THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

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Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

The Cave of Ali Baba
by DOROTHY SAYERS

The Man in the Shadows
by T. S. STRIBLING

The Turkish Yataghan
by SAX ROHMER

The Mark on the Window
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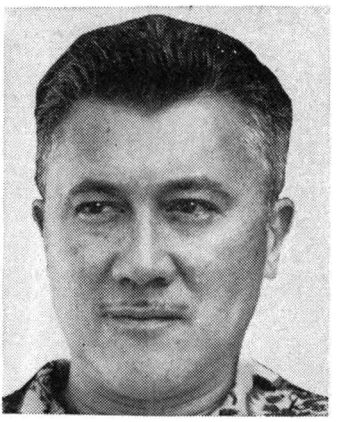
THE PERFECT SUCKER

A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



AMONG THE MANY CHORES I regularly cope with which you would know nothing about if I didn't tell you is that of keeping a paternal eye on our French edition. From the cover, this is a very reasonable facsimile of what you have just picked up, and the very least linguistic of you would have little trouble translating the heading LE SAINT—*Détective Magazine.* You would also recognize most of the authors' names on the cover, if not the translated titles of their stories; except that there is often among them one all-French writer and story which you never saw here, which we put in in the hope that our French readers will not get fed up with so much American literature and start picketing the Paris newsstands with signs saying "Yankee Writers Go Home."

On the inside, however, there are other characteristic differences—by which I hasten to explain that I don't mean there are lots of pictures of half-dressed damsels in semi-cancan costumes. (Do your own arithmetic on that.) But our French editors have some ideas of their own which we have been happy to let them play with. Lately they have been playing up *Le Grand Concours du Saint,* a six-months' contest out of which some indefatigable reader is going to emerge as the proud winner of a motor scooter. And ever since their début they have featured every month a crossword puzzle, a book-review department, and a crime-movie review section.

Now I have always thought that getting out a magazine full of good reading stories was tough enough; but just in case this may be pure laziness, and our French staff may have something, you'll find we are giving one of their notions a trial run this month in our own book.

Why anyone should want this on top of a brand-new story by Pulitzer Prize-winner T. S. Stribling, a new and delightfully goofy job by science-fiction virtuoso James Gunn, a new Solar Pons pastiche by August Derleth, and a new murder mystery by positively the only writer with the authentic name of Rodolfo Jorge Walsh—to say nothing of contributions signed by Sayers, Post, and Rohmer—is a little beyond me.

But our only aim is to please. I'll throw in my own latest addition to the Saint saga, THE PERFECT SUCKER. And if you still want a chance to win a motor scooter, write and tell us. We'll think about it.

Leslie Charteris

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Isaac Newton

Francis Bacon

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the perfect sucker

by . . . Leslie Charteris

In the skirmishes of men who live by their wits, no weapon is as devastating as innocence. . . .

"DON'T ever run away with the idea that any fool can play the fool," Simon Templar was heard to say once, without a blush. "To turn in a first-class performance as the ideal chump, the answer to the bunco artist's prayer, the way I've played it sometimes to hook them on their own line, takes more talent than ordinary actors win awards for. If you overdo it and make yourself look too utterly stupid, a con man might pass you up simply because you seem too dumb to have even the rudimentary larcenous instinct which he needs for his routine. If you strike any false note, you're likely to scare him into a dead run. You have to adlib all your own dialog, and you don't get any rehearsal. And the discouraging thing is that no matter how much you polish your technique, you'll never do so well as when you aren't even trying."

He was certainly not trying when he met Mr. Irving Jardane, or Mr. Jardane met him; for he had come to the Rogue River in Oregon with no thought of hooking anything more preda-

Mr. Sebastian Tombs' new friend, Mr. Oliphant Quigg, was a victim of the 20th Century Way of Life, in particular, forms of legalized robbery and extortion, recognized (except by militant feminists) under the names of Property Settlement and Alimony. The Saint smiled—sympathetic—as he listened to the man.

tory than a few rainbow trout. At such times the Saint had to make no effort to look worthy of his often incongruous nickname. In the complete relaxation which a man can only achieve when solely preoccupied with the leisured assembling of a fly rod and reel in anticipation of a peaceful evening's fishing, all the bronze and sapphire hardness which could edge the Saint's face at some other moments was softened to an almost unbelievable innocence, which a more bemused critic than some of the sharks he had gaffed in his lifetime might have claimed was the revelation of a wonderful childishness of heart which he had never really outgrown.

Mr. Jardane was a rather stout gentleman of about sixty, with bristly white hair and the florid complexion of one who liked to live well—though perhaps not in the same sense as a dietician might define it. He came by the white frame cottage where Simon was sitting on the stoop, and paused to ask: "Been doing any good here?"

The Saint did not delude himself for an instant that his interrogator was eager to know whether he had recently performed any acts of charity or beneficence. In piscatorial circles such a question has only one meaning, and Mr. Jardane was very obviously a fellow fisherman. In fact, he was one of the fishingest fishermen Simon had seen for a long time, from the soles of his waders up to the crown of his special hat which was encircled with a string of small magnets to which clung a dazzling assortment of artificial flies. A plastic box of additional flies, with a magnifying lid, hung like a bib from around his neck; a creel was slung by a strap over one shoulder and a spinning tackle box by another strap over the other. He clutched both a fly rod and a spinning rod in one meaty hand, a landing net dangled down his back, and on his belt were holsters containing a hunting knife and a pair of pliers tricked out with half a dozen auxiliary gadgets. All this gear was of the finest quality, but one seldom saw so much of it on one man at one time.

Mr. Jardane had the next cabin in the irregular row spread out along the high bank of the river in a parkland of tall pines between Grant's Pass and Medford which made up the prettiest fishing camp on that stretch of water (and I have to put that in the past tense, because by the time you read this you might search for it in vain). Simon had already noticed him, as he noticed almost everyone who came within his long range of vision. Mr. Jardane's car was a Cadillac of the latest model: combined with his elaborate angling equipment, he gave the

almost blatant impression of a man who had plenty of money to spend on anything he liked and who had no inhibitions about doing so. But fishermen are an infinitely varied crew, and the Saint could think of many more foolish or more wicked things for a rich man to splurge on.

"I got a couple this morning," he said. "Only small ones. And I worked for them."

"I worked," grumbled Mr. Jardane, "and didn't get anything. Yes, I had one strike. But I lost him. Fishing's lousy this year, anyhow. It's those floods they had last winter. Chewed the bottom of the stream all to hell."

