lifted themselves up to the little window—they had dug holes in the wall to climb up easier.

I climbed up in my turn, and when, sitting in the oval bay, I could see the crowd, could see life and movement and happy faces, tears flowed down my cheeks. I no longer thought of suicide—I felt a truly remarkable need for breathing, for living.

"Ah," I said to myself, "to live is to be happy! Let them make me push a wheelbarrow, let them fasten a ball to my leg! No matter—just so I live!"

The old market building, its roof in the form of a candle snuffer, offered a wonderful view. The old women, seated in front of their baskets of vegetables, their chicken crates, their egg baskets; behind them the old men, selling second-hand clothes, with faces the color of boxwood; the butchers with bare arms, cutting up meats on their tables; peasants with wide-brimmed felt hats on the back of their heads, quiet and serious, hands clasping their holly sticks behind their backs, and calmly smoking their pipes. Then the crush, the noise of the crowd, the yapping, shrill, grave, loud, short words, the expressive gestures, the unexpected attitudes which reveal from a distance the trend of an argument and so well betray the character of an individual—in short, all that usually captivated my mind. And in spite of my sad predicament I felt happy to be still of this world.

While I was looking thus, a butcher passed by carrying a huge quarter of beef on his shoulders; his arms were bare, his elbows raised, his head was bent underneath his load. His flying hair hid his face from me, and yet instantly I gave a tremendous start.

"It is he!" I said to myself.

All my blood rushed to my heart. I got back down into my cell, quivering to the ends of my fingernails, and stammered, "It's he! There he is, there, and *I* am going to die to atone for *his* crime! Oh, God! What can I do? What can I do?"

A sudden idea, an inspiration

from Heaven, crossed my mind. I felt in the pocket of my coat. My box of crayons was there! Jumping to the wall, I began to draw the murder scene with incredible speed. No more uncertainty, no more groping for the murderer's face. I knew the man. I saw him. There he was—*posing for me!*

At ten o'clock the jailer entered my cell. His owl-like impassivity gave way to admiration. "Is it possible?" he cried, standing on the threshold.

"Go get my judges," I yelled at him, continuing my work with unrestrainable excitement.

Schlussel said, "They're expecting you in the Examining Room."

"I want to reveal something to them," I cried, putting the second hand on the murderer.

He was frightening to look at. His face, from in front, foreshortened on the wall, stood out against the white background with startling clarity.

The jailer went out.

A few minutes later the two judges appeared. They stood stupefied. My hand stretched out, and trembling all over, I said to them, "There is the murderer!"

After a few minutes of silence Van Spreckdal asked me, "His name?"

"I don't know it. But at this moment he is in the market building. He's cutting meat in the third stall to the left as you enter from the Street of the Halberdiers."

"What do you think?" he asked, leaning toward his colleague.

"Bring the man here," the other answered.

Several guards in the corridor went out to obey the order. The judges remained standing, still gazing at my sketch. I collapsed on my pallet, my head between my knees, as though prostrated.

Soon steps resounded far under the vaults. Those who have not waited for the hour of deliverance, and counted the minutes, long as centuries, those who have not experienced the poignant emotions of waiting, terror, hope, doubt—those could not possibly conceive the inner tremblings I felt at that moment. I could have recognized the steps of the murderer, walking with the guards, with a thousand others.

The judges themselves seemed excited. I had raised my head, and, my heart as tight as though it were being squeezed in an iron hand, I fixed my eyes on the closed door.

It opened.

The man came in.

His cheeks were swollen with blood, and his small eyes, uneasy and wild as a wolf's, gleamed under thick eyebrows of reddish yellow.

Van Spreckdal pointed silently to the sketch.

That beefy man looked and turned pale. Then, uttering a roar that froze me with terror, he flung out his enormous arms, and jumped backward to upset his guards.

There was a frightful struggle in the corridor; you could hear only the panting breath of the butcher, dull curses, short words, and the feet of the guards, lifted from the ground and falling back on the flagstones. It must have lasted a full minute.

Finally the murderer was dragged back in, his head low, his eyes bloodshot, his hands handcuffed behind his back. He stared again at the sketch, seemed to concentrate, and in a low voice, as though speaking to himself, said, "Who could have seen me? At midnight?"

I was saved!

Many years have passed since that awful adventure. Thank God, I no longer do sketches, nor even portraits of burgomasters. By dint of hard work and perseverance I have won my place in the sun, and am earning my living honorably with true works of art.

But the memory of that mysterious sketch done at night has always remained in my mind. Sometimes in the middle of my work my thoughts hark back to it. Then I lay down my palette and ponder.

How could a crime, committed by a man I did not know, in a place I had never seen, have been reproduced under my crayon down to its most minute details?

Was it chance? No! And besides, what is chance after all, if not the effect of a cause that escapes us?

Could Schiller have been right when he said, "The immortal soul does not share in the weakness of matter; during the body's sleep it spreads its radiant wings and flies off to God knows where! What it does then, no one can say, but inspiration sometimes gives away the secret of its nightly wanderings."

Who knows? Nature is bolder in her realities than the imagination of man in his fancy!

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ARTHUR PORGES**

TITLE: ***Do You Believe in Astrology?***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Meet Mr. Brandon, one of the nastiest characters ever to cross the pages of EQMM. You'll hate him . . .*

THE YOUNG ELECTRICIAN'S EYES widened as he opened the door to a muffled: "Come in—it's unlocked." It wasn't often that he saw the inside of a place like this one. To his left a huge picture window looked out over the rolling green hills, bright with sun and dotted with other luxury houses. The pale blue rug under his dusty shoes was soft, deep, and as springy as the fur of some fabulous beast.

Before his wondering gaze could properly take in the oddly grouped pieces of modernistic furniture, there was a sardonic cough from a deep armchair near the fireplace; and flushing a little, the visitor looked somewhat defiantly at the man sprawled there.

"Ah, the electrician," the owner said, his manner vaguely contemptuous. He eyed the soiled levis, the wrinkled plaid shirt, and his critical gaze finally settled on the large Adam's apple, which was undoubtedly conspicuous on a size 14 neck.

"I'm from Acme Electric," the boy announced, his own voice tinged with resentment.

"They were supposed to send me Mac," the other remarked. "I'm surprised they don't know that by now."

"He's sick today. I'm the new man." He saw the annoyance that this news aroused, and added crisply, "What's the trouble? You're Mr. Brandon?"

"There's no trouble. Who said there was? Just because one sends for an electrician, that doesn't logi-

cally imply trouble. Only a felt want, a hiatus in my domestic scheme of things. An extra outlet for the etheric fluid, to be precise. And if I'm not Mr. Brandon, then my study of Descartes has been a complete waste of time."

The young electrician's face was a study in bafflement. Obviously he had lost the thread even before the man named Brandon had finished.

"They told me an outlet," he said weakly. "A special job—very neat and careful."

"You want it in words of one syllable or less," Brandon said. "Yes, I need an extra outlet. Now shall I spell it?"

The young man flushed, and one of his big, work-stained hands clenched momentarily. Then he shrugged.

"Where?"

Brandon sank deeper in the chair, adjusting his dragon-embroidered lounging robe. He pointed languidly.

"Just under the Braque." Then seeing the look of bewilderment on the boy's face, he snapped, "Under that painting." In a low voice, obviously meant to be overheard, he complained, "My God, what do they teach kids today? Never even heard of Braque."

The electrician carefully deposited his tools on a clean canvas mat and proceeded to study the immaculate paneled wall with its satiny patina. His methodical scrutiny moved Brandon to say irritably, "Are you sure you can handle this job? That wall mustn't be butchered."

"Yes, sir," was the quick reply. "That's why they sent me. My hobby's cabinet work. You don't have to worry, because—"

"I'm not worrying a bit," Brandon said coldly. "That's for you, because if you make the tiniest botch, I'll have your job by tomorrow. That's a promise."

The electrician stared at him, more surprised than resentful.

"Look, Mr. Brandon, you don't have to talk like that. I can do the work all right. But if you keep needling me—"

Brandon waved one hand. "More action and less chatter, *please*. Mac doesn't forget tools like the plumbers—they have a patent on that, I guess—but he always manages to get me talking long enough to earn him an extra hour's wages. At least he understands English."

"I wasn't—" the boy began hotly, only to break off with a visible effort. He hunkered down, peering at the molding; and as he did so, a small magazine dropped from his hip pocket to the floor. Brandon's eyes narrowed a little.

"Judging from that garish Zodiac design on the cover, I'd say you dabble in astrology. I should have guessed."

The electrician twisted round, saw the magazine, and snatched it up, cramming it into his pocket.

"That's the *Horoscope Quarter-*

ly," he retorted. "And I don't dabble—I study it seriously in all the publications. They can tell you exactly—" Once more he stopped abruptly, as if keeping an abnormally tight rein on his tongue.

"And I suppose you swallow all that superstitious nonsense."

"You bet I believe in astrology. I've seen it work." He sat back on his heels, looking at Brandon squarely with his bulging blue eyes. "And I'm in good company, if you must know. All the great men of the past—Newton, Kepler, Copernicus—"

"Skip the lecture," Brandon said airily. "I'm not sure it's worth the trouble to educate you, but I'll try. Know anything about astronomy? Not astrology—astronomy. In the words of Mark Twain, there's a difference between the lightning bug and the lightning."

"I know that scientists always pick on astrology," the boy said. "But for thousands of years before astronomy the astrologers had everything figured out. You take sunspots. Doesn't the sun influence radio waves?"

"Ah sunspots. Good—suppose I grant you those. Do you think that a star dozens of lightyears—no, you wouldn't know about lightyears—say trillions of miles, can affect the life of some two-legged insect here on earth?"

"It isn't so much the stars, it's the planets. They're much closer. And when they're arranged in a certain way, why shouldn't it affect us? There's gravity, isn't there? And the tides?"

"We can't both ask questions," Brandon objected. "One of us ought to answer a few. Take the case of identical twins. They're born under the same planetary configuration or sign of the zodiac, or what have you. Yet as you know, such twins never have the same careers. Now, how do you explain that?"

The electrician was taken aback. "The same planets," he muttered. "Born at the same time." Suddenly his eyes brightened. "Not born at the same time!" he almost yelled. "You're trying to mix me up. I know this much: one's always born first. Sure, only a few minutes, but that's enough. Those planets move mighty fast—ten, twenty miles a second."

"The curse of half education," Brandon groaned. "Considering your background, that's not bad. But it won't do. What about the hundreds of other babies born at the same time—the identical second—and in the same part of the world, even, if you want to be fussy? Do they have the same, or even similar careers. In the words of Shaw, not bloody likely!"

"How do you know that? There could be plenty of lives that turn out exactly alike."

"Nonsense! Here's somebody who dies of a rare disease, or kills himself, or kills somebody else, maybe. There are hundreds of babies who

share the same astrological birth data—do they all do these things? Of course not—it's pure superstition. Why, most astrologers couldn't figure out where a planet will be at a particular moment if you gave them a nautical almanac and five years to study it. Higher math is involved in that. I remember a Madam Redi who—"

"You know Madam Redi?" the electrician interrupted, a hint of awe in his voice.

"Know her? She figured my horoscope a few years ago, the old fake!"

"Boy, you must be loaded all right. They say she gets a hundred dollars for a single reading. Still, if you don't believe in astrology—"

"Don't get me wrong. It was at a party given by Waldman, the theatrical producer. He paid the tab—peanuts to him. Everybody there got a free reading. Entertainment, so called. And of all the silly stuff. Do you know, my naive young friend, what Madam Redi predicted for me?"

The young man shook his head.

"I am to be killed, says Madam, by—get this—a mad wolf. Even Waldman got shook up, paying a hundred for *that*. Imagine—a mad wolf here in a big city where you couldn't even find a rabbit without nine bloodhounds and a posse."

"Wait a minute, Mr. Brandon. She didn't say it would happen in the city, did she? Maybe you'll go to Canada or something."

"Like hell I will. Everybody knows I never leave civilization. I'm no outdoors man, my young astrologist."

"Don't forget there's a zoo only a few miles away. Or a circus might be in town."

Brandon gave him a pitying look.

"Yes. The wolf will escape and come up here—'way on top of a hill. When I go out, it will be waiting in a car. I never walk ten feet on the sidewalk. I've got it!" he cried suddenly, slapping his forehead. "A masquerade party. The mad wolf will sneak in pretending to be a moving picture star. Who'd know the difference? Not the girls, that's for sure."

"Aw, you're kidding. But don't laugh. If I were you, and Madam Redi said that, I'd—"

"You! You're not me. You belong to the moron fringe—astrology, witchcraft, and a charter geoplanarian, I'll bet."

"What's that?"

"That means you believe the earth is flat. Come on now—admit it."

For some reason this particular jibe seemed to irritate the electrician. He sprang to his feet, an angry gleam in his eyes, which were now a hard, shallow blue. In a half-choked voice he gritted, "I've been trying to behave myself, but I'll be damned if that isn't too much."

"Did I hurt your feelings?" Brandon grinned maliciously. "Sorry. I just figured that anybody who be-

lieves in astrology would naturally go for a flat earth. And prenatal influence. And poltergeists. Say," he drawled, "do you read Charles Fort, too?"

"You cut that out," the boy said in a dull voice. "I got my feelings, the same as you. Don't push me. I get enough of that kind of talk from my wife."

"Can I help it?" Brandon said, spreading his hands in a helpless gesture. "It's in my stars, isn't it? They said a superstitious young idiot would come here today instead of old Mac, the metaphysical Scot, who reads Duns Scotus and splits a hair six ways. And both our planets say I'd do my duty and teach you what an ass you are."

"You got no right—" the boy said thickly.

"Speak up and stop muttering," Brandon said, dropping back into the armchair. "Or better yet, get to work. This unenlightening conversation is costing me money. Go on, boy," he added sharply. "Acme didn't send you here to be impertinent."

"But you started it!"

"You heard me!" There was a nasty ring in Brandon's voice now. "Read all the stupid tripe you want to. After all, if we did educate guys like you, who'd be left to wash our windows and pick up our garbage. Thank God for the simple little people, I always say."

The electrician got up slowly, walked to the chair, and looking down at Mr. Brandon, told him something in a low, biting voice the older man never repeated.

Some days later the District Attorney received an informal note. It read:

> Re the Brandon killing, you'll never convict the boy. He's a paranoid from 'way back. Hopelessly insane, I'm afraid. See report.

And underneath, more formally, there was a long case history titled *Psychiatric Report on Harvey Wolf.*

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **WILLIAM FAY**

TITLE: ***Cop With a Conscience***

TYPE: Detective Story

COP: McShane

LOCALE: A boys' summer camp

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A cop has two duties: to enforce the law and to protect the public. The latter includes kids—and it made no difference that McShane was a retired cop . . .*

MCSHANE, WHO HAD BEEN A tough cop for a long time in New York, walked down among the children of the summer camp and attempted to be gentle and reassuring, in his way. The campers, ages eight to fourteen, began to gather on the lake shore with their counselors the moment they saw him coming through the pine trees from his cabin on the hill.

The path between the trees was steep and slippery because of all the needles that had fallen from the pines. McShane, whose game leg now and then betrayed him, slipped once, badly, and had to grab a tree in passing. He did not believe this added to his dignity or bolstered the children's confidence in him.

"Are they still here, Hoppy?" one of the children asked.

The "Hoppy" business, which had its justification in McShane's bum leg and its inspiration in a celebrated cowboy character, was corny, he supposed, but there was not much he could do about it. The boy who had spoken was nine years old and he wore glasses as thick as Macy's window. He was unable to see the two men on the porch of the highest cabin. The boy's name was Donahue and he looked Irish and skinny and scared. "They didn't go yet, Hoppy?"

"No, Eddie. They're here. But they'll be going very soon."

"You can see them on the porch," another of the children said. "Open your eyes and you can see them, Eddie."

"All right, so you can see them on the porch," McShane said. "It doesn't mean they're going to hurt you."

It wasn't hard to see the two men on the wide veranda of McShane's own cabin, nor difficult to make out the smaller figure of the hostages they held.

One of the men stepped out before the cabin now. His name was Siljo—Everett Lawton Siljo—convict, killer, thief. Mr. Siljo, wanted by the police, and with his picture posted in so many public places, was fond of playing a Frank Sinatra recording that McShane had in the cabin: *Wanted—Someone to Kiss Me.* It made him scream with laughter.

At the moment, Mr. Siljo had a .30-.30 rifle in his hands. He moved it carelessly, yet even at this distance many of the children backed away. There was fear on most of their faces.

"Nobody's going to get hurt," McShane said, "if you do as you're told." He was sick of rendering the reassurances in which he did not believe. He turned to one of the counselors. "They're all here, Al?"

"Fifty-eight of them, Mac. All but —well, you know."

You wouldn't call them especially fancy kids, but they were scrubbed and clean-looking at this hour in their blue shorts and their white shirts, with the camp insignia proudly on their chests. They were, with only a few exceptions, the sons of New York City policemen.

It had been McShane's idea to run a camp where the charges wouldn't run any more than $20 a week. He knew very well that cops with kids were always lean in the pockets. It figured that way and, if the cops were honest, it had to be that way.

McShane could not say truthfully that he enjoyed the company of children. He liked them well enough and he thought he understood them; he felt for them, too, but he would a damned sight rather have been with people his own age. Sometimes, when all the kids got to howling and being too cute and he was expected to be a "great big daddy" to them, like it said in some camp folders, he'd as soon have kicked them all into the lake.

He knew it was his conscience that had made him start a camp up here in the first place. He had a tough kind of conscience to carry around. It was the blight of his life. It was always protesting against this own free choice. Now he looked at the kids and their faces were full of love for him. He wanted to run and hide because at this moment he felt like a no-good bum. But instead he had to make a speech to them.

"Look now," McShane said, "all of you are friends of mine. You

know that. I was a cop for more than twenty years, like most of your fathers, and any fellows here, whose fathers don't happen to be cops it's nothing against them. You should all know that a cop's got two things to do. Number one, he enforces the law. I mean he locks people up for doing the wrong things —driving crazy on the roads, for instance, stealing, or hurting people. That's one thing a cop does, when he can. I said when he can."

He watched them all for a minute as he lit a cigarette. It looked as though they understood what he was saying.

He gazed out at the lake at the end of the day and the lake was silver and quiet and beautiful. It was shaped like a woman's long and thin and extended arm. It was eight miles long and very narrow in some places. There was a rowboat, upside-down and dry on the grass, and there were two canoes, the same way, upside-down. I can always cross in a boat, McShane was thinking; it still wouldn't be too late for that.

"Now the other thing a cop has for his job, and it's the more important thing—you can ask your own fathers—is the protection of people. That's why I'm telling you now to do as you're told. We don't want any heroes. We don't want volunteers with great big muscles. That goes for the counselors, too. Especially the counselors. Relax, Al. You too, Hermie. All of you kids keep gazin' up the hill and what do you see? You see Francis and Cookie on the porch with these men, and a lot of you may go to bed tonight and cry tonight because of Francis and Cookie."

McShane looked away from them then, out over the lake to the white birch trees on the opposite shore and the rich green hills where cattle sometimes grazed. His own small herd of dairy cows, unattended now, were lowing near; there were sixteen of them, Holstein, undisturbed and stupid-looking, two of them with their forefeet in the shallows of the lake.

It kind of serves me right, he was thinking, for liking cattle better than kids. McShane, who had not wept in his adult life, didn't believe that this was just the right time to begin.

"There's no use my lying to you boys. You know what's happening. Those fellows up here have Francis and Cookie and they say they will kill them—shoot them in their heads, if anybody interferes. You've got to believe them. I've got to believe them. All the cops and state troopers and sheriff's men for twenty miles around here, they've got to believe them and let these men ride out of these mountains with Francis and Cookie in my car. I know, because I've talked to the police, but what the cops or anybody else can do about it, I don't know. They'll be leavin' here in about ten or fifteen minutes."

"Look, Mac." It was Al, the counselor.

"We've got nothin' to talk about, Al," McShane said. "If you've got something good to say, you should write it down. I don't want to sound nasty, or like I'm the real big boss, but it's got to be this way. You all go to the 'rec' hall, like I told you earlier—everybody goes, the boys first, then the counselors, because these fellows will be counting how many of you go; they know exactly the number of boys and counselors we've got. You stay in the 'rec' hall, every one of you, until it's over. There'll be a ball game on tonight. There'll be the Giants and the Braves."

"Cookie and Francis," somebody said, and a few of the kids were crying.

"You can all pray to God for Cookie and Francis," McShane said, then he turned away from them. Pray to God for them, he repeated to himself, and he asked the question: What else?

He walked back up the hill, still slipping on the pine needles, with his short leg hurting, aching like a tooth, protesting his weight. Turning once, he could see the children filing into the big wooden shed, most of which he had built himself, working up here in the spring and autumn months, living up here on the pension his disability had earned for him.

The kids went into the "rec" hall in an orderly fashion, obedient, with their counselors behind them. McShane continued to climb and he could see Siljo waiting on the porch for him. Siljo was standing alone, without the other man, Rickard. Francis and Cookie were both inside.

"We goin' to have a nice sunset, Commissioner?" Siljo asked?

The title, "Commissioner," was a taunt, rubbed free by now of any comic import, but based on the fact that McShane had been a cop. Siljo, of course, despised all policemen, and either he or his partner had managed to kill one getting this far. Their hope of survival, largely for this reason, rested with the children whose lives they controlled.

Yet Siljo was no hophead, McShane had decided. He was vicious, intelligent, calculating, calm. He had probably figured, with some justification, that his own and his partner's chances were not too bad. They'd ride out of here in McShane's own car and with more protection than the Queen of England for as long as one of them held a revolver at the heads of two small boys.

Siljo, like McShane, was looking out to the lake and the hills. He scratched himself idly.

"How does it look out there for tonight, Commissioner?"

McShane set himself for the blow that would follow his reply. "You know how it looks out there, you rotten ———" he said, and it was worth the careless, sweeping

slap across the mouth that he received.

Siljo, looking greatly amused, whistled into the barrel of the .30-.30 that had once belonged to McShane. "I'll tell you this much, Commissioner," Siljo said. "I think it looks real nice."

McShane was silent. These acres in the hills, bought cheap, comprised the only place on earth he had ever felt entitled to call his own. "Mine and the Lord's," he had said once in exultation, but the arrogance of the phrase had frightened him, so that he had reversed the partnership, putting himself in second place.

That was the first time his conscience, intrusive and annoying, had complained. He had been a widower, a reasonably young man living up here on his pension like a Daniel Boone emancipated from the Bronx. He was a natural for the place and he had dearly loved it, cows and all, especially the cows, until his conscience began to say, "Why don't you share it, McShane? Why be a hog?" and he had started the summer camp.

"One lousy little ol' helicopter floatin' over them woods tonight, with a cop in the cockpit droppin' tear gas, and these kids is dead," Siljo said now. "One roadblock and the kids is dead. One motorcycle cop on the main road and it's the same thing, Commissioner. One siren, even. You told them that?"

"I told them that. I told them twenty times. Nobody has to get nervous with a gun, nobody," said McShane.

"Well, let's go then," Siljo said.

The other man, Aaron Rickard, was younger than Siljo. He was very tall and thin. He had straw-colored hair and pale eyes that never blinked. He had a thin, straight nose and a narrow mouth. He wore a leather jacket that didn't fit. His hands were strange. They always perspired and they were ten inches long from his wrists to the tip of his middle fingers. His hand around a .38 made the gun look like a teaspoon. This man, whose presence frightened McShane, nevertheless took orders from Siljo. He led Francis Reagen and Cookie Armando out to the porch of the cabin again.

"There's nothin' to wait for," Siljo said.

They started down the incline toward the lake and McShane's old sedan. Siljo said he preferred it to the camp's less dependable and more easily recognized station wagon. Francis Reagan walked first, as he had been instructed. He was a tall boy, nearly fourteen years old, skinny as a stork, a dreadful athlete, yet unspeakably brave. It was one of those things. His father was a detective sergeant, the 14th Precinct, Manhattan.

"You," Siljo said to Cookie.

Cookie went next. He was twelve. He was very dark from the sun and he looked as Italian as eggplant

parmigianne. He was a comedian, and there were marks on his face from the times he had failed to amuse Aaron Rickard or Everett Lawton Siljo. If, internally, he was less secure than Francis, he was also younger, and he had more imagination. His father was a traffic sergeant in the Mott Haven section of the Bronx. Aaron Rickard walked carefully behind him.

"You, Commissioner," Siljo said, and that was the way they went, in single file, yet close together, down through the slippery pine needles and the sweet smell of the trees.

The lake was eight miles long and east of it there was no road at all. There was a marsh to the east, as oozy and dark as a melting chocolate sundae. The road went west, out of McShane's own fragment of shore front, up and around and through the clean, hard forest, circling the west end of the lake uneconomically, so that, in all, the trip was sixteen, seventeen miles.

The mountain road led into Route 12A, a thirty-five minute drive, if you didn't break any springs. The road would be open. McShane knew that, for what else could the cops do? Run up a big net? Throw a bomb? Call Siljo and Rickard nasty names through their loudspeakers? With Cookie and Francis riding in the car, the police, however close to the road, would make no clumsy rush. And in their place, he had decided, I'd do the same.

McShane's cows wandered close to the shore. The lake looked dull as a glass eye, dull and cold, and only the white birch trees were vivid on the other side. Forty-five minutes from now there would be no light, which was as Siljo had desired it, as he had planned it, for reasons of his own. He wanted the twilight as far as Route 12A; after that, only Siljo knew.

The single rowboat and the two canoes were still on shore. Here, at the narrow waist of the lake, it wasn't more than a quarter of a mile across. *If I got to the other side,* McShane was thinking, *I don't know what I could do. Dump a log on the road as they came down the steep grade over there? Throw myseld on the road like a bag of sand? Bite the tires with my teeth? God knows I ought to try something,* but it didn't make much sense.

"You like boats, Commissioner?' Siljo said.

"Do I what? Like—what?"

He tried to look dumb, but there was no profit in his pretending. Siljo grinned, then walked over with the .30-30 in his hands and blew two holes in the belly of the rowboat. He fired a shot into each of the more easily splintered canoes.

The cattle scattered clumsily, all but the one between the boat and the canoes. This animal whirled and stumbled, then stopped and looked up at Siljo.

After the four gun blasts, the silence returned to the lake, the for-

est, and the hills. The shadows gathered. Siljo, wearing a strange smirk on his face, raised the .30-.30 once again and shot the cow between the eyes. the Holstein went down, silent and heavy, like a car that slipped from a jack.

"You ——!" McShane said.

He spoke the favored, applicable phrase, but this time Siljo didn't bother to hit him. Siljo listened wistfully to the lingering timber of the blast. He reloaded the rifle.

"I'll make those cops out there as nervous as they can be, won't I, Commissioner?" Siljo said.

Aaron Rickard was already in the back of the car and he spat dryly through one of the windows, as though disapproving; but Siljo looked at him in Siljo's way, so that Rickard did not say anything.

"All right, we go now," Siljo said.

And Francis and Cookie, who was crying, got into the car, sitting next to Siljo, as they were directed. Siljo started the motor. It idled smoothly, the mixture being exactly right. The cheap car purred like a $1,000 watch because Siljo had worked on it that morning. The tires were good, the tank was full.

Siljo didn't speak; he just started away, and all McShane could remember for the next few minutes were the faces of the two kids in the car, looking back at him in unspoken despair, as though, all along, they had believed he would do something more than stand beside a dead cow.