"So I hear."

"Anyhow, for me the fishing doesn't have to be good," said Mr. Jardane defensively. "It's just supposed to be good for *me*."

If he was trying to get a raised eyebrow, he succeeded with that.

"Come again?" Simon murmured politely.

"You think I do this to eat fish? I hate fish. Except when it's cargo. Me, I could eat steak and potatoes every day of my life. That's cargo too. But I like cargo. I like work. So the doctors tell me I work too hard, and I got to lay off at least a month out of every six and relax. They tell me to go fishing. So I go fishing. Relax? Every time I lose a fish, my blood pressure goes up out of sight. I can feel it. But you can't argue with doctors. I'd rather try to figure a tight freight schedule, any day."

Simon grinned lazily.

"Is that your job?"

"Yes." This was where Mr. Jardane gave his name. He added, as if the additional explanation shouldn't really have been necessary: "Transamerican Transport. The yellow trucks with the red lightning-flashes painted on 'em. You must 've seen 'em all over."

"Oh. Those."

"What's wrong with 'em?"

"Aside from clogging the traffic when they're crawling uphill, or barreling too fast down the other side, and stinking up the whole countryside with diesel fumes, I guess they're wonderful."

"They're more than that. They're necessary. Any time you eat a Maine lobster in California, or an Oregon pear in Florida, or a good steak most anywhere, as like as not Transamerican hauled it there. Think about that when you're eating Gulf shrimp in Chicago. And you think we don't pay for the roads? Listen, how many private individuals d'you figure could afford to run a car if they had to take over the share of gas and highway taxes and licenses that's paid by the trucks?"

"I'm sorry," said the Saint

amiably. "I wasn't trying to start a fight. It's only that I wonder sometimes if progress is worth all the things it spoils. I'm only a little crazy."

Mr. Jardane sniffed.

"All right," he said aggrievedly. "But I made my pile out of the world the way it is, and I'll bet I've done it as honestly as however you make a living."

"That," said the Saint mildly, "is certainly more than probable."

The admission seemed to make Mr. Jardane feel better. He watched Simon dextrously tying a tapered leader on the end of his line, and asked chattily: "What sort of business are you in?"

"I used to be a sort of business investigator," Simon told him, without feeling obliged to explain that the only sort of business he had ever investigated very deeply was funny business. "But I'm more or less retired now."

He had said this so often that he had honestly begun to believe it, in spite of the fact that every month or two something infallibly happened to make a liar out of him.

"Retired already? And you look so much younger than me. But don't think I envy you," said Mr. Jardane vigorously. "I've worked all my life, and I'll die in harness, if those damfool doctors 'll let me. Wouldn't know what to do with my time if I quit."

"I go fishing," murmured the Saint. "Like you're doing."

Mr. Jardane blinked at him somewhat dubiously, as though he instinctively sensed a barb somewhere and was trying to locate its point. Failing in the immediate effort, he made a gesture of shrugging himself more purposefully into his manifold accouterments, and said firmly if fatuously: "Well, I guess I'll give it another whirl. We'll compare scores later."

"Good luck," Simon said pleasantly.

But he didn't even glance up as Mr. Jardane clomped away, being too intent on snipping his knot close and melting the remaining couple of millimeters of nylon into a tiny slip-proof bead with the tip of his cigarette.

When the sun dipped below the hills on the west he went down the bank and began to wade slowly up the riffle, pausing for a number of casts every few yards. There were still at least two hours of daylight left, but the direct sunlight was cut off from the water, and there was no reason why the trout shouldn't begin biting, except for their own natural orneriness. . . . Which, apparently, was at its worst that evening, for in the first hour the only specimen of *salmo gairdnerii* that rose to

his fly was a fingerling of such immature dimensions that he could only release it and hope that the experience would keep it out of trouble until it grew to more edible size.

He took to a path by the water's edge to bypass an unpromising stretch of rapids, and it brought him to a floating pier which the owner of the resort had hung some fifteen feet out into the stream to provide a place where anyone who was disinclined to wade could enjoy some limited casting. The outer end of it was already occupied by a small thin man with gold-rimmed glasses who was studiously baiting a spinning line, but Simon stopped on the pier anyway to light a cigarette and lean his rod against the handrail while he changed to the wet fly which he had decided to try next.

The alders and laurels along the bank were still green, but every gust of breeze harvested a flutter of falling leaves, and since the vanishing of the sun there was a perceptible crispness in the air. With the first russet fragrances of autumn blending with the sweet damp smell of the river, and the rush and chuckle of water playing accompaniment to the whispered arias of the treetops, and the softened light from the sky overlaying the landscape with a hint of gauze that a painter would despair of capturing, a poet might have felt that the mere catching of a fish was magnificently unimportant compared with the excuse that the attempt gave a man to enjoy so much beauty and tranquillity; and the Saint might easily have agreed with him. No doubt the relaxed and peaceful mood was even more plainly reflected in his lounging stance as he propped himself beside his rod and carefully wove his knot.

But a fisherman is still a fisherman anywhere, and so he felt no surprise or resentment when the frail man at the end of the pier interrupted his vacuous serenity with the conventional inquiry "Any luck?"

"Not much yet," Simon said cheerfully. "How are you doing?"

The other reached down into the water and pulled up a string from which dangled four small but not contemptible fish.

"How's that?"

"Not bad."

Simon was inevitably interested—he would not have liked to call it envious, but he was human too.

"I see you're one of the fellows who'd rather do it the hard way," said the little man sociably, lowering his catch back into its natural cooler. "I'm afraid I'd be a complete duffer at fly casting." He picked up his rod and held up the line, exhibiting a couple of salmon eggs on the

hook with a small sinker a cubit ahead of them. "But I suppose you'd despise this kind of fishing."

"It seems to catch trout," Simon conceded.

The little man made a clumsy roundhouse cast, but managed to reach out about forty feet. He had sparse mousy hair and an eager bony face; somehow he made one think of a timid schoolteacher.

"There's a bit of art to it, all the same," he insisted apologetically. "A lot of people don't catch anything, even with salmon eggs. They get nibbles, and lose their bait, but they don't seem to be able to hook the fish. It used to happen to me, till I made a study of it. First, I decided you have to let your egg go to the bottom, and leave it there, so it lies pretty much naturally. There's no use to keep hauling it in and throwing it out again. If there's a trout anywhere around, he'll find it. And if he's hungry, he'll take it."

"I can't argue—with the theory."