Then they were gone.

Sweet, merciful God, McShane said, not in exclamation, but in prayer. There had to be something he could do, however impossible the something might prove to be.

There were deadfalls of timber on the other side. That much he knew, but he supposed it was the sort of thing that any dwarfed mind would entertain. The trouble was that Siljo had made himself so completely clear about roadblocks of any kind.

McShane tried to think of some other way to wreck the car when it came down the grade on the opposite shore about thirty minutes from now. He believed that anything would be better than letting Siljo and Rickard through to Route 12A and trusting them from there.

McShane looked again at the blasted bellies of the boats. His frustrations choked him because he feared to swim the quarter mile. He did not swim well. The lake, where the springs ran deep, was colder than icebergs, colder than death. He was afraid, and while he was being afraid, he took off his shoes and his pants and his shirt. He feared even more doing nothing at all . . .

A hundred yards out he was exhausted. He had been swimming too hard. He had been threshing his arms like a man trapped in hay. He began treading water. He wanted desperately to turn back.

Here, at this depth, the freezing water made his bad leg ache. The

pale birch trees on the other shores looked impossibly distant. His chest hurt from the effort he had made, but he began to swim again, less desperately this time, persuading himself that he had a chance, that only his fear was holding him back.

It seemed to him that he swam almost as slowly as a floundering child taking lessons, which was true. Don't panic, he thought, don't panic now. Once he looked back to his own shore and he found what he expected to find—that he was halfway across. There wasn't a choice left to him.

It was so silent here, so lonely. His strength was nearly gone, but the deep, penetrating cold that at first had made the pain rage in his left leg had numbed it now. The only agony he knew was that of effort, which was unremitting.

It would be so easy to abandon all the trying and to go down into the water that was no longer cold . . . so, so much easier that he prayed again: *Lord, give me the hem of Your garment.*

A light wind swept the surface of the lake and as he swam, the suddenly choppy water slapped at his face. He swallowed some of it. There was a pounding in his ears, as though they were swelling and would burst.

He tried again and again and then the birch trees were very close, so close that he had hope again and did not abandon effort until his good leg, reaching downward, touched a stone, and the passage was made. He floundered forward. He rested, all but naked, and freezing on the shore.

How long had he taken to swim the quarter mile, he wondered. Ten minutes? Fifteen? Twenty? McShane didn't know, but he could still see clearly, up through the birches to the winding road, though the dusk was fast coming on.

He heard the car faintly, but he wasn't able to measure its distance away. He climbed up to the rough and narrow road to where, as he had known, there was a deadfall of trees. But he could no more budge the first massive trunk he selected than he could have lifted the world from space. All he managed to do was skin his hands on the brutal bark. The effort made him reel.

He wasn't thinking well or planning sanely now. He was being frantically, almost therapeutically busy, as though to remove his emotional need. He saw one heavy stone, the size of an office safe; it was above the road and, if dislodged, it could conceivably roll into the path of the car descending the grade.

McShane tore his feet in the thicket, grappling with the bedded, unmoving stone. He found a stout dead branch to use as a lever. He gained a purchase under the stone. He strained with unnatural effort until the dead branch splintered and broke. He fell with the snap of it and lay exhausted.

He could hear the car very close to the place where he had labored and fallen. He was sobbing and weak, and his wits were no longer dependable.

For instance, it seemed to McShane, as the car came on, that he was seeing, or imagining, cows in the road—cows of all things, driven by a man in overalls, who disappeared on the other side, quietly into the bush—cows in double and bumping columns, crowding close together, turning, looking lost on the narrow road, making their bleak sounds, acting so real that McShane believed he could smell them.

It was an illusion, he thought, imposed by his recent experience with Siljo. Or wasn't it? McShane didn't know. But then the car stopped in the crowded road—stopped still; then it was real enough.

Siljo, the driver of the car, got out of it, holding the .30-.30, his expression very strange. He looked around in the cool twilight, apprehensive, but not convinced of what he should do. McShane saw that. He also saw the indecision on the face of Aaron Rickard, who sat with the .38 in his hands, only inches behind the two boys.

McShane stood almost erect, then moved a trifle forward. He watched Siljo swing the .30-.30 at the cows, but not wholeheartedly, because all kinds of thoughts must have been crowding Siljo's head.

McShane moved forward, step by little step—and then he heard the two shots, sharp and murderous. He never looked toward Rickard. He dove instinctively at Siljo, who had fallen, and he was punching at Siljo, with a stone in his hand for almost a minute before he realized that Everett Lawton Siljo was dead.

"Take it easy, Mac—take it easy now, will you? There's no percentage in breaking your hands."

McShane, sitting in his underwear looked up. He saw a lieutenant of State Troopers. The man looked pretty fancy in his gray whipcords and his wide-brimmed hat. He had too much stomach under his belt, but he was a big enough man to be excused. His name was Kovacs.

There were now more cops than cows in the road. Searchlights had dismissed the twilight. The whole place glared like a big pool table, brilliantly green. Aaron Rickard had never moved from the back of the car. He sat fairly erect, but there was a bullet in his head, too.

"We only fired two shots," said Kovacs. "We had the right men in the right places and they were instructed not to miss."

He helped McShane to his feet and McShane could see Cookie and Francis, just off the road, looking all right at the moment, even though there was a doctor there and a nurse in a white uniform. Someone handed McShane a coat.

"You know, for country cops," he said to Kovacs, "you fellows did all right."

The big trooper smiled. "You swam the lake McShane?"

"That's right, I swam the lake."

"Why did you?"

"Well, I'm a real fancy swimmer, Kovacs. I'm like an eel with a keel. Look, tell me something more important. How come that you thought of cows?"

"Well, they're cheaper than people," Kovacs said, "and we were afraid of any other kind of roadblock. Cows look so innocent. And who the hell would shoot a cow?"

"You're asking me?"

McShane buttoned up the borrowed coat and stepped over the body of Everett Lawton Siljo. He could see Cookie and Francis running toward him now.

Introducing a new series-detective—Professor Atwater of the Addison Club—in a "problem" that will take you back to the classical "golden age" of the simon-pure detective story . . . Lieutenant Kovachy observed: "There seldom is any magic in murder." But, dear reader, there is, there is!

THE CURIOUS QUINTS

by DON KNOWLTON

"SORRY, I CAN'T TONIGHT," SAID Professor Atwater. "I'm going to a meeting of the Curious Quints."

Snodgrass stared at him.

"What in the world," he asked, "are the Curious Quints?"

The Professor chuckled.

"Five old codgers, including myself," he answered, "who like to pit our wits against each other and explore useless and fantastic subjects. You might say that we indulge in an excess of speculative ratiocination. We meet the first night of each month—at the Addison Club, where we're all members. Somebody down there called us the Curious Quints, and the name stuck."

"The Addison Club?" queried Snodgrass. He was an instructor in the English Department of the University. Atwater had been head of the department.

"I'll have to take you down there some day, just to amuse you," continued the Professor. "It's a haven for ancients. Why 'Addison'? It dates us. We're holdovers from the days of Addison and Steele."

The Professor reloaded his pipe. He sat hunched forward on his chair, elbows on his knees, his puckery face peering out from behind a thatch of white hair.

"You really must see the place," he went on. "The Club has a big square brick house with an iron railing—a hundred years ago it was the residence of somebody important. The ceilings are a mile high, the rooms dark, and the walls are lined with books that nobody ever reads. The members sit around nursing their arthritis and polishing their bifocals and making quite a show of being profound and literary, and many of them really are —or perhaps I should say were— very brilliant people. But with the passing of the years—"

The Professor lapsed into retrospection.

"About the Curious Quints," prodded Snodgrass.

"Oh, yes! The Curious Quints. Well, there were five of us who decided that we must take aggressive measures against the advance of dry

rot. So we get together once a month for the deliberate purpose of mental exercise. For each meeting one of us poses a problem and mails it to the others the day before. That provides enough time for cogitation—research, you understand, is not permitted. Our sole tools are memory and logic."

"But the one who submits the problem," began Snodgrass. "Does he—"

"Presumably he knows the answer. The rest of us are supposed to arrive at it. We goad him with questions, we challenge his assumptions—"

"Well, what sort of problems?"

"Anything! On what did Conan Doyle base his belief in spiritualism? What was the numerical strength of the army of Queen Zenobia? What was the relation beteen the Michelson-Morley experiment and the Einstein Theory? Were Swinburne and Christina Rossetti lovers? Where and when was the first stock exchange? That sort of thing. Problems? They aren't problems, exactly. They're fields for conjectural discussion. And it often turns out that the man who presents the problem doesn't actually know the answer—he just *thinks* he does—and we wind up in general disagreement."

"I'd love that," Snodgrass said enviously. "Of course, a lot depends on the kind of men—"

"Aha!" interrupted the Professor. "Let me give you a Who's Who on the other members of the Curious Quints!"

He sprang up and began pacing, bumping his long legs against the furniture, and speaking in jerky sentences interspersed with furious puffs on his pipe.

"Ferris Underwood," he began. "Does calculus in his head and goes to bed with a slide rule. Engineer. Still does some consulting work. Knows everything nuclear inside out. Scares you to death.

"Henry Barnaby. Born wealthy. Collector of rare books and classical statuary. Reads absolutely everything and has a prodigious memory. Will dispute on any subject. A nuisance because of his colossal knowledge.

"Hans Greininger. Raised in Germany. Investment banker, semi-retired. Brilliant financial operator. Appeals us by his understanding of money matters. Eloquent and persuasive, but sometimes inclined to shout us down.

"Carroll Crayton. There, my boy, is a most unusual, a really incredible, character."

Professor Atwater paused, and made a vague gesture toward the window, as if reaching into the snowstorm outdoors in search of the words he wanted.

"Carroll Crayton," he resumed, "is the vainest man I have ever seen. I don't mean vain of his appearance—mercy, no! He'd run behind Caliban in a beauty contest. He has the head of an eagle, the arms of a

chimpanzee, the eyes of a fox, and the voice of a bullfrog. His vanity is that of an actor. He will do anything to win admiration and applause. He *must* demonstrate that he is the cleverest man on earth. You see, he used to be a professional magician—imagine a stage magician from a long line of New England forbears. There is still a slight twang in his voice."

"Isn't he something of a bore?" asked Snodgrass.

"Not for a minute! There's more to him than you would think. His forte was the invention of fantastic mechanical devices that made possible the most incredible stage tricks. Well, he turned that inventive faculty loose in the industrial field. He took out patent after patent; his royalties made him a rich man, and long ago he retired from the stage. He's a scholar, in weird fields—necromancy, the Rosicrucians, alchemy, pagan rites, oracles—he's still a magician at heart! When he gives us a problem—"

The Professor stopped suddenly, and began fishing in his pockets.

"Tonight's Crayton's night!" he exclaimed. "I've got his problem here somewhere—it came in the mail this morning."

After some fumbling the Professor extracted a typewritten sheet and handed it to Snodgrass.

"Here," said the Professor, "see for yourself." Snodgrass read:

"Problem for April 1st: April Fools' Day! Thus doth the calendar annually remind us of the fallibility of the human senses, and the unreliability of conclusions based upon their evidence.

It is not merely that "The hand is quicker than the eye"—any amateur dabbling in the veriest fundamentals of legerdermain can demonstrate the truth of that ancient maxim. Nor is it, as Little Buttercup says, that "Things are seldom what they seem," although illusion is the basis of the magician's profession.

And let us rule out, as unworthy of consideration, what I might term incillary devices for obfuscation such as those used by the notorious Balthaso in the Thirteenth Century; he so bemused the audience by sudden puffs of smoke, "ghosts" in the wings, weird noises, fearful incantations, and cabalistic symbols that their powers of actual observation were reduced to a minimum.

Beyond the diversion of attention, beyond trick lights and mirrors, beyond sleight of hand, there is a deeper art—the art of *actually performing the impossible.* By this I mean that a thing is done which, in the light of cold logic and painstaking examination, could *not* conceivably be done.

Twice already, at the Club, I have given you demonstrations of such accomplishments. They were performed, you may recall, without apparent trappings or paraphernalia. And then (since I have long since retired) I violated a rule of

the profession and revealed *how* they were done.

From this you learned that the technique employed was primarily one of mechanics. An object does not move from one place to another save by physical means. And yet every one of you in the audience—observant, skeptical men—would have sworn, in court, that the object *could not possibly* have been transported to where it was found. I give you this much as a clue to the Problem, which is this:

In a high-ceilinged, book-lined room in an old house an old man is found slumped over a desk. Words do not awaken him; nor does a hand on his shoulder. He is dead. He has been shot at close range through the right temple and has died instantly. No gun is seen; the door is unlocked; the inference is murder. But it was *not* murder—it was suicide. The gun is later discovered in a wastebasket, twenty feet away from the body. Question for the Curious Quints: How did the gun get from the suicide's hand into the wastebasket?

C.C.

"Well, I'll be damned," said Snodgrass, handing the sheet back to the Professor.

The doorbell rang.

"There's my cab," exclaimed the Professor. "Good night—see you tomorrow."

As he entered the Addison Club, Professor Atwater noted that the gate in the iron fence still squeaked. "Ought to be oiled," he thought, as he had so many times before. But then it occurred to him that it was properly symbolic: Most of the members were creaky too.

He nodded hurriedly to the group sitting in the big downstairs room. Old Huddleston, he noticed, was telling a story. He had no doubt told it fifty times to the same people, yet they sat and listened. "Polite old frauds, anyhow," murmured Atwater.

He climbed two flights of stairs, making sure to hold onto the railing, and went down a long hall to a little room in the back—the "Committee Room," it was called. Old files covered one wall; the other walls were sheathed with shelves bearing musty books, faded maps, forgotten trophies, and a few moth-eaten stuffed birds. There was a hot plate for making coffee, and an extension telephone. A roaring fire blazed in the grate. The room had many peculiar uses, but on the first evening of every month it served as the den of the Curious Quints. About a round table were set five copious chairs; on the table were glasses, a pitcher of iced water, and a fifth of scotch.

Henry Barnaby was already there. He was the baldest of them, observed Atwater. That shiny dome above those massive shoulders gave him a formidable appearance; but from the waist down there was not much of Barnaby.

"Blow, blow, thou winter wind," was Barnaby's greeting.

"Can Spring be far behind?" returned Atwater. "Yes, it can. Shelley was a bloomin' optimist."

In came Hans Greininger and Ferris Underwood. "Hans drove me down," explained Underwood. "I don't drive any more." He was a mite of a man, bent over, grizzled rather than gray, with a pointed nose and a habit of staring challengingly.

Greininger was the youngest of the lot. He was a big man, and ostentatiously robust. Insultingly so, thought Atwater. There was, too, a sleek polish to him that Atwater was sometimes inclined to resent. But no pretentiousness. When he was unduly positive about a point it was usually because he was right.

The four took their places at the table.

"It's a queer one that Carroll has given us tonight," observed Underwood.

"No queerer than the ones he's given us before," commented Greininger.

"They've all had to do with magic, one way or another," added Barnaby. "You can't imagine Carroll Crayton proposing any other subject, can you?"

"Oh, come now, let's be charitable," suggested Atwater. "Don't you see we're the only audience he has left?"

"He's given us a real poser," put in Underwood. "I know Carroll's figured out some incredible contraption that would do it, but just the same, how a gun could get from the hand of a man who has shot himself and died instantly to a wastebasket twenty feet away—"

"Hold it," cautioned Atwater. "Let's stick to the rules. No advance speculation. Wait for Carroll. He ought to be here any minute now."

But Carroll Crayton did not arrive.

Round went the talk, from weather to ancient coinage to blood pressure to inflation to palmistry to rockets—but still no Crayton.

"Queer," said Underwood. "He's usually quite prompt. How far out does he live?"

"He lives in one half of an old mansion near the park," answered Greininger. "Owns the place. Rents the other half to people who are away most of the time. Likes solitude. I've never been there, but he's told me about it."

"I've been there," put in Barnaby. "It's the strangest setup you ever saw. No kitchen—he goes out for all his meals. A big library, bedroom, and bath—that's all he uses. All the rest of the rooms are cluttered with relics left over from the days when he was on the stage—props and sets and crazy devices and costumes and photos of The Incredible Crayton. And dust! I suppose he has a cleaning woman in once a month, or something like that—"

"Let's give him a ring," broke in

Atwater. "If he doesn't answer we'll know he's on his way."

The Professor stepped to the phone and dialed the number.

A deep male voice answered.

"Is this Mr. Crayton's residence?" asked Atwater.

"Yes."

"Is he there?"

There was a pause.

"Yes, he's here all right," answered the voice.

"Well, may I speak to him, please?"

"What about?" asked the voice.

Atwater was a bit nettled. "Will you please just call him to the phone?"

"He can't talk to you right now," said the voice. "If you will give me the message—"

"He's supposed to be at a meeting with us tonight, and he hasn't shown up. I want to know if he's coming. This is Atwater speaking."

"Meeting? Where?"

"At the Addison Club."

"What sort of meeting?"

"Damn it, man, he'll know. The Curious Quints."

"The curious *what?*"

Atwater's tone grew icy.

"Will you kindly stop this silly interrogation," he said, "and just ask Mr. Crayton—"

"Sorry, Mr. Atwater," interrupted the voice. "You deserve an explanation. Prepare yourself for a jolt. I'm Lieutenant Kovachy, from Homicide. Your friend Crayton is dead. He was shot."

"You mean—you mean he's been *murdered?*" exclaimed Atwater—and the other three men jerked in their chairs.

"Looks like it. Now you see why I asked questions. What is the nature of the meeting he was supposed to attend?"

Atwater braced himself. As tersely as possible he described the proceedings of the Curious Quints. And as he did so, a monstrous suspicion began to form in his mind.

"Lieutenant," he asked, "was Crayton shot sitting at his desk?"

"Yes."

"Was he shot in the right temple?"

"How the devil do *you* know that?"

"Did you find a gun?"

The Lieutenant sputtered.

"No gun? Well, go and look in the wastebasket."

"What the hell are you handing me!" yelled the Lieutenant.

"I said," Professor Atwater said mildly, "look in the wastebasket. You'll find it about twenty feet away from the desk."

"Hang on," said the Lieutenant. When he came back on the line his voice was grim. "The gun was in the wastebasket. Atwater, I want you and the rest of your crowd to stay right there. That's an order. I'm coming down."

"I rather thought you would," replied Atwater.

It was close to midnight. The

"boy" from downstairs had brought up a fresh bucket of coal—and, just in case, another fifth of scotch. But still they sat—Lieutenant Kovachy of Homicide and four old men—with Carroll Crayton's "Problem" spread on the table before them.

"It's such a peculiar communication, to begin with," the Lieutenant had remarked.

"He thinks we should all be in the psychiatric ward," thought Atwater.

"Nothing peculiar about it at all, for Crayton," Underwood had declared. And they had proceeded to tell the Lieutenant about Crayton.

"That stuff about legerdermain and Balthaso and tricks and doing the impossible—that's his theme song," Barnaby had explained. "We've heard it so many times we almost know it by heart. I hate to say it, but it had become a bit of a bore. All the problems he put up to us sounded very much like this one."

And with that they had produced, out of a squeaky drawer, a file of the past "problems" discussed by the Curious Quints. The Lieutenant scrutinized carefully those that had been presented by Crayton.

"Yes," the Lieutenant had agreed, "I see." He also saw that certain irregularities in the type, obvious in Crayton's current problem, were also present in his earlier ones. The same typewriter—presumably Crayton's—had been used.

Next had arisen the question of time.

The family living in the other half of Crayton's house had returned from Florida at about 7:45 that evening. They had naturally tried to say hello to Crayton, but he did not answer his doorbell and his rooms were dark. But one of them tried the doorknob, found the door unlocked, and walked in. They phoned the police immediately.

Crayton had been dead, the Lieutenant said, for at least twenty-four hours—probably more.

"Let's narrow it down," the Lieutenant had suggested. "Figure him sitting at his typewriter, pounding out an original and four carbons of that 'problem.' Then he addresses and stamps the envelopes, and mails them. All of you got yours this morning. Now—how early would he have had to get them in the mail?"

"Before noon," Atwater had replied, "assuming he took them to the corner mailbox. I live in his zone, so I know."

"But if he had taken them downtown to the post office, even late in the afternoon, you still would have received them—"

"Yes," Atwater had agreed, "but he wouldn't have done that, Lieutenant. Nothing was pressing him, he had all the time in the world, he might even have typed his problem the day before. You see, he hated to go downtown."

"All right," the Lieutenant had

continued, "for purposes of argument, let's assume he walked to the corner mailbox with them some time shortly before noon. That and the medical evidence would place the killing somewhere between noon and, let us say, four P.M."

From that they had got into a discussion of Crayton's personal affairs. *Why* should he have chosen to commit suicide? Health? Money? Insanity?

"You were his financial adviser, Hans," said Underwood. "How did he stand, financially?"

"Absolutely nothing to worry him on that score," replied Greininger. "He had plenty, and it was well invested."

"Might he have overspent—gambled or something?"

"Crayton gamble? Impossible," asserted Barnaby.

"He seemed in perfect health," put in Atwater, "and he certainly wasn't crazy."

"How do you know?" challenged the Lieutenant.

In the silence that followed, the bell in the clock tower downtown boomed twelve. The Lieutenant stiffened his shoulders.

"Okay," he said—and now there was iron in his voice— "let's get down to business. Let's say that Crayton, for reasons still unknown to us, decided to kill himself. The assumption is that he deliberately staged his own death in such a way as to provide a 'problem' for the Curious Quints—and the 'problem' is based on the premise that *after* a man puts a bullet in his brain and dies instantly he can then hide the gun in a wastebasket clear across the room. It's not only preposterous—it's impossible."

"But that's just what Crayton says in his problem!" exclaimed Underwood. "The art of performing the impossible! Doing something which, in the light of cold logic and painstaking examination, could *not* conceivably be done!"

"Let me tell you what he did here at the Club," said Greininger. "He stood up on the stage and took a wooden paper knife out of his pocket. He handed it to a man in the audience, a fellow named James Fink, and asked him to sign his name on it, with his own pen. Fink did so and handed the paper knife back to Crayton, who put it back in his pocket and went on talking. About two minutes later a taxi driver appeared at the back of the room and called out, 'Is there a Mr. Fink here?' Of course Fink got up. 'You seem to have left your paper knife in my cab,' the driver said, and he walked up and handed Fink the paper knife—the very same paper knife on which Fink had written his name. Then Crayton explained how he did it. The microphone was supported on an aluminum tube, and the tube of course was hollow. Crayton, without being seen, had dropped the paper knife down the tube. It had gone through a hole that he'd bored in the floor. Cray-

ton had hired the taxi driver to wait in the basement and catch the knife and bring it upstairs to Fink."

"And the other one," cut in Underwood, who had been waiting eagerly. "That time he took a book—he'd asked a chap in the audience just to pick one from the shelves—and he put it in a box on a table. He did a card trick for a minute or two. Then he said, 'If the gentleman who selected the book I put in the box will now go into the writing room, he will find the book in the middle of the top shelf on the north wall.' And he did! Crayton had rigged up the confoundedest thingamajig, a conveying system, belts, pulleys, and so forth—he patented one, you know, for factories. It went from under the table down into the basement and up the outside of a wall and dumped the book off through an old stovepipe hole. Just as he says in his problem, the technique employed is primarily one of mechanics."

"The man was a fiend of ingenuity," said Barnaby, picking up the theme. "He must have perfected some sort of device that would move the gun—"

"Like, perhaps, a long rubber band," Greininger suggested, "looped over the chandelier, that would pick up the gun after it left his hand and snap it clear across to the wastebasket, and then vanish."

"Or something on wheels," ventured Underwood. "Something activated by the report of the gun, that would carry the gun to the wastebasket and then disappear somehow."

"Or a man," the Lieutenant said coldly, "who walked in, fired the gun, and then dropped it into the wastebasket."

Underwood and Barnaby regarded him pityingly.

"Lieutenant, don't be silly," said Greininger.

"Why do you say it's silly?" the Lieutenant demanded.

"Because there wouldn't be any point to it!" explained Underwood. "There wouldn't be any magic."

"There seldom is any magic in murder," observed the Lieutenant.

"So you still think it was murder," commented Atwater.

"Lieutenant," asked Greininger, "if it was murder, how do you explain the 'problem'?"

The Lieutenant shook his head. "Damned if I can make any sense of the whole business. It's the craziest thing I ever heard of."

"If you'll bear with me for a moment," said Professor Atwater, "I think I can clarify matters."

The Lieutenant looked up in surprise. Thus far Atwater had said very little.

"Assuming that Crayton was determined on suicide," Atwater began, "the rest is entirely logical and quite in character.

"Crayton's overweening passion was the magician's art. He believed that he was the greatest the profession had ever produced. He must

have regretted his retirement from the stage, after his inventions made him wealthy. He missed the spotlight and the acclaim. He still fiercely demanded recognition as the Master.

"He must now die by his own hand. But why not use that death for his final and greatest performance? What a splash the story would make in the newspapers! The King of Magic who, in his own suicide, contrived a trick that baffled the experts! And revealed it in the form of a 'problem' presented to the Curious Quints! Why, the thing would be a sensation!"

"Exactly!" put in Greininger. "If you knew Crayton, Lieutenant, you'd know it was just what he *would* do."

"It's my guess," Barnaby surmised, "that when you get to digging into things out there, you'll come upon some sort of crazy mechanical device—"

"I doubt that," Atwater interrupted decisively. He had stood up, and now faced them, his back to the fire, his long legs casting enormous shadows on the opposite wall.

"You mean," queried Greininger, "that he might have rigged up something so clever that the 'problem' would be unsolvable? Like a self-destroying device that would leave absolutely not trace?"

"No, that's *not* what I mean," Atwater replied—and there now was a grimness in his voice.

"We've all taken for granted," Atwater went on, "that Crayton wrote that problem. But suppose he didn't? Suppose it was written by some body else?"

There was startled silence.

"If Crayton didn't write it," Atwater continued, "who did? It could only have been done by a man who knew Crayton's style and Crayton's personality, a man who was so familiar with Crayton's conversation and obsession that he could do a convincing imitation of him. It would have to be someone who knew all about the Curious Quints, who knew that tonight was a meeting night. It would have to be someone who knew Crayton's living habits. In short, Lieutenant, if the 'problem' was not written by Crayton, it could only have been written by one of us here in this room tonight."

There was an outburst of shocked protest. "Quiet!" roared the Lieutenant. "Let Atwater finish."

"I shall paint a picture for you," said Atwater. "Sometime yesterday morning—probably before noon—a man paid a call on Crayton. There was an argument. The man shot Crayton. Lieutenant, were there powder burns?"

"No—the shot was fired from too far away. That's one of the reasons we assumed it was murder."

"Exactly," Atwater went on. "So the murderer couldn't just leave the gun on the table, expecting the police to figure it was suicide. And he obviously didn't want that gun on

his person. So he hit on the ingenious idea of putting the gun in the wastebasket and duplicating the setup in the form of tonight's 'problem' for the Curious Quints. If Crayton already had a problem of his own ready, the murderer simply destroyed it. Perhaps Crayton was typing one when the murderer came in, and that gave him the idea."

"Of all the crazy—" began Underwood.

"Are you out of your mind?" demanded Barnaby.

Atwater held up his hand for silence.