"But he won't usually gulp it, the way he might go for a fly. He knows it's not going to run away. And I think it must taste better than a fly. Why shouldn't he want to enjoy it? So he takes it in his mouth and swims a little way with it. That's when most people go wrong. They feel a little tug, and jerk their rod, and unless they're lucky they snatch the egg right out of his lips, or pull the hook out of the egg, but they don't snag *him*."

"What do you do, Professor?"

"I've got a lot of extra line off the reel, see, like this, and I'm holding it in the tips of my fingers, just as lightly as I can, only just enough so's the current won't take it away, and I can feel a little pull if I get one, but not so tightly that he'll feel a resistance and get suspicious—Look, something's playing with it now!"

The monofilament was peeling slowly away from his poised fingertips. Two or three feet of it slipped off, and then the movement stopped. The little man lowered his thumb to grip the line again as lightly as a feather.

"Now he's really taking it well into his mouth. In a minute he'll be ready to start swallowing, and then he'll move on again to look for something else to eat. . . . There he goes. . . . Give him a little more to make sure . . ." The skinny fingers delicately released more line, then checked it gently. "Now we should have him."

The handle began cranking, the rod tip flicked up and then bent, and the line sprang straight and taut from it for a second before a galvanized shimmer of silver erupted from an eddy downstream. In a very few sec-

onds more the little man was hoisting his prize bodily on to the decking—it was not much over the legal minimum, and couldn't put up any appreciable struggle.

"But it's a fish, isn't it?" said the little man diffidently. "And I was lucky to be able to show you what I mean."

"You must be a hell of a psychologist," said the Saint.

"Well, I am about some things."

The man added the trout to his string, but did not put the string back in the water.

"Why don't you take a turn here?" he said. "It's a good spot."

"Thanks, but you had it first."

"No, really, I'm through. I've got all I want for supper, and it's time I took them home and cleaned them and cooked them."

He squeezed past the Saint quite decisively, and Simon took his place at the end of the pier and began working out line with false casts. The other stopped as he reached the bank, and out of the corner of an eye Simon saw him put down his rod and his string and squat down to rinse his hands in the river; then the Saint had to concentrate completely on keeping his back cast high and accurately grooved into a narrow gap between the trees behind him, a problem which the salmon-egg psychologist had not had with his spinning tackle.

Simon would have been quite childishly delighted if some enchanted trout had risen as if on cue to his first cast, and would have settled for any prompt action that would have entitled him to give a return lecture on technique; but by the time he had his fly drifting and sinking where he wanted it, the only audience he was immediately anxious to impress had gone.

About ten minutes and several casts later, on the swing-around, he tied into his best strike of the day. Having dared his luck by coming out with no landing net, he had to beach it after a brief but exhilarating tussle at the shore end of the pier. It was a rainbow which he estimated at almost two pounds—far from a boasting size, but big enough to dwarf anything the egg expert had to show.

After unhooking it and killing it cleanly, he squatted down again to rinse his hands, exactly as the little man had done. And it was as he turned back from this ablution that he saw the wallet.

It lay on the path just a half-step off the pier, where anyone who was not purblind, leaving the pier, could hardly have missed seeing it, or if he did could scarcely have failed to trip over it.

Simon Templar picked it up. Of course.

He looked inside it. Inevitably.

It contained remarkably little of the motley miscellanea which most men accumulate in their wallets. There was a driver's license, an Auto Club card, and an insurance card, all bearing the name of Oliphant Quigg, with an address in San Francisco. The remaining contents were most monotonous, consisting of eleven identical pieces of paper currency, each with a face value of $100.

One didn't have to be a detective to assume that the name of Oliphant Quigg was the private affliction of the Saint's newest acquaintance, and that the wallet had squeezed out of his hip pocket when he washed his hands.

Simon Templar suddenly decided that he had done enough fishing for the day. Like Mr. Quigg, he had plenty for his own dinner, and the others would keep better in the river than in his icebox, and it would soon be dark anyhow. And to the Saint, much as he might insist that he had retired, people who dropped wallets like that still promised one of the few sports that fascinated him more than fishing.

He stopped by the office to make an inquiry, and was not disappointed.

"Yes, he's staying here," said the proprietor. "Number fourteen—the end cottage over that way."

"I found something I think he dropped," Simon said for explanation.

In the gathering dusk he walked over to the indicated cabin and knocked on the door. When Mr. Quigg opened it, Simon was holding up the wallet in front of him. The little man looked blank at first, then appalled. His hand flew to his hip, and came back empty and trembling.

"Gosh," he gasped. "How ever could I— Do come in, won't you?"

Simon did not need to have his arm twisted. And if the invitation had not been issued he would have doubted his own sanity.

Mr. Quigg had taken the wallet and was thumbing shakily through it.

"Your money's all there, Mr. Quigg," Simon assured him. "I couldn't help seeing it, of course, when I looked inside to find out who it belonged to. You're lucky it didn't fall in the river."

"Or am I lucky that you're such an honest man? If you'd kept it, I could never have proved that it *didn't* fall in the river."

"Why didn't I think of that first?"

The little man fingered out a corner of one of the bills.

"Would you be offended if I—"

"A psychologist like you should know that," Simon told him reprovingly. "Or do you only know about fish?"

Mr. Quigg pushed the bill back and put the wallet away in his pocket.

"Well, at least you won't refuse a drink?"

"Now you're talking."

Mr. Quigg went into the tiny kitchen and produced a bottle of Peter Dawson.

"Is this all right?"

"My favorite," said the Saint, who had followed him in. "Mind if I put this minnow down in your sink while I'm here?"

"Please, make yourself at home, Mr.—"

"Tombs."

"That's a nice trout, Mr. Tombs. Much better than mine. I'm really happy you caught it. Especially happy, now."

Simon accepted the glass he was handed, lifted it to eye level in a gesture of salute to his host, and said with a smile: "Maybe there's something to this business about living right, after all."

"That's nothing to laugh about," said the little man earnestly. "If there's any justice in this world, a truly honest man ought to be specially favored by the gods. There aren't enough of them so's it would make a great upset in the ordinary laws of chance. Believe me, sir, I feel quite privileged to have met one like yourself."

In the Saint's soul was burgeoning a sensation of bliss almost too ecstatic to be borne. To have encountered a gambit of such classic if corny purity on a New York sidewalk, and to have helped it to develop in some tawdry Broadway bar, would have been only a mechanically enjoyable routine. To meet it beside the Rogue River and continue it in a fishing camp cottage gave it the same spice of the miraculous that would have been experienced by a shipwrecked gourmet on discovering that the vessel stranded on the island with him had been laden to the Plimsoll line with a cargo of the finest canned and bottled delicacies that France could export.