"The murderer," he resumed, "had plenty of time. He composed that 'problem' with infinite care. Oh, it was cleverly done, it was devilishly clever—but any one of us, with our background, could have done it. He wrote the 'problem,' original and carbons, on Crayton's typewriter, put the copies in Crayton's envelopes, and took them downtown at the post office, sometime in the afternoon, to make sure they would be delivered to us in this morning's mail."

This time there was no outburst. The four men at the table sat like rocks. Only their eyes moved—searchingly—and despite the fire the room seemed very cold.

"Simple, wasn't it?" continued Atwater. "He knew that in any event Crayton's absence from tonight's meeting would uncover Crayton's death. He knew that we were supposedly sane and reliable people. He knew that if the Curious Quints were convinced it was suicide, the police might also be inclined to accept that theory. And he almost got away with it!"

Atwater whirled and pointed a finger at Hans Greininger.

"Hans," he said, "you handled his investments. What had you done with his money, so that you felt compelled to kill him before he would expose you?"

Greininger's face went white. He tried to speak, and failed. He stood up—but by that time the Lieutenant's revolver was on the table.

"I wouldn't try anything if I were you," advised the Lieutenant. "Atwater, if you'll be good enough to phone headquarters—"

After they had gone—Greininger between two husky patrolmen, and Underwood and Barnaby, muttering and still half incredulous—Professor Atwater and Lieutenant Kovachy sat, legs stretched before the fire, each with a long scotch and water.

"Okay, Professor," said the Lieutenant, "tell me how you knew."

Atwater picked up a copy of the "Problem."

"In the last paragraph of the 'problem'," he began, "Crayton refers to himself as an 'old man'. Crayton would never have done that. He was too vain.

"In the third paragraph he refers to Balthaso as having lived in the thirteenth Century. He didn't—he lived in the Fourteenth. Crayton

would never have made that mistake.

"So I began to wonder. If it wasn't Crayton, it had to be one of us. I recalled that Greininger was Crayton's investment counselor. Then I remembered that Greininger had said he'd never been in Crayton's place. But later he suggested that the revolver might have been attached to a rubber band draped over the chandelier. Now, chandeliers are rather uncommon these days. But there *is* a chandelier in Crayton's library, right over his desk. I've been there, and I've seen it. Now—how could Greininger have known about that chandelier if he'd never been there?"

"But the first two words in the fifth paragraph of the 'problem' gave me the clincher. Crayton came from generations of New Englanders. Would he ever have said 'twice already'? Nobody but a German born would have said it that way."

"Damn it," exclaimed the Lieutenant, "even a Hungarian like me should have spotted that one."

For a few moments nothing was heard but the sputtering of the fire.

"You know," the Lieutenant finally ventured, "this idea of five people getting together once a month on a problem—"

"Only three left now," amended Atwater.

"I suppose that's the end of it?"

"Not necessarily," said Atwater. "What we really need is young blood. There's chap named Snodgrass who's interested. Now, Lieutenant, if you'd care to make the fifth—"

The Lieutenant grinned.

NEXT MONTH . . .

***New* stories by—**

AVRAM DAVIDSON

URSULA CURTISS

MARK VAN DOREN

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JAMES HELVICK**

TITLE: ***Total Recall***

TYPE: Crime and Suspense

LOCALE: England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *How long is it since you've read a real thriller?—and we mean a 24-carat, dyed-in-the-blood thriller . . . Well, here it is—enjoy yourself!*

ON THE KITCHEN FLOOR OF THE moorland cottage, pushed in through the wide crack under the door, they found two letters. One was a threat of death. The other was an offer of help. Both letters must have been slid under the locked door during the five hours the Mansells had been out on the moor. The offer lay nearer to the door than the threat, as though it had been pushed there later.

Edward Mansell read the offer first, and his look of vague boredom became one of bewilderment. Then he read the threat. Joan Mansell, looking on irritably, saw him reach out and close the door without taking his eyes from the letter. When he started to read the first letter again, she snapped impatiently, "Oh, what is it? What is it then?"

This holiday on the moor was to have been a kind of second honeymoon after a year of marriage. And today they had spent five hours walking, picnicking, and wrangling about everything or nothing. They had got on each other's nerves all day; their relations seemed to be at the breaking point, and Edward chose this moment to stand there reading these letters as though she were not there.

He touched her shoulder gently. "What?" she said.

He said, "Well, this. You'd better have a look." He gave her the letters, and she stood reading them in the same order that he had. The first said:

Dear Mr. Mansell: I hope you won't consider this an impertinence from a total stranger, but in view of the news about the man Howard being at large somewhere in these parts, I thought, as your place is so very isolated, you might be glad of a little reinforcement. I don't suppose he'll come anywhere near you, but still, he is supposed to be a very dangerous maniac, and I took the liberty of suggesting to the police at Buckforth that they ought to post a man with you tonight. But they are so busy with their "manhunts" and "cordons" that it seems they just haven't anybody to spare.

So it occurred to me that, as I shall in any case be cycling to the "outer edge" of the parish late this afternoon, I might look in on you on the way back and, if you think it would be a good idea, I could help you do sentry go during the night. Probably quite unnecessary, as the police think Howard is over on the other side of the moor by now. But in any case, I should be very glad to make your acquaintance, and hope you will not, under the circumstances, think me intrusive.

It was signed: *George Beale,* with (*Curate at Buckforth, in case you didn't know!*) after the signature.

The other letter was written on expensive paper, in an elegant hand, covering four rather large pages. It opened with a detailed and obscenely worded threat to torture and murder the inhabitants of that cottage during the night. The rest of the letter was a series of reiterations and elaborations of the threat. It was signed: "Barrington Howard."

It took a long moment for the meaning of the letter to drive the irritated expression from Joan Mansell's face, leaving it momentarily blank. Then she swung round to Edward, touching the tweed of his sleeve with her fingertips.

"But, Eddie—all this—it's crazy, isn't it?"

He frowned, taking the letters from her. "Well," he said, "I suppose—"

His eyes turned toward the low window of the kitchen, beyond which lay the moor. She noticed his glance and jerked round abruptly, staring toward the window, her hand to her mouth.

"You mean," she gasped, "there's really something—someone, I mean —out there?"

"Probably nowhere near here. Some maniac." He took the letters from her, keeping his eyes on the window. "The parson seems to know all about him. Probably if we'd been getting the newspapers out here we'd know all about it too. Trouble is, we're so isolated."

"Isolated," she repeated, and took a small step toward the window. "There's no one else for miles."

"Of course there's this police

cordon, and the parson chap." He, too, had lowered his voice.

"And why *us*?" she asked in a strained whisper, looking quickly at the letter in his hand.

"He's a maniac," Edward repeated. "He may be threatening lots of people." He gripped her suddenly by the shoulders. "Look, Joan darling. It's no use our standing here whispering and peering out of that damn' window. Let's for God's sake get a grip on ourselves. Best thing we can do is to get out of here."

"Out?" She was still peering at the emptiness of the moor in the late afternoon sunshine.

"It's less than six miles into Buckforth."

She said, as though she were talking to herself, "Over the moor."

"Only the first part. Chances are we'll run into one of the cops or the parson man on the way out, and this—what's-his-name?—Howard, he'll lie low till after dark, anyway."

"You think so?" She was still staring out of the window.

"Of course." His voice was loud and matter-of-fact. "His letter says tonight. I believe it's true that maniacs never shift from their plan. Kind of *idée fixe*. And anyway—in broad daylight. Now's when the going's good."

"All right." Her expression, as she turned quickly from the window, was a mixture of fear and unbelief in what was happening. "But if we're going, let's be quick. Let's go *now!*"

"Just a minute." He was looking about, with an air almost of embarrassment—as though he, too, hardly believed in the reality of danger—for some kind of weapon. He found a couple of sharp, sturdy kitchen knives and held one out to her awkwardly. "Only for just in case," he said.

Her hand shook a little as she took it. She said, "I know. But it makes it all seem more horribly real."

He took a thick stick too, and she slung her handbag over her shoulder. As he pulled the door open, she managed a wavering smile. "And we were bored with our dull little cottage," she said.

"There might be tracks," he said from the threshold. "I suppose the parson came on his bicycle. Now I come to think of it, that must have been the parson we saw way off across the moor this morning."

"I couldn't see that far."

"I definitely saw someone off on the Buckforth road."

He was looking closely at the hard-earth path that led to the cottage door. "Too hard to hold tracks, I guess," he said. "Anyway, let's get going."

The moorland path went slantwise up and along the side of the steep ridge behind the cottage. They walked in the soft, bulging shadows of the tussocky heather, and

their own shadows hurried beside them. Joan looked westward at the sun, going down toward a pile of thunderclouds.

"It's later than we thought," she said.

"We'll make it," he said. But he too looked westward, and now he was setting a pace that kept her nearly trotting behind him on the narrow track.

He could see her shadow out of the corner of his eye, and once he called out sharply, telling her not to keep looking back.

Before they quite reached the point where the path went over the saddle of the ridge, the thundercloud had hidden the sun. Their shadows had left them. On level ground at the top, they paused briefly, looking back and forward.

Ahead, the path dipped sharply down the long, steep eastern side of the ridge, into a glen at the bottom of which grass and bushes and tall trees took over from the heather. The light and color had drained away from the glen into a vague, early dusk.

One could see the shape of the valley and where the trees and bushes were, but if one started to look hard at anything in particular, the details were softly blurred. The gurgle of the stream along the valley bottom, and the stirring of a small evening breeze in the heather and the treetops blurred, too, the details of any other small sounds there might be.

They strained their eyes and ears against the gurgling, rustling dusk, "There could be anything down there," Joan said.

"Or nothing," Edward said sharply. "We'd better get on if we're going."

"Just let's listen for another second."

They stood rigid, listening. He said, "Come on," and stepped forward, and a paralyzing noise burst out of the valley and rushed up toward them. He jumped back as though something had hit him. For a split second the sound was everywhere.

"It's the birds," Joan gasped. "They shot up all at once out of those trees down there."

They could see now the innumerable dark shapes of rooks circling and beginning to spiral down, with subsiding cries, toward the tops of the trees. "God, how they frightened me!" she said. "Just rooks."

But he was standing looking down intently. She looked at him and gripped his arm.

"You mean something frightened *them*," she whispered.

He nodded, and as again they listened, both of them heard another sound, just audible through the scattered cawing of the rooks and the noise of the stream. Something was moving heavily in the undergrowth down there. Instinctively they both crouched in the heather.

The noise stopped, then started again. It was impossible to tell whether it was a loud noise some way off, or a lesser noise in the nearest part of the valley bottom.

"Could be one of these moorland ponies," he whispered.

The sound came again, the sound of a creature moving carefully.

"Too late," Joan breathed. "We can't go on." He nodded quickly. "The cottage is our best chance now."

Walking in a half crouch, they got back to the ridgetop. Then where the path dipped slantwise down the western flank, they started to run. The jolting thud of their feet and hearts deafened them to all other sounds.

Panting painfully, they staggered together down the last narrow lap of the path to the cottage door. Then they stopped for the first time to look and listen.

Nothing could be seen or heard coming down the path. "We had a good start," Joan said.

Edward pushed her ahead of him into the house. "It may be only just enough," he said. "You get this door and window fixed. I'll do the front."

The cottage was a square box—two rooms in front, divided by a front door, which they never used, and a little passage running back to the kitchen, which filled the whole back space of the house. The front door was a heavy affair with bolts and chains that probably had not been opened in years. One of the little rooms they used only as a storeroom; the other was their bedroom.

Edward moved quickly from one to the other, securing the heavy, old-fashioned shutters which had iron bars that locked them on the inside. When he returned, he found Joan had the kitchen windows shuttered, too, and the door barred. That was also a strong door, though the floor had sunk a couple of inches, leaving the gap through which the letters had been pushed sometime that morning.

A little of the dim remains of daylight still seeped in through large cracks in the shutters and between the heavy panels of the door. Edward lighted the oil lamp, set it on the floor, and rigged a curtain of dish towels around it so that it illuminated the room only dimly and wouldn't disclose them to a watcher outside.

"We'll want to keep a good ear open for the parson man," Edward said. "If he sees the place dark he may think we've gone."

They sat in the half dark listening, and at the same moment both of them heard the noise of something coming down the path from the hillside. Edward had time to get up and tiptoe over to the door, hefting in his hand the small hatchet he had brought from the storeroom.

Then a loud, authoritative hail came from outside. "Police out here. Anyone home?"

Through the largest of the door's

cracks Edward caught a glimpse of the familiar uniform. He hurriedly unbarred and opened the door.

Edward interrupted the speech the policeman was beginning about having no wish to alarm them, but it was his duty to inform them that a maniac—

"We know about that," Edward said. "Look at this." He handed the policeman the two letters.

"And what's more . . ." Joan began to tell the story of their attempted flight and the thing that had moved in the valley.

The policeman listened stolidly. "Well, now," he said, "it might be as well to get that door shut, and if you'll get the lamp lit, I'll just take a look at a this."

Edward barred the door again. "That wouldn't have been anything but a moor pony," the policeman said. "Don't forget I've just come that way from Buckforth myself. Everything quiet. No birds whizzing about. For your information, the indications are that Howard's moving away from here. There'll be a police cordon between you and him by now," he said. "With dogs and all."

"But who *is* this Howard?" Joan asked.

"Barrington Howard?" he asked. "I thought everyone knew about that case."

Seven years ago, Howard, ex-acrobat, small-time actor, with nothing worse in the way of a police record than a couple of parking offenses, had murdered, with obscene brutality, five people in a single night.

The victims were the members of two different families, living within a mile or so of one another in the outer suburbs. Both sets of victims were complete strangers to Howard.

Each household had received, on the day before the murder, a notification of Howard's intention. "The same technique, you see," said the policeman, seeming to find satisfaction in the fact, as though it were a proof of order in a shifting world.

"But didn't the people he murdered—didn't they take precautions?" Joan asked.

"Seemingly didn't take enough," the policeman said grimly. In one case the recipients of the threat had dismissed it as an obvious practical joke by some friend of the family given to practical jokes.

The other household had applied for, and received, a measure of police protection. Clearly it had not been sufficient because by some means which the killer would not, and his victims could not, disclose, Howard had gained admittance to both houses and carried out his threats to the letter. Obviously insane, he had been sent for life to the criminal lunatic asylum. Four days ago he had escaped.

"Queer thing how they caught him that first time," the policeman

said. "It was psychological, kind of. He was very clever at disguising himself and he might have got clean away if it hadn't been for this psychology."

Psychiatry had broken through to Buckforth police station; the policeman knew the words. "Total recall" was the phrase he used to describe how Barrington Howard, despite his remarkably able disguise, had been picked up after those first and famous murders.

Several people had known of him that he had what psychiatrists call "total recall" on one particular subject—Germany. It had been quite a joke in the suburban bar he used to frequent. If anyone brought up the subject of Germany, Howard had total recall—that is, he would get started talking about Germany, and go on recounting quite irrelevant and uninteresting facts about Germany, till, as the policeman said, the cows came home.

"Some people," the policeman explained, "just *can* remember everything about something—something they read, or something they saw. Where it's psychological is when they *have* to remember it. And they come out with it, too."

"Compulsive total recall," Edward said.

"The very words that were used," said the policeman approvingly. "That's the way they got him last time. Maybe that's how they'll get him this time. He's a plausible sort of chap, but they'll get him, all right. Don't you worry." He looked abruptly at his watch and fiddled with his hat.

Joan cried out, "But you're not going to leave us—like this—with that outside?"

The policeman shifted his weight from foot to foot.

"I know how you feel," he said, "but you see, the situation's like this . . ." The police already had had a message that the elderly farmer and his wife who lived in the most desolate part of the moor five miles to the westward had also received some kind of threat. The policeman's present assignment was to make contact with the officer in charge of the cordon, give him the message about the distant farm, and then go on ahead himself to do guard duty there.

"Now," he said, "if I go against orders, the lieutenant won't get the message about the farm, and the old couple out there won't get any quick protection. No one but you and me knows about the letter you got. Seems to me, the only thing to do is for me to get going quickly, give them that information, and have them detail a man to come back here."

It made unanswerable good sense. Joan said, "You can't leave those two old people alone out there. With the killer near, perhaps." She gave a little shiver, and automatically her head turned toward the shuttered window.

"That's right." The policeman

patted her arm. "Now look here, I can tell you one thing: it's unlikely Howard's got hold of a gun, and even if he has, it's a hundred to one against his having more than a couple of rounds of ammo for it. And that means he can't shoot his way in here, and by the look of these shutters and the door, he'd have a hell of a time breaking his way in, either. Now, the parson that's written to you, he's a good chap—chaplain in a commando raid, he was—and before it's full dark *he'll* be here. With a gun, too, I expect. That should see you right till one of our men gets back here."

They listened to the policeman's bicycle bumping away, and then to the silence. Joan turned to her husband and looked into his eyes. "Anyway," she said, "we're together again." The wrangle of the morning seemed infinitely far away.

"Yes," he said, taking her in his arms, "we're together."

Suddenly she leaned away from him. "Listen," she said.

There was a sound on the path. Then there was the loud, repeated ringing of a bicycle bell, and a voice called out, "Is that the Mansells? This is Beale. From Buckforth."

Edward called out in response. The voice came a little nearer, and then said, "Look, you'll probably want to take a look at me before you let me in. Do you want to open a shutter and shine a torch on me?"

"Okay." Edward opened the shutter a chink, and in the light of a flashlight surveyed the clerical figure standing rather stiffly beside the bicycle a few yards away.

He wore a conventional clerical collar, but otherwise he might have been, from his appearance, a doctor or government inspector, or some other kind of civil servant whose work was in the countryside. He grinned pleasantly at Edward. "No good taking chances." he said.

He was a biggish man, and when Edward, as he let him into the cottage and secured the door after him, commented that he looked like a useful reinforcement, he laughed and said that he had a bit more fighting experience than most chaplains.

They thanked him for his offer and his prompt arrival.

"Well," he said, "if Howard is lurking round this bit of the moor the three of us ought to be a match for him. I brought a gun, just in case." He patted his pocket. "Now," he said, "what about showing me the defense plan?"

They showed him what they'd done, and he approved.

"There's nothing to do," he said, "but await developments. Could you give me a sandwich, or something? I've been on the go all day and I'm pretty hungry."

Hurrying, Joan got the food. They carved cold ham and ate a lot of it, and had a potato salad. Edward brought out bottled beer from the cupboard and they drank that.

They talked low and listened of-

ten. But with their new ally there, an armed ex-commando, there was a kind of gaiety in the tension now. It was like the first night of a war. And then, since the visitor seemed an exceptionally agreeable, as well as a kind and thoughtful man, Edward brought out a bottle of whiskey which they had been saving.

As he did so, he saw Joan frown, and he said, "After all, if this isn't a special occasion, what is?" She smiled briefly. Their guest accepted a big shot of whiskey, and the men were soon deep in cheerful reminiscences about the war.

They kept refilling their glasses, even when Joan said, with a little extra emphasis, that she would not have any more because she thought everyone should have a clear head. She sat a little apart, frowning slightly in the gloom of the half-lighted kitchen.

Edward accentuated his cheerfulness, as though to prove that he, at least, was a jolly good fellow who appreciated what another jolly good fellow was doing for them. And so he was still listening with a slightly fatuous smile for at least a quarter of a minute after Joan had stiffened suddenly in her chair.

"I entered Germany," the visitor was saying, "on the Cologne *Autobahn* at three forty-five on the morning of May the twentieth, 1945. I remember it as if it were yesterday. It made, this first sight of Germany, a quite unforgettable impression on me. Of course, when one comes to think of Germany, and the fate of Germany, and so on, naturally one . . ."

His voice went on and on talking about Germany.

Edward's fatuous smile started to freeze on his face. Then, while the guest looked down into his glass, and talked about Germany, Edward got his smile back into position again and kept it there.

At the first break in the stranger's talk, he started to rise and muttered something about going outside for a moment. "Only outdoor sanitation here, you know, old boy."

The face above the clerical collar came up, alert and startled. "I really wouldn't do that, you know. I wouldn't take a chance on going out there alone. You don't realize how dangerous Howard is. I'll come along with you, though, if you like. I've got the gun, you see." His hand went to his pocket.

Edward relaxed into his chair, "Oh, well," he said, "later perhaps. We'll have another drink first, anyway."

The other relaxed, too. "I'm not going to let you out of my sight," he said, smiling.

Keeping it slow and casual, Edward leaned forward to take the bottle. "I'll fill that up for you," he said.

The other looked at his glass, and as he did so, Edward got the neck of the bottle in his fist, jumped suddenly from his chair, and swung with what force he could at the side

of the lowered head in front of him.

The other rolled sideways and seemed to be trying to get out of his chair. His mouth came open, and his eyes stared up with the look of a man taken utterly by surprise.

Before he could even make a move to handle his gun, Edward hit him again. With a deep, shuddering groan, the man toppled right out of the chair.

For a full couple of seconds Edward stood, staring down at him, incredulous at his success. Then he began to claw at his own necktie, ripped it off, and started awkwardly binding the man's hands behind him.

Joan dashed to the cupboard and came back again with a length of clothesline. Silently, trembling with delayed terror, they trussed the big man's arms and legs, twisting the rope around him in a frenzy of self-protection.

The bound man was breathing heavily. Edward felt the side of his head with his fingertips and decided there was no fracture. They tied a wet dishcloth over the small bleeding wound the bottle had made.

They stood back, looking first at the helpless figure on the floor, then at each other. Relief flooded through them. For a minute or two they babbled at each other.

"It was my fault," Edward heard himself saying. "I took too many drinks. He fooled me completely."

"But, darling," Joan was saying, "he'd have taken in anybody."

Edward looked at her gratefully, and then out of the corner of his eye he saw a movement on the floor. The man's leg had moved, gently, stealthily, and one of the knots they had tied had loosened and slipped.

Edward's voice came in a sharp whisper. "Look out," he said. "He's moving. He's—you remember what the policeman said—he's an acrobat. He may be a kind of Houdini."

Fear came back into the room. The prisoner was motionless now, his eyes still closed, but his immobility had the suggestion of a sinister trick.

They stared down at him and actually wished that he would make another movement, something that would give an indication of what he planned. But he did nothing. And they, watching him in fascination, began to have the sensation that quite suddenly, in a single second perhaps, he would simply leap out of the knots and the clothesline and go for them.

"My God," said Joan. "I can't stand this all night."

There was no telephone at the cottage, and Edward said, "I'm afraid all night is what it's going to be. We could take turns watching."

"I wouldn't dare be alone with —with that."

"We could drag him into the front room and lock him in."

They were talking in whispers now.

"It might be just his chance," Joan said. "While we were lifting

him, he might get loose. They can get out of anything—people trained to do those tricks."

It was as though the man on the floor had established some commanding position, as though they, and not he, were helpless.

"Maybe," said Joan suddenly, "the real Mr. Beale, the real parson, will turn up."

Edward looked at his watch and saw to his surprise that even after all that had happened it was still early. Mr. Beale probably would keep his word and "look in" on his way back from what he had called the "outer edge" of the parish.

"I hope to God he comes," Edward said.

For a half hour that seemed a lot longer, they sat, not daring to take their eyes off the figure on the floor. Once Edward thought he saw a new, stealthy movement of an arm, and went over and tried to tighten one of their knots, which now looked horribly amateurish. And then they heard the repeated ringing of a bicycle bell out in the dark, and a voice hailing them.

"It's me, Beale," shouted the voice. "Are you all right?" His voice had a note of urgent anxiety.

"Yes. We're all right." Edward's voice was a little shaky. With an effort, as though he might be struck suddenly in the back, he went across to the door.

The man outside said, "I really ought to give you some kind of password."

But Edward already had the door open and was explaining the situation.

The other stepped quickly across the room to look at the man on the floor.

"My goodness," he said, "he really does look like a parson, doesn't he? Though," he added, "if you were entirely familiar, with the behavior of parsons these days, you might have thought his getup a little, well, a little *too* parsonical."

He himself wore a clerical collar, but was otherwise dressed in rather crumpled light-gray flannels.

He bent over the bound man, and fingered the knots.

"If you'd just give me a hand," he said, "I think we would tighten up this job here and there. And what about the gun? Didn't you say he had a gun?"

Edward gasped. He realized that in the excitement of knocking the man out and then tying him up, he had forgotten the gun.

The newcomer fumbled for it with slightly shaking hands and finally pulled it out of the man's side pocket. "Well," he said, "he seems safe enough now. There's not much trouble he can cause now."

Belatedly they offered him a drink.

"The thing I don't understand," Joan said, "is how this maniac *knew* that you were going to come here. I can understand his picking on us as his victims because of it

being so lonely here. But how did he know he could get in right away by pretending to be you?"

"You see your note," said Edward, "was pushed in *after* his. It was nearer the door and must have pushed his along the floor."

The other looked at him with raised eyebrows.

"But I didn't push mine under the door at all," he said. "I pinned it to the door. Stupid thing to do, now I come to think of it. In fact, if I weren't a parson, I'd call it a damn' stupid thing to do. Howard must have found it, read it, resealed it, and pushed it under the door. That's how he was able to make his plan. Didn't you notice anything funny about the envelope?"

They remembered their bitter quarreling in the afternoon. They had not been in a noticing mood. "We didn't notice anything," Joan admitted.

"And when *did* you notice anything?"

"When he had that 'total recall' thing about Germany," Joan said. "The policeman had told us about his peculiarity. Edward said something about Germany, and suddenly there he was, having 'total recall.'"

"Talked about Germany, did he?" said the other interestedly. "Now I could tell you quite a lot about Germany. I will commence with essential statistics of the area of the country, principal exports and imports, industrial and agricultural production, outstanding historical events. Taking the production figures for 1939, and comparing them with those for 1948, 1949, and the first quarter of 1950, we get a statistical picture of Germany susceptible of comparison with the statistical picture of pre-Hitler Germany."

Edward saw the man pick up the knife while he talked, and at the same time he heard Joan's dreadful scream.

NEXT MONTH . . .

Winner of a Second Prize

HAROLD R. DANIELS' *Inquest on a Dead Tiger*

a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MARJORIE CARLETON**

TITLE: ***Monday Is a Quiet Place***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: A church in Edgeville, United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The fascinating duel of wits between Vern, 15-year-old delinquent and former choir boy, and Emily Damon, 29-year-old secretary to the minister . . . a beautifully written story—and a vision from Hell.*

EMILY DAMON WENT THROUGH the narrow outer closet dedicated to stationery, church bulletins, and the like, and yanking open the inner door, propped it ajar with a shoulder. If it slammed shut, it stuck, amd already the knob was loose from repeated tuggings. She hung her sweater at a decorous distance from Mr. Sanders' robes and then emerged hastily, for the janitor had been heavy-handed with the moth spray. Some of the reek followed her into the study, but the excellent ventilation would take care of it shorty.

She sat at her desk and looked around with her proprietary Monday eye. There were no windows but the cornices shed a concealed daylight, and unless you touched the walls you would think they were really paneled oak instead of patterned plywood. That, at least, was Emmy's innocent conviction. Mr. Sanders' desk was in order, with its single white carnation in a bud vase; the lectern with its huge Bible brooded beneath a picture of the Sermon on the Mount. Everything was as it should be.

She was sharpening a pencil when the door opened soundlessly and a choir boy slipped in. His robe

was far too large, she noted with a practiced eye.

"You boys are not supposed to come in here—" she began and then saw that it was Vern Perrault. Her astonishment cut the rebuke short. No one had told her that Vern had been paroled from the county Reformatory and such a juicy bit of gossip should have flown rapidly around the town. Well, she had obviously missed it somehow, but it was quite incredible that even Mr. Sanders would have admitted him back into the choir.