It gave him a dizzy feeling of being the spoiled pet of a whole brigade of guardian angels to an extent that Mr. Quigg's interpretation did not even begin to justify. But according to the protocol which he had once himself enunciated, he was categorically prohibited from leaping up and down and uttering shrill cries of jubilation. The most he could permit himself at this point was to wriggle modestly.

"Oh, hell," he said, exerting some effort not to ham it into

Aw, heck. "Don't let's go overboard about this."

"But I mean it," said Mr. Quigg. "If I only had a friend that I knew was absolutely honest, it'd make all the difference in the world to my life."

"What sort of highbinders do you have in your circle, Ollie?"

"Just ordinary people. They wouldn't dream of cheating you out of a dollar, but if they had a chance to chisel a few thousands without the slightest risk of getting in trouble I wouldn't expect them to die before they'd do it."

Mr. Quigg put down his glass and picked up a knife, but it was quickly apparent that the only butchery he intended was to be performed on his fish, which were laid out on a newspaper on the draining board.

"Will you excuse me if I finish this job?" he said, and continued with the cleaning which Simon's knock had obviously interrupted. He was quick and neat at it. "It's a crime not to eat trout absolutely fresh." He pursed his lips in a final survey of his dressed-out catch. "Mmm —this is more than I can eat tonight. I've such a small appetite. I think I'll preserve a couple of them."

The unorthodox word, combined with the startling contradiction of what he had said only three sentences before, should have been enough to hold anyone's attention on what he proceeded to do, which proved to be rewardingly extraordinary.

Perched on one of the kitchen chairs was an aluminum coffer which at first sight could have been taken for some kind of portable icebox, roughly cubical in shape and measuring about two feet on any side, until you noticed that it was plugged in to an electric outlet and had a row of dials and switches along a lower panel which suggested a television set with no screen. Then when Mr. Quigg opened a door in one side, it looked more like an oven. He slipped two trout into a self-sealing plastic bag, and put the bag in the box, and twiddled switches and dials.

Whereupon the cabinet ceased to resemble anything Simon had ever seen except a prop from a Hollywood "science" movie. A thin high-pitched humming came from it, and its interior glowed with a weird fluorescence. Violet ribbons of energy like cold crawling streaks of lightning bridged the inside and writhed up and down between its walls like tortured disembodied snakes. And on the central griddle where Mr. Quigg had placed it, the transparent plastic package was bathed in a soft rosy light that seemed to emanate from the trout themselves.

Simon Templar had seen a

fine assortment of Contraptions in his time, from transmuters that made gold and diamonds out of a handful of common chemicals, to machines that printed perfect replicas of British banknotes or United States greenbacks as fast as you could turn a handle; but never before had he seen a gizzmo that gizzed with such original and soul-satisfying pyrotechnical effects.

"What is *that?*" he demanded, and did not have to fake a fragment of his yokel's entrancement.

"It's my Preservator," said Mr. Quigg matter-of-fact-ly. "I invented it. I couldn't explain it to you very easily, unless you happened to be very well up on electronics and radiation theory. And then I'd be afraid of telling you too much, perhaps. But it preserves anything you treat with it by total sterilization, without chemicals or refrigeration." He flicked another switch, the slow fireworks died down, and he withdrew the plastic envelope, from which the pink luminosity had already faded. "You could keep this for months now, anywhere, even in the tropics, and when you opened it those fish would be just as fresh as they are now."

"No fooling—you've tried it?"

"Well, not in the tropics. But here's something I've been keeping just to see how long it *would* last." Mr. Quigg took from a cupboard another transparent bag in which was sealed a small lettuce cut in half. "This has been down to Los Angeles a couple of times through the San Joaquin Valley, and it was with me in Sacramento for a week, and they were all plenty hot, and it's never been in a frij since I treated it. If you didn't know, wouldn't you say it could've been picked yesterday? But I preserved it last April. Yes, on the eighteenth. Look, you see that strip off the top of a newspaper, with the date on? I sealed that in with it so's I couldn't forget."

Simon could not be so ungracious as to point out that anyone who had thoughtfully hoarded a number of old newspapers could have just as easily sealed a dateline of fifty years ago in with a lettuce packaged yesterday. Instead, he regarded the Contraption again with renewed awe.

"Where could I get one of these?" he asked.

"You couldn't. It isn't on the market. As a matter of fact, it isn't even patented. It probably never will be."

"But good Lord, man, you're going to do something about it, aren't you? Why, an invention like this must be worth a fortune!"

"Yes, I know," said the inventor sadly. "All the food

growers and packers, the trucking firms, the markets . . . even all the fishing camps like this could use it, it wouldn't cost as much as a deep freeze, and they could preserve everything their guests caught, and people could take fish and game home wherever they lived without having to bother about keeping it iced. . . . But it wouldn't do *me* any good."

"You mean you're already in such a high tax bracket that you don't care?"

"Oh, no. I wouldn't mind that so much. But I do have a problem. Quite a personal one. Somebody would have to handle the Preservator for me as if it was all his own, and I'd have to trust him to kick back some of the profits. That's what I meant when I said if I only knew a completely honest man —someone like you. . . . But I *do* know you!" A strange feverish gleam came into the little man's wistful eyes. "If I only had time to tell you— I mean, I don't want to bore you— Oh, I know it's too much to hope, but. . . . Well, could I possibly ask you to have dinner with me? If you wouldn't mind contributing your own trout, and you can have my two extras as well, and I've got lots of vegetables and a bottle of Château Fuissé if you like wine, and if you get tired of my troubles I'll shut up the minute you tell me."

The Saint smiled sympathetically. The other's babbling eagerness could not have struck a more responsive chord from his heartstrings. Already he treasured an affection for Mr. Oliphant Quigg not unlike that which a tiger might have conceived for an appealing wolf cub, likewise towards dinner time.

"You'd have to hire a bouncer to throw me out now," he said with the utmost sincerity. "I love listening to people's troubles, especially when they sound as unusual as yours."

Mr. Quigg's story, he found out presently, was not quite as unusual as its advance build-up. In fact, some cynics might have said that it was not particularly unusual at all, in modern America. Mr. Quigg was simply a victim of the twentieth-century philosophy, promulgated by a hard core of embattled suffragettes, and made law by a widespread gaggle of gutless jurists in mortal terror of what their own wives would do to them if they opposed it, which proclaims that any female who makes the supreme sacrifice of marrying a man and thus officially granting him the ineffable favors of her body even for a few months is thereby entitled, if they separate for any reason whatever, not only to walk off with a hog's share of any fortune he may have been able to accumulate in all

his preceding years of toil and thrift, but also to clamp an advance lien on a major percentage of anything he may earn for the rest of his life thereafter.

Mr. Quigg, during twenty-five years as professor of electrical engineering at such a humble college that Simon had never heard of it, had patented two or three minor gadgets or improvements on standard equipment, and had succeeded in licensing his rights for royalties which eventually attained a volume on which, with the addition of a meager pension, he was able to retire in very modest comfort. He had no plans other than to indulge his passion for fishing and to tinker with a few other scientific ideas which he had been gestating—one of which was an entirely new method of food preservation. But a capable and motherly woman of less than forty whom he met one evening in a hotel on Lake Mead, where he had gone for some bass fishing, soon remedied that deficiency of purpose, and before he fully realized what was happening he was married.

Within a year he had discovered that his wife was so capable that she had taken complete control of their finances, allowing him $2 a week pocket-money, and so motherly that she treated him like a naughty child in need of stern discipline. She considered fishing messy, stupid, and a waste of time and money: when they wanted to eat fish, they could buy it at the market in a minute, and in the long run it wouldn't cost a fraction of what he'd been spending on tackle, bait, licenses, trips to remote places, lodgings and boat rentals. The experiments which used to happily clutter his living room were banished to a bleak cellar, but she did not dispute their potential as money-makers, and in fact upbraided him for approaching them so casually: she decided that only by putting in a proper working day of eight hours, six days a week, could he expect to get anywhere with his projects and make a real fortune, and she was going to see that he did it.

When at long last he rebelled enough to go into a bar with a friend he ran into on his way to the store where she had sent him to buy some groceries, and stayed out for more than two hours, and came home without the money or the supplies but drunk enough to tell her that he would as soon be dead as shut up in the basement for six days a week and not even allowed to go fishing on Sunday, she fled sobbing to the nearest neighbor, and was next heard from through an attorney, who wanted to know if Mr. Quigg was at least prepared to give her her freedom in a gentlemanly way, after all she had done for him.

Mr. Quigg, who was in a slight haze of hangover, but surprisingly without remorse, agreed that he would chivalrously refrain from contesting charges of persistent drunkenness and mental cruelty. He was too relieved at the prospect of the simple solution offered by this minor sacrifice to pay much attention to the papers he was asked to sign: it was September, and the steelhead were reported thick in Klamath Glen, and he had moved some of the works of the Preservator into the kitchen and had already had a new inspiration about it while waiting for his breakfast eggs to boil.

About a month later, Mr. Quigg read in the paper that his wife had been granted an interlocutory decree, and that in consideration of her ordeal the judge had awarded her the community property, their savings account, their Goverment bonds, the car which she had already taken, and Mr. Quigg's patents together with contracts appertaining and royalties accruing thereto, plus fifty per cent of the proceeds of any invention which he might have started to work on at any time prior to the divorce.

"In other words," said the little man, "I was left with the lease on an old house, a lot of shabby old furniture, my fishing kit and some tools, and my pension from the college."

"They can't do that to you," Simon protested.

"Oh, but they can. I went to another lawyer, when it was too late, and even he told me they could. And they had. They even get half of anything I may ever do from here on. What chance would I have of proving that anything I might invent tomorrow didn't have its roots in something I worked at during the first fifty years of my life?"

"All the same, chum, this could be worth millions. And even half a million—"

Mr. Quigg shook his head.

"I'm a funny guy. I don't get mad very easily, but when I get mad I can stay mad for a long time. I know now that I was taken for a sucker. And I'm just sore enough that I'll never write it off to experience and let bygones be bygones. That woman and her shyster lawyer took me for everything I had when she left me, and I can't do a thing about it. But I can see to it that she doesn't get half a million more. I'd rather scratch along on a pittance for the rest of my life than give her another nickel. Were you wondering about the eleven hundred dollars in my wallet?"

"Well—"

"They're what's left of fifteen hundred I sold another little invention for. If I'd handled it properly, it'd probably have paid me five thousand a year for life.

But then there'd 've been contracts, and checks, and records, and I couldn't 've kept from giving her half of it. I preferred to give the idea away, let someone else take the credit for inventing it, and settle for fifteen hundred dollars cash under the table. Do you blame me?"

"If that's the way you feel about it, it's your privilege," said the Saint. "But it seems a shame about the Preservator."

Mr. Quigg poured himself another glass of wine. They had finished eating by then, and he had become progressively less inhibited with each sip that washed down the meal.

"It is. You don't know the offers I've turned down. Why, only the other day. . . . But it's out of the question. That's one invention she always knew I was working on. I could never get away with it. Unless—so we're back where we started—unless I had a completely honest friend."

"What could he do?"

"I'd sell him all rights to the Preservator," said Mr. Quigg. "It'd have to be a bona fide deal, for something that might look like a genuine price. Say ten thousand dollars. All right, she'd get half of that. But this friend would make a fortune. And I'd have to trust him to slip a fair share of it back to me, without any contract or lien or anything, in cash handouts when I asked for it, so's there'd be no record and *she* couldn't get her claws on it."

"I see," said the Saint. "You'd be absolutely at his mercy."

"And how many people could you be sure wouldn't fall for a temptation like that? Unless it was someone like yourself. Now you know what I was getting at. I can't presume on our few hours' acquaintance, I know. I'm pipe-dreaming. But if only you were interested, what a difference it would make to my life!"

Simon reached for what was left of the Château Fuissé with a smile that did not have to worry about how thinly it veiled its excitement.

"Don't throw that pipe away yet, Ollie," he said. "I'm going to think it over."

It was another hour before he could plausibly take his leave, on the valid excuse that he had been up since before dawn and wanted to be out on the river at dawn again the next morning; but the truth was that he was desperately afraid of casting some inadvertent damper on Mr. Quigg's pathetically incoherent optimism, and after a while his facial muscles began to ache.

The fishing was still slow at the start of the next day, but he took two nice eating-size trout before the sun was high enough to strike the water and he decided that he might as well knock off for breakfast. As he

was walking back along the higher ground towards his cabin, Mr. Irving Jardane came blundering up the bank, looking more than ever like a piscatorial pack-mule, and trudged beside him.