As the great door started to swing back, the boy caught it and slipped the catch so that it locked behind him.

"Surprised, Miss Damon?"

"Surprised you're back in the choir," she said curtly. "And we don't lock the corridor door. Maybe we should."

He answered only her first comment. "Oh, I'm not in the choir—" he shrugged off the robe, let it drop to the floor—"just took it from the basement chest. How else do you think I got by Miss Lacey?"

He was wearing blue denims and a leather jacket buttoned to the throat, although it was a hot June day. He slid into the chair opposite Emmy, his pose alert but easy. She said nothing, waited. He would talk when he was good and ready, she knew, and after a while he did. "All fixed over in here, I see. But it's awful quiet."

"Monday is a quiet place," Emmy nodded. She approved the slip of the tongue but corrected it. For all his intelligence, Vern was literal-minded. "Quiet day," she amended. "Sunday's over and most folks are too busy the first of the week to bother Mr. Sanders with their troubles. Come to think of it, they seldom die on Mondays, either."

"I didn't mean that. I mean you can't hear the choir practicing. Can't even hear the sawmill."

"When the study was made over, it was soundproofed," she said absently. And that was a slip she did regret, for his eyes narrowed triumphantly.

"Then I guess no one outside can hear anything *inside* here."

"Unless I push the buzzer," she agreed. "The bell rings in the parish room."

"I don't see any buzzer."

"There's one under each desk."

"Why would a minister hide a buzzer?"

She sighed with exaggerated patience. "He's a busy man, Vern. If some talkative old lady takes too much of his time, something has to be done about it; but naturally he doesn't want to hurt her feelings. So he presses the hidden buzzer and one of us comes in with something important for him to look at . . . Anything else you'd like explained?"

He warned, "Just don't touch the buzzer, that's all."

"Not unless you take too much of *my* time," she said meaningfully.

The first round was over and instinctively they settled back in their chairs. There was a little silence as they appraised each other for the first time in two years.

Vern was slim, blond, and a very undersized fifteen, with the innocent eyes and cherubic face that choir boys are supposed to possess and seldom do. He had actually been a choir boy for a brief six months. And that was a laugh, Emmy thought, without feeling in the least like laughing. Fourteen years his senior, she had had Vern in her seventh grade class; and he had been one of the excellent reasons why she had given up teaching to become secretary to the Congregational minister.

Presently she said, "So they didn't parole you out of Dogtown—" (it was an accepted euphemism) "you ran away. They'll catch up with you in a few hours, you know, so why not enjoy the great outdoors while you can?"

He glowered. "I'm waiting for Mr. Sanders."

"If you want help, why don't you go to the church where you were baptized?" Her eyes were grim. "The font water must have sizzled when it touched your little forehead."

He accepted the compliment with a curve of lips as delicately cut and tender as an angel's. But he remained practical. "Mr. Sanders is single and he'll have some dough he can spare. The Reverend Brown's got five children, so he wouldn't have none."

"My, how your grammar has deteriorated."

He bristled. "I was smarter than any of the other kids and you know it. Went clear through the Book of Knowledge before I was nine."

"Through it, is correct. None of it sank in. Anyway, you'd wait a long time for Mr. Sanders. He hardly ever takes his day off but he solemnly promised he wouldn't show up before afternoon. And I hope he's gone fishing. Besides, even if he wanted to help you run away—and he wouldn't —he hasn't a nickel to spare. Not one."

"Oh yeah?"

"I mean it." She leaned forward earnestly. "The parish had to spend so much on church repairs that it will be two years before they can afford to carry the parsonage again. That's why they wanted a bachelor minister who'd be willing to live in a boarding house and take a lower salary for a while. Mr. Sanders is poor and the parish is poor."

Vern looked around sneeringly. "This room cost plenty of dough."

"A minister has to have at least one quiet place," she defended, "so the church voted to fix this up instead of buying the new Communion service."

The boy muttered an obscenity so familiar to Miss Damon's school-hardened ears that her frown was

merely automatic. He went on savagely, "Thanks for the treasurer's report but I'm not interested. Mr. Sanders will find some way to help me. He'll hafta."

"You'll be seeing someone else first. Deacon Phipps comes in Mondays to sort the collection and take the cash to the bank." Emmy found that her eyes had wandered to the wall safe and she hurriedly glanced away.

Vern laughed. "Don't worry, I got no plans to rob the safe."

"And if you did, I don't have the combination any more than you do," she prevaricated. "But you'd better listen to what I'm saying. Deacon Phipps will be in any moment now and you won't win any argument with him, believe me."

"Won't have to argue. Just show him something." The knife was in Vern's hand then, the switchblade a sudden glitter beneath the cornice lighting.

Emmy stared at it without real surprise. Vern's swaggering order about the buzzer had already indicated that he was relying on something other than his own fragile physique to enforce his commands. And it was typical of his confused values that he should come armed to beg help from a clergyman. But she somehow hadn't expected a knife, not after what had happened two years ago. Well, no use taking a chance on the buzzer. She'd have to handle matters herself. The janitor was mowing, Miss Lacey would faint, the choirmaster was seventy-five and arthritic.

She said mildly, "Oh-oh. A knife like that is what brought you the heaviest sentence they could give a thirteen-year-old. Don't you ever learn anything, Vern? That sort of thing won't get you very far."

"Far enough. I'm waiting for Mr. Sanders, whatever Longnose Deacon Phipps tries to pull."

"Mr. Phipps is a big man."

"He makes trouble, this'll let a little air out of his paunch. He won't be so big then. He smiled.

A Victorian writer would have called that smile winsome. Miss Damon had her own adjective.

"And I'm a big girl," she reflected aloud. "Eight inches taller than you, forty pounds heavier. Brought up on a farm. I didn't develop these muscles cleaning blackboards, Vern. Think you can handle both of us at the same time?"

The knife blade did a bewildering ballet through the air. "Like that," he said complacently, "but thanks for the suggestion. Maybe I'd better settle you first, huh?"

Emmy's large and capable hands folded around the bronze paperweight. "I was good at baseball too." Her eyes were bright as a mink's behind the heavy brows. "Of course you might carve me up eventually. But I can guarantee to damage your handsome nose before you even reach this desk. Unfortunately, I can't guarantee it

wouldn't split your skull too. My goodness," she grumbled, "what makes you so ambitious this early on a Monday morning? Quite a change from your school days. Keep it up and you'll be Man of the Year—at least in the penitentiary."

He said sulkily, "Skip the wise chatter. Just push your chair back from the desk so's you can't reach the buzzer." She began to stir reluctantly. "And leave that paperweight on the desk."

Her expression altered. "Ha-ha and ho-ho, little wolf! That would be just a bit too easy, wouldn't it?" There was in her now the same mingled wariness and fierce good-humor with which she had once gentled cattle and unruly classrooms. "I tell you what: you put the knife on the rug as far away as you can reach, and I'll put this paperweight on the rug as far away as *I* can reach."

He said suspiciously, "Your arms are longer than mine."

"Then the knife will be nearer you than the paperweight is to me."

There was something wrong with this argument but offhand, Vern couldn't think what; so he muttered a grudging "Okay." Eyes alert, Emmy thrust the heavy chair back a foot, two feet, four feet. It was slow progress for the carpet was thick.

"Here we go," she said, "as far as you can reach and no cheating." Knife and paperweight were deposited on the rug simultaneously and then the two could relax.

Vern said admiringly, "You're not even sweating."

"Room's air-conditioned. But the day will be a broiler before it's through and you'll look mighty silly in that leather jacket. Stolen from a clothesline, I presume?"

"I presume," he mimicked.

"What'd you expect me to do, wear a Dogtown jersey down Main Street?" He sniffed at a sleeve, raised his head, frowned. "Something smells funny."

"The room," she said indifferently. "Para-dichlor-benzene."

"What the hell's that?"

"Moth crystals to you. Church closes for the summer after Children's Day next week. Why don't you come sing for us, Vern, dear?"

"Go to hell."

"Two hells in a row. You used to be more original, Vern. That's what comes of being with bad companions. I mean, bad for your vocabulary and their morals."

He wasn't listening, his eyes were roaming. After a moment he demanded. "Where's the barrel?"

"What barrel?"

"One Mr. Sanders keeps his sermons in. I heard all ministers get their sermons from a barrel."

Miss Damon studied him thoughtfully. "You're incredible, Vern, quite incredible. You heard that storks brought babies too, didn't you? But you never believed that. No, you knew."

Transparently fair as Vern's skin was, he was no longer capable of blushing. But for the first time he didn't meet her eye. "Aw, can it. All the guys—I mean, any guy . . ." His voice trailed, was cut off by a cough as firm as a period.

"Of course," Miss Damon agreed. "At certain ages you're all horrible little beasts—and don't I know it. But all boys don't torture animals, they don't bully little children to death—oh, no, they're capable of love. Some of them are even afraid of God." She startled herself by that last comment. The Deity's name belonged to certain well-defined rites or to the clergy; it was not to be bandied about in a duel of this nature. But if she were startled at this breach of etiquette, Vern was outraged.

"I said shut up!" he shouted fiercely, but as her eyes stormed at him he became a defensive fifteen, shrill, whining. "How'd I know there was rat poison on the floor? How'd I know she'd be silly enough to eat it?"

Emmy was dispassionate, musing now. "A three-year-old locked in a dark little harness closet for ten hours. No light, no water. No food except dry oats—and rat poison. Of course you wouldn't know it, Vern. All the Books of Knowledge in the world could never teach you or reach you. Nothing ever reached you—nothing. And never will."

But the homily had been too long, she knew. And he had heard it too often. Before she had finished, his face was quite calm again, even faintly amused. "Babble, babble, o'er the pebbles—or however it goes. Anyway, save your breath. I been saying I'm sorry for two years now and I'm through, see? Fact is, it was her mother's fault. If kids are taught right, they don't go around eating things off a dirty floor. *I* didn't," he added virtuously. "Mom Perrault always said so."

"It wouldn't have hurt you," Emmy pointed out. "Most snakes are immune to their own poison."

He ignored that, his brief moment of weakness over. "Where those other two doors go?" he demanded. "I don't remember 'em."

She was not to be betrayed into removing her eyes from the knife. "One's a closet. Other's a hall that leads outdoors. Private lavatory off one side. If you're feeling nervous, Vern," Miss Damon added generously, "I'm sure Mr. Sanders wouldn't mind your using the lavatory. You always did have weak kidneys when you were nervous."

"I'm not nervous and I'm not in seventh grade for you to be talking about my kidneys!" he flared. Inwardly, Emmy acknowledged her own flash of sadism. She had used the one weapon that could hurt him—and against the one failing for which he could not be blamed. But she was not proud of herself.

"Sorry, but I can't waste any

more time with you." She was suddenly brisk. "Monday's the one day I can work without being interrupted much. Listen, Vern, there's eighteen dollars and some change in my handbag. You can have it if you'll just leave here quietly and get yourself picked up somewhere else."

His eyes squinted with curiosity. "Why do you care where I might be picked up? Not that I will be." For a second Emmy wondered herself—but only for a second. Honesty lay deep in her, a granite ridge beneath the loose earthy soil of her everyday personality. She looked down at the broad hands folded in her lap, hands as freckled as her face.

"This place means a lot to Mr. Sanders. Mondays, too. Only room, only day he has to himself. He'll come back this afternoon with a sort of new look on his face, ready for the week ahead. I don't want the study and Monday spoiled for him. He needs them." For the first time she pleaded. "Listen, Vern, he came out of an orphanage the same as you did. He never had a private place or a private day before."

It was the wrong appeal. His voice was jerky, violent. "I never had 'em neither!"

"I know. But the way you're going, you'll have them sooner than you want, and they won't be the same kind as his."

"Gosh, I'm going to burst out crying any minute. But thanks for the loan of your dough and don't hold your breath till you get it back."

"Then you'll take it and go?"

"I'm not getting out till I see Mr. Sanders. Whatever you say, he'll hafta help me. He's my half brother."

"Dream on, little boy." But her tone was not unkind. How well she knew the fantasies of children who had been born or adopted into environments that didn't jibe with adolescent egotism. Even she herself on the good, dull farm . . . She knew a sudden joy that she had left that endless routine forever and without any wrench of ingratitude to mar her freedom. Her parents had died "in the fullness of their years," as Deacon Phipps had put it, and only then had the homestead been sold, with due and unhurried propriety. She would never have to go back to farm life. Never.

She smiled at Vern with the indulgence of memory. Perhaps he mistook the smile for a sneer.

"I mean it," he persisted. "He's my half brother."

Patience vanished. "Please, none of your dramatics, Vern. Of course you came from the same orphanage —there's only one in the state, so why not? But let me tell you something: everyone in Edgeville knows who Mr. Sanders' parents were—and that when his father died, his mother was too ill and hard up to take care of him and

had to go back to her own family."

With pedagogic precision she was ticking off the points on her fingers now. "So Mr. Sanders became a state ward when he was twelve. When he was eighteen, he left and worked his way through college." She sat back triumphantly. "There's no mystery about him, none at all. You were a baby then, hadn't even been adopted yet."

He repeated stubbornly, "He's my half brother. One of the guys told me."

Emmy was really angry now. "Oh, stop it! There's something else you're too stupid to know: when a child is adopted in this state, it's against the law to tell who his real parents were or are. The Perraults didn't know who you were when they adopted you, poor souls. They never knew."

"Now *you* listen." He was supercilious. "There's this guy come to Dogtown the other day. Seems he worked in the orphanage office his last year there. And someone left the files unlocked one day and he was looking through them for the names of fellas he knew. And he found me and Mr. Sanders in the same file. Same file, get it? His mother — my mother — married again. Only the second time, she got an A-one bum." The admission was made with quiet inverted pride. "And when she died he dumped me in the orphanage and claimed they wasn't married and I wasn't his kid."