"I see you're still doing okay," observed the transport tycoon aggrievedly. "And I'm still skunked. I don't get it. What the hell do these trout want, anyway?"

"What are you offering them?" Simon asked.

"Nothing but the best. I had a chap who makes 'em design 'em specially for me." Mr. Jardane tore off his trick hat and stared at its multicolored adornments with baffled indignation. "Did you ever see anything prettier? What do *you* catch 'em on?"

Simon reversed his rod and exhibited the drab and tattered fly on the end of his leader, hooked into a keeper ring near the butt.

"This."

"*That?*" The other peered at the relic with barely concealed disgust. "What d'you call that?"

"A Gray Hackle—much the worse for wear."

"You mean they bite on that? If I were a fish—"

"But you aren't," Simon pointed out gently. "Those hat-trimmings of yours look beautiful to you, but to the trout around here they just don't suggest anything edible. This tattered piece of fuzz makes its mouth water—if a fish's mouth can do that. You have to see it through the eyes of a trout."

"Dad blast it," growled Mr. Jardane, "you must be another fish psychologist. Like a fellow I got talking to on the pier the other day."

"A little wispy guy with a theory about salmon eggs?"

"That's him. Name of Quigg. A genius, too. But crazy. Got an invention that couldn't help making millions, but he won't do a thing about it."

"He showed you his Preservator?"

"You, too? Sure he did. We got talking about my business, and some of my problems, and it came up. I tell you, it's sensational. Revolutionary. If anyone else was working on anything like it, I'd know. I have to keep up with these things, in my business. Hell, I offered him three thousand dollars just for the right to test it myself for three months, with an option to take it over on a royalty basis with a twenty-thousand-a-year minimum guarantee, and he turned me down flat."

"I got the impression that I could make a deal with him," Simon said.

By then they had walked as far as the Saint's cabin, but this could not have been responsible for bringing Mr. Jardane to

such an abrupt halt. He scrutinized the Saint with a cold deliberation that was supremely unconcerned with its rudeness.

"If you can, you're a lot better talker than I am," he said. "But if you do, I'll make you the same offer."

"What would you do with the Preservator?"

"Make it, man! Make it and sell it. I manufacture my own truck refrigeration equipment already. I'm set up. I'll change over to this. And after I've outfitted my own fleet, I'll expand. I've got all the contacts. Let me worry about the merchandising. You just send in your auditor every year to make sure I haven't short-changed you."

"I'll see if I can talk to Quigg again after breakfast," said the Saint.

He found Mr. Quigg contentedly reading a science-fiction magazine, but cordially willing to be interrupted, and came to his point without much ado.

"Certainly I meant it," Mr. Quigg said. "Why should I have changed my opinion of you overnight? But I'm a little overwhelmed. It's so much more than I ever really dared to hope for. You are serious?"

"I'll give you exactly what you asked for," said the Saint, most seriously. "Would you care to put it in writing?"

"By all means."

The little man bumbled around the cottage, found some paper in a drawer, and sat down and wrote thoughtfully but decisively. Then he handed the sheet to Simon.

"Will that do?"

I hereby offer to sell to Mr. Sebastian Tombs, for the sum of $10,000, all rights in my food preserving process called the Preservator.

(signed)
Oliphant Quigg.

"It should take care of everything for now," said the Saint.

"Mr. Jardane might want something much more elaborate," said the little man calmly. "But whatever you need to satisfy anyone's lawyers, I'll sign it."

Simon's eyebrows went up.

"How did you know I'd talked to Jardane?"

"Oh, so you have? I was guessing. But I'm not surprised. And believe me, I don't mind a bit. You ought to be able to make a good deal with him. And I'd rather make you a present of half the profits than pay them to that greedy woman and her conniving lawyer. Besides, you'll be doing something to earn your share. I think Mr. Jardane is a pretty hardboiled business man; which is why I wouldn't be at all ready to trust him with the same proposition that I made to you. But you strike me as being well able to

take care of yourself. Good luck to you!"

Simon went back to Mr. Jardane's cottage and displayed the paper. The haulage hot-shot glared at it for long enough to have read it four times, and then transferred his incredulous scowl directly to the Saint.

"D'you mind if I ask Quigg if he really signed this?" he demanded. "Because I'm going to, whatever you say."

"Go ahead," said the Saint generously.

Mr. Jardane went out like a fire-eating lion, and came back in less than ten minutes like a somewhat dyspeptic lamb.

"Okay," he grumbled, handing back the document. "You must be a terrific operator. Wish I had you working for me. But I know when I'm licked. All right. So you've got this Preservator sewed up. My offer still goes. Yes or no?"

"Mr. Quigg put his offer in writing," said the Saint mildly, laying down the magazine with which he had been pasing the time. "Would you do the same?"

"Certainly. I was leaving this afternoon, anyhow. I'll see my attorney first thing tomorrow, and put him to work drawing up a contract."

Simon looked disappointed.

"Fine. But I was thinking of calling a friend of mine at Westinghouse this evening—"

"But before I go," Mr. Jardane continued firmly, "I'll rough out a preliminary agreement myself that we can sign."

"If you insist," said the Saint, looking more unsubtle every minute. "But then some money would have to change hands, to make it legal, wouldn't it?"

"I'll give you my check for three thousand dollars at the same time."

Simon stood up.

"To return the compliment you paid me when you verified that Ollie had actually signed this offer, would you mind if I said I'd be much more impressed with cash? After all, I don't really know anything about you except what you've told me. But there should be someone in Grant's Pass that your trucks do business with, or you could go to a bank and have them call your bank back home for authority to cash you a check."

Mr. Jardane glowered at him for a second or two, a picture of grudging admiration.

"I bet you were a tough and nasty investigator," he said. "But I can take it. Business is business, God bless it. I'll get you your cash. Don't go away—and don't call Westinghouse, or anyone else."

Shortly afterwards, through a window of his own cottage, Simon saw the Cadillac drive away. After it had gone, he made unhurried but efficient preparations for his own depar-

ture. He packed all his personal things, and a box of such supplies as were not immediately expendable. He moved his car around to the back of the cabin, and loaded his suitcase and the box into the trunk through the back door, where his activity was cut off from chance observation from almost any angle, including that of Mr. Quigg's cottage at the other end of the scattered colony. When he had finished, there was nothing he would have to take out of the cabin except the fishing tackle that was still picturesquely littered around the living room. It saddened him somewhat to have to cut his stay so abruptly short. But business was business, as Mr. Jardane had observed, and even a Saint could not be sanctimonious enough to snub it when it jumped into his lap: there were immediate compensations, and there would be other rivers to fish.

Presently he fried the last of his bacon and cooked his remaining trout in the fat, with a squeeze of lemon and a sprinkling of chopped almonds which he had left out. He was finishing a glass of Dry Sack and getting ready to feast when Mr. Jardane drove by again and almost at once was knocking on his door.

"You're just in time," Simon said hospitably. "Would you care to join me in some *truite amandine?* Save me from being a glutton."

"Thanks, but I've got to be on my way if I want to get home tonight. I had a sandwich in town while I was waiting for a public stenographer to type this up. I dictated it to her while I was waiting for this bank to get in touch with my bank." Mr. Jardane flourished a thin sheaf of papers. "Read it, sign it, and I'll give you your money."

Simon turned the oven on at its lowest and put his lunch away to keep warm while he read one of the copies of his prospective partner's composition. He had to admit that there was nothing slipshod about Irving Jardane. This was no second-class operator who would risk botching a good thing by skimping on some detail, no matter how tiresome the chore might be. The "preliminary agreement" that he had drafted was well thought out, comprehensive, and painstakingly phrased in the language of a man who had made some study of contracts: it had a competent and authentic ring that would have impressed even a genuine business man. At the same time, perhaps even more skillfully, it avoided any legalistic hedging which might have seemed to conceal pitfalls and thus could have led to prolonged argument.

"It seems very straightforward," said the Saint, and quickly signed all four copies.

Mr. Jardane countersigned one of them, gave it back, and put the other three in his pocket. Then he produced a roll of currency and counted off thirty hundred-dollar bills.

"That ought to make it legal enough for you," he remarked, perhaps a trifle sarcastically. "Now, you've got my address in your copy of our agreement. Let me hear from you directly you've got Quigg's signature on a proper sales contract. An outright sale like that is simple enough that any local lawyer could write it. Get it done before he changes his mind or some men in white coats pick him up. And send me a notarized copy of his receipt for the money you pay him—before I go any further, I want to be sure you've made it legal with *him*."

"I'll get rolling right after lunch, Irving, old chum," Simon promised him.

He ate his meal with leisured enjoyment, and during the course of it he watched Mr. Jardane stuff the Cadillac with his impedimenta from the next cottage and drive away. The Cadillac, he thought, had been a nice touch too—there was no other car that conveyed such an air of solid affluence to the sucker type who forgot that all the best U-Drive outfits had them for rent by the day for that very reason.

He washed up tidily, and then openly carried his fishing tackle out to his own less ostentatious wagon. He was still wearing the morning's shabby but comfortable fishing togs; and to anyone who might have been keeping watch on him—such as Mr. Quigg—he would only have looked as if he were preparing to wet a line farther up or down the river that evening, not to remove himself indefinitely from those parts. But beyond any dispute, he reasoned as he let off the hand-brake and toed the accelerator, he was getting rolling. It had always given him a perversely puerile delight to look certain over-confident individuals squarely in the eye and tell them a literal truth which they were incapable of appreciating. He was pleased to think that he had been especially scrupulous throughout this episode.

A more conventional courtesy, however, obliged him to stop at the camp office on his way out.

"I'm on my way, Ben," he told the proprietor. "I know I'm paid up through next weekend, but forget it, with my compliments. Maybe I'll take it out on you next time I stop here."

"There may not be another time," said the other glumly. "If that new highway goes through as it's supposed to, we mightn't be here next year. It's only a question of time, anyway. What's the matter? Is anything wrong?"

"Everything is gorgeously perfect," said the Saint. "I've had a wonderful old-fashioned workout, and there's nothing I like better. Aside from letting you know you've got an unexpected vacancy, I wanted to thank you for keeping quiet about my real name. I hope you didn't have to tell too many lies about Sebastian Tombs. That really is a ridiculous name."

"Mr. Quigg did ask me a few questions, but I told him I didn't know any answers. You must have made a big hit with him."

"He may be disillusioned next time you talk to him. And if he is, please let him in on my secret. The same goes for a white-haired slob with a hired Cadillac, using the name of Irving Jardane and claiming to be the head man of Transamerican Transport. If I may drop a friendly flea in your ear, I'd suggest that you didn't cash any of his checks, if he ever comes here again—which may be unlikely."

The owner frowned sharply.

"You're talking about Irv Jardane—the fellow in the next cottage to yours?"

"None other. A post-graduate psychologist, although maybe not quite so smooth as Brother Quigg."

"I don't quite get you, but I know he can be pretty gruff at times—"

"What else do you know about him—aside from what he wrote on the card when he registered?"

The proprietor blinked, in a shocked but rather puzzled way.

"He was a class-mate of mine in college. Worked his own way through—the real hard-driving kind. I watched him start with one truck that he drove himself, and build up that Transamerican Transport System, while I was in business in Portland. He's been coming here for the last five years, ever since I retired and bought this place."

An oddly empty sensation lodged in Simon Templar's stomach like a bullet, and expanded hollowly. He lighted a cigarette, moving rather slowly and stiffly, while a clammy chill stroked his skin into goose-pimples.

"Thanks, Ben," he said at length. "You just saved me from pulling the most fabulous boner of all my life. Some day I may tell you both how gorgeously ghastly it could have been, but right now I don't feel strong enough. However, I just changed my mind again, and I'm going to stay out the week in the cottage."

"Whatever you say," answered the other agreeably, if in some pardonable fog.

Simon drove back to his cabin, unloaded his gear again, and took from his suitcase the check-book of a Swiss bank in which,

for many obvious reasons, he had for some time found it convenient to carry an account in the name of Sebastian Tombs. He wrote a check for $10,000, and made another pilgrimage to the cottage at the other end of the camp.

"Your bank should be able to get this cleared by airmail and cable within three days," he said. "Meanwhile we'll get some professional to draw up whatever you ought to sign, and directly you can give me a valid receipt I'll take everything to Portland myself and get Jardane started. The sooner he gets going, the sooner you start collecting. For the time being, here's the three thousand option money he was talking about."

The little man peered at the crumpled cash mistily through his bifocals.

"But according to our verbal agreement, half of this is yours."

"You know how you feel about your ex-wife?" said the Saint lightly. "That's how I feel about tax collectors. I'm going to do this for free. Call it my contribution to the cause of the downtrodden male, which wouldn't normally be a deductible item. Or a sop to my own conscience. Just do me a favor and stop dropping your wallet and telling the story of your life to anyone who picks it up. You might make some innocent con man feel like a perfect sucker."