Miss Damon felt a rising uneasiness but her voice was cool enough. "That's the corniest script yet. Mr. Sanders' mother wrote him regularly until she died of tuberculosis. He told me. And she didn't say anything about another marriage, let alone another child."

Vern said with one of his unnerving flashes of acuteness, "She wouldn't, natch. Look, she puts him in the orphanage because she's sick and her folks wouldn't take him too. Well, maybe even a kid could understand that. But how'd he feel to hear she'd married again and started another family—leaving him out in the cold?" Emmy's face was closed against him, disdainfully. His own hardened. "Anyway, he'll believe me and I'm waiting for him, see? You think I'd be fool enough to skip Dogtown if I wasn't sure he'd *hafta* help me?"

"Whether he believes you or not, he'll never help you break the law."

There was a little silence, then Vern nodded syly. "I thought of that too, but even if he makes me go back, I'll only be twenty-three when I get out. Maybe less, if he pulls strings and gets me paroled to him. He can do a lot for me then. Good thing he isn't married. I'll need time and money to look around till I'm really on my own." For an instant his face was incredibly old and calculating, and Emmy had a vision of what it would be like to have Vern "on his own"

again—but this time an adult, the cement of his wickedness hardened forever. It was a vision from Hell.

"You think he's going to stay single eight years just to support you when you get out?" Her voice cracked with outrage. "Just on the off-chance that you're his half brother?"

"Off-chance, nuts. I can prove it."

"That's exactly what—" Emmy paused abruptly. She had started to say, "what you can't do." But to complete the thought aloud would merely be giving Vern another weapon, for could his assertion ever be *dis*proved legally? The orphanage couldn't officially open its files to Mr. Sanders, for the law had been written to protect not only a child's anonymity but that of his natural parents, whether they were alive or dead.

Mr. Sanders could accept, deny—or wonder. He would never know; he would live on the edge of an abyss. Of course a sensibly selfish extrovert would shrug off the unprovable, with a pang, perhaps, but with sturdy common sense. But not Mr. Sanders, who too often let his Monday be nibbled away by far more trivial exactions; not Mr. Sanders who accepted a room in a noisy boarding house and who was still filled with humble awe at his possession of this study.

The fact was, he wasn't practical and no one would want him to be. But Emmy was. Now it suddenly occurred to her that the orphanage was not the only source of information. One might be able to find people who in later days had known Mr. Sanders' mother and grandparents—the grandparents who had accepted the care of an invalid daughter but who had refused responsibility for an active small boy. Well, they had been old, one couldn't exactly blame them.

Somehow it could be proved that Mrs. Sanders had never married again, had never had another child. And Vern's venomous little balloon would be punctured forever.

But all this would take time and money, for years had passed and the grandparents, like their daughter, were certainly dead or Mr. Sanders would have mentioned them, looked them up. There was no spite in him, no capacity for harboring resentments.

Emmy thought of her savings account but almost immediately another thought, chilly and clairvoyant, perched like a bat on her shoulder. What if she spent time and money only to prove something she didn't want to know? What if she would look back some day to this very moment and say, "Dear God, why didn't I leave it alone?"

She closed her eyes an instant, calling Mr. Sanders' image to her inspection: blond, slimly-built like Vern but unlike Vern, very tall. Vern had blue eyes, so had Mr. Sanders. But the boy's eyes were presented to the world on a plane almost flat with his cheeks, as

though their bland transparency had nothing to hide. Mr. Sanders' eyes were caverned beneath projecting brows; kindly, shy. No, the two did *not* resemble each other.

She looked up, saw the boy lighting a cigarette. "Please don't smoke, Vern. There aren't any ashtrays and remember your asthma."

"My goodness," he grinned, "isn't our Miss Damon thoughtful today. Kidneys and asthma! Why-n't you just say 'drop dead.' You don't fool me any." He took a defiant puff, coughed. "It's not the cig, it's the stink in here. You must have a tough nose." But he pinched the lighted end of the cigarette, blew the ashes away, and pocketed the stub. "Not that I got any complaints about the asthma," he added complacently. "It took me outta farm work and into the liberry. They wouldn't believe me at first, they never do at Dogtown. But Jeez, that first ten minutes in the hayfield I near strangled to death and turned blue in the face. Or so they say."

He threw a leg over the arm of the chair and went on, with an even broader grin, "I was clean out. Woke up in the Infirmary and did I ever get service for a coupla weeks! Now I can pick and choose. For instance, makes me cough to dust books. So I just sit at the desk marked Information."

"And give it out, I'll bet," Emmy observed dryly.

The buzzer rang. Vern leaped visibly. Perhaps he had not quite believed in the existence of that concealed bell. Emmy was almost as startled. She had been in a small purgatory, whose minutes were as endless as eternity. It was comforting to find that Time actually existed—prosaic human time, measured in half and quarter hours.

"I'll have to signal back, Vern. It's probably Mr. Phipps."

He had snatched up the knife and was already on his feet. But he wasn't threatening her for his eyes were swiveling, seeking a compass point in this windowless room.

Emmy had risen too, swooping up the paperweight. Now she moved to the desk, opened a drawer and took out her handbag.

"Don't lose your head, Vern. Just go out the hall door to the garden. That's the West Street side," she reminded him. "There's at least eighteen dollars here, maybe a little more. But if you have a scrap of sense left, you'll go back to Dogtown and do your week in solitary."

He shook his head. "Nix. And I don't want the money. Come to think of it, Brother Sanders wouldn't think that was nice of me—" his eyes glinted at her—"and I want him to know I'm *real* reformed, I can see the front walk from the garden and when old Phipps leaves, I'm coming back to wait—even if it takes all day."

He was panting now, but she knew it was from excitement, not fear. Vern did not experience fear

as other people do. In fact, he had few of the so-called normal reactions. That made him more difficult, of course, but in an odd way, more predictable.

Emmy could predict him now, as calmly as in the classroom. He would do the Vern-thing: at some point in figuring an equation, his very real intelligence would yaw wildly, would leap some unknown terrain—and come up with the wrong answer.

In a way, it was something like the death-wish that psychologists talked about. Not that Vern's body wanted death. It was brilliantly alive, clutching, avid. It burned to survive; it would trample every obstacle to survive. But something in him always came up with the wrong answer.

Emmy stared at him curiously, almost with sympathy.

The buzzer rang again and added two little beeps like plaintive questions. Vern seized the choir robe from the floor, wadded it under his arm. "Which way to the garden? I'm coming back," he warned again.

"To tell Mr. Sanders he's your brother?" Emmy stood very still and her voice was still too.

"Well, my half brother, at least. The good half." He grinned tauntingly. "And he's bound to think there's a good half to me too, or it'd make a monkey out of a parson, wouldn't it?"

Miss Damon let the handbag thud to the desk. She pulled open the closet door. "Here. Straight ahead to the garden through the next door."

Vern plunged in, and almost immediately started to back out. But Emmy was right behind him, bulking tall and solid.

"Jeez, I can't see nothing! Where's the other door?"

"Just put out your hand."

"Okay, go ring the ol' buzzer. But I'm coming back. You rat on me to Phipps, you'll be sorry. So will pie-face Sanders. He'll wish he was dead."

"Yes," Emmy agreed. She could see nothing in the inky darkness, but he must have the door to the inner closet open now, for the stench of the insecticide was a sudden blow to the lungs. Even Emmy coughed and the gasp from Vern was like a ripping blanket.

"Hey, what the hell! Hey, wait!"

Emmy didn't wait. She gave him a powerful thrust that must have thrown him against the robes, for there was a clatter of wooden hangers as he lost balance. The inner door shut. Let him have a taste of the harness room, a taste of night and terror and death.

Emmy closed the outer door and sat at her desk, waiting for the sound of coughing, of fists pounding on wood. But the double closets must be as well insulated as the study itself, for there was nothing around her but the Monday quiet.

Even the buzzer was silent. Miss

Lacey, however puzzled, was keeping Mr. Phipps busy with gossip. And there would be gossip. By this time the whole town must know that Vern had run away from the Reformatory.

She glanced up at the picture above the lectern. Blessed Are the Merciful. She looked away, but the other wall offered even less comfort, holding as it did the sampler worked in 1850 by old Mrs. Phipps's mother: Vengeance Is Mine, I Will Repay, Saith the Lord. The "I" stood out large and scarlet.

Emily stirred uneasily. There was no good half in Vern nor even a good ten per cent. Of course, she conceded, there might be a good one per cent. For all his swagger, was it possible that he was trying to bring a puny miserable little hope—to his brother?

She didn't believe it; only a fool would believe it. In that odd, suspended moment she thought: Maybe this time *I* was Vern's wrong answer. He was sure he knew me —and he didn't.

She sprang up, rushed through the outer closet, and yanked violently at the inner door. The knob came off in her hand.

She felt for the connecting bolt. At her mere touch it slid relentlessly through to the other side. The door was smooth now—a nightmare door.

She raced back into the study and toward the corridor, to call the janitor, pausing only a moment to reset the catch that Vern had changed. And turned to see Mr. Phipps beaming down at her.

He was not allowed to linger. In fact, Miss Damon suggested firmly that his counting and accounting should be done in the parish room today. Anyone listening in would have *known* that she was trying to get rid of Mr. Phipps so that Vern and his asthma could be released from the closet. But he was a shrewd and stately old man. If she had been too rude, he might have grown suspicious and that wouldn't have helped Vern either, would it? Because he did know about the escape.

Her mind was suddenly full of contradictory choices, each canceling the other, holding her in an odd paralysis. Or was paralysis itself a choice?

It was particularly difficult because Mr. Phipps was in a rare and waggish mood for a Monday morning—full of sly, friendly little suggestions. For instance, church finances were doing much better than had been expected. The parsonage would be available again in another year and a fine young man like Mr. Sanders should be married. Makes parishioners selfish to have an unmarried pastor always on call. And then, in a clumsy attempt at a *non sequitur,* everyone liked and trusted Miss Damon. Everyone knew her background, her good solid practical folks. How long was she planning to remain a

beautiful spinster? Wasting her sweetness on the desert air, so to speak—if an old man might say so without offense?

It didn't occur to Emmy to smile at his transparency. She was transparent herself, born of the same rural traditions, the same moralities, the same capacity for facing facts. She looked down at her wristwatch and faced a certain fact very quietly, by about eight minutes she had lost any right to be the future Mrs. Sanders.

After that recognition, she didn't find it hard to get rid of Deacon Phipps. She followed him down the corridor, her experienced eyes noting everything. Choir practice was over. Through the open east door she could see the janitor leaning on his power mower to chat with a passing workman. Sunlight glittered from the metal parts of the machine and there was the acrid, rebellious odor of young grass newly snipped. Miss Lacey's car was gone; she would be at the printer's, heckling him about the Children's Day programs. Emmy turned back, having seen Mr. Phipps safely established in the parish room. She could move swiftly now.

She found tools in the janitor's quarters and returned to the study, and then to the inner closet. No paralysis now—chisel and hammer were a duet of efficiency.

Propping the door open finally, she bent down. There was no pulse in the huddled body, but it was still warm and limp; it was a simple matter to shrug it into the oversized choir robe. And that big strong girl could carry Vern as easily as she had once carried calves or lambs dropped in desolate pastures.

She carried him to the chancel, up to the choir loft, and slid him into one of the choir benches. Once she had folded his arms along the bench in front of him, his head fell quite naturally on those arms. Just as naturally her hand smoothed back the soft blond hair. She lifted his chin an instant and saw that the blue was fading from his face.

She thought: Mr. Sanders will be sure the Prodigal Son came home to repent and die. Perhaps he did. I don't think so but how do I know? I'm just a farm girl who went to Teachers College two years.

She stood looking down from the chancel, tasting the quiet. The church was mid-Victorian Gothic, far too large for its present parish. And in winter, a bit forbidding.

But now with the June airs pulsing through it, it heaved and shone and breathed like some great and gentle ox whose strength has never fully been tried. She would miss it.

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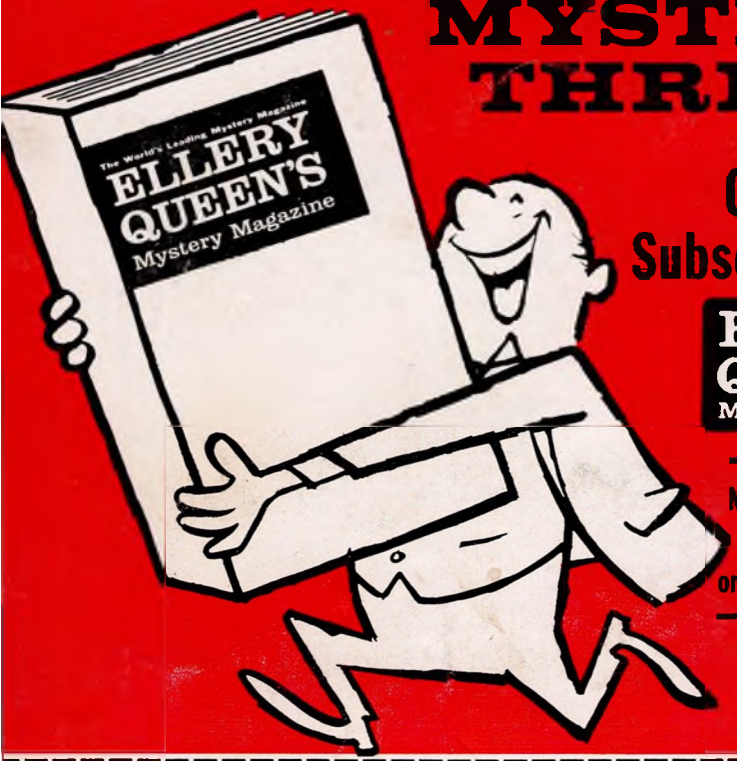

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