"I don't understand this at all," said Mr. Quigg.

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the turkish yataghan

by . . . Sax Rohmer

One clenched fist shot straight out before him as though he had died in the act of striking a blow. The carpet was stained....

ECHOING dully between sordid house-fronts of a narrow street, it reached my ears unmistakably again—the sound of heavy, stumbling footsteps. The night was typical enough, gray and cloudy with a threat of rain. One of those queer lulls had occurred in the nearly ceaseless tumult of dockland: such odd syncopations, but very rarely, break in upon the steady drone of the busiest city; as though some Superman had commanded silence.

"Still behind us!" I commented, glancing at my companion.

He nodded but made no reply. He was muffled up in a black waterproof, its wind collar turned up so that it met the brim of his hat; and except that he smoked a very charred briar pipe no one could have given a more detailed description of the man.

Lured, I suppose, by that sad siren who calls men in after years back to the battlefields where they have suffered, I was revisiting this district of unpleasant memories.

"It's been cleaned up now and made suitable for charabanc

Sax Rohmer, internationally known for his novels about Dr. Fu Manchu, has contributed much, in these and other works, to the folklore of our times. We share an adventure in Limehouse here with the redoubtable Sir Dennis Nayland Smith, of New Scotland Yard, the doctor's long time and relentless opponent.

From: TALES OF EAST AND WEST

parties, Greville," my guide had said. "They run tours of Chinatown on the New York plan."

We were bound for a house of entertainment which formed a rallying point for these tours. It was a cafe which had been in existence for many years, but which, now, in charge of an astute Chinese and his English wife, had developed into an extremely profitable enterprise, thanks to the fact that "conducted tours" delayed here for half an hour.

True, it was still called the Blue Lamp, its former title; but whereas the Old Blue Lamp had been headquarters of one of the tongs, and meeting place of a dangerous group, the modern establishment was a show place, pure and simple.

We turned right, away from the river, and then left into a narrow alleyway. A dim blue lantern beckoned. The place had all the trappings of mystery which deceive the unsophisticated. And as we entered the passage clearly behind us, I heard again that *tap—tap—tap* of dragging footsteps, and:

"Hi, mate!" came a hoarse voice.

My friend and I stopped, together, and turned. A rough-looking seafarer who walked with a slight slimp, which accounted for the dragging sound of his steps, stood before us. He wore a very greasy cloth cap, a shabby coat and muffler, and a pair of extraordinarily shiny trousers over sea boots.

"Well," my friend rapped sharply. "What is it?"

"Bloody fine chase you give me. Don't you 'ear me 'all yer before?"

"No. We thought you were singing."

"So I was—singin' out."

He was a red-faced, unshaven fellow, very full of beer, but his bleary eyes were not without cunning. And now, carefully surveying my companion:

"Excuse me, Captain," he amended. "You're commander of the *Rajput,* ain't yer?"

"No, I'm not! What d'you want?"

The man continued to stare a while; then he directed his bleary but calculating gaze upon me.

"Well, if you ain't orf of the *Rajput* I don't know who you are. But I reckon one of yer might like to buy this 'ere."

Whereupon he pulled from a pocket of his dilapidated coat a large dagger having a curiously curved blade, the hilt encrusted with what might have been precious stones.

My friend weighed the weapon in his palm, glancing at it reflectively.

"Anything in your line, Greville?"

"No." I studied the thing curiously. "It looks like Damas-

cus work, of which I know next to nothing.

"Let's move along to the lamp and have a closer inspection."

"No need for that, gov'nor," the vendor broke in thickly. "It's a bloody bargain at five quid—an' five quid's what I'm askin'."

"Very likely," my companion returned drily, and stepped under the blue lamp fixed in an iron bracket projecting from the wall. Following a short examination:

"You're quite right, my man," he said, "it would be a bargain at a fiver. Have you any money on you, Greville?"

"Certainly," I answered, surprised, "two pounds or so."

"Then give our friend ten shillings—that should buy him as much more beer as he can hold; and," turning to the seaman, "take care of this thing," handing back the knife, "and come to see me in the morning. Where did you get it, by the way?"

"Ho!" said the man. "I see! You think I pinched it? Well! You're right—I did! I'm a fireman, see, gov'nor? An' what with bloody oil an' no cargoes, a fireman 'as a bloody thin time these days. See what I mean? I'm stuck in Aden—see? Ever been in Aden? It's proper name is 'Ades, but they calls it Aden. I signs on in a freighter belongin' to the Sampson Brothers, name o' the *Starry North*. She was out of Singapore in to London, with a mostly Chinese crew. Orf of Suez, one o' these 'ere bloody Chinks tries to knife me with this bloody thing—but I laid 'im out—see?—an' pinched it. That's where I got it. Comin' ashore tonight, I 'as me pocket picked! An' if ever I see that bloody Chink—"

"Here you are," said I, interrupting his rambling narrative, and thrust a ten-shilling note into his hand.

"If you will call at New Scotland Yard in the morning," added my friend distinctly, "and ask for me—"

"Scotland Yard!" cried the other hoarsely. "Gor' blimey! Not bloody likely! Thanks for the ten bob, mate, but I steers clear o' the cops!"

As he turned away:

"Do you think the thing's genuine?" I asked. "Are the jewels real?"

"Undoubtedly, Greville!—the blade is very good Damascus, as you surmised. Apart from which, there are anything up to a hundred pounds' worth of gems in the hilt. A Turkish yataghan; and except in the Seraglio Palace at Stamboul, I have never seen one like it."

"Then why did you let it slip?"

He turned in the very act of pushing open a door which gave access to the Blue Lamp. I detected his smile in the dim light.

"Because it's contrary to my private principles to deal in stolen property," he replied; "and officially I'm off duty!"

We went in. I paused for a moment. The fireman of the *Starry North* was clattering away as rapidly as his limping gait would allow. That mention of Scotland Yard had lent wings to his heels.

The Blue Lamp was not inspiring.

It was actually almost empty when we entered. A group of men played cards at a table in a little recess, but I gathered that these were supers employed by the management to lend local color. There were one or two nondescripts of doubtful nationality; and a half-caste girl with no particular claim of beauty acted as waitress. The place was decorated in pseudo-Chinese fashion, and native dishes might be obtained if desired.

"No sign of the famous Jo Chang," said my companion as we sat down and ordered drinks. "But Mrs. Chang is the star feature. She, also, seems to be absent, however."

"She acts as hostess, I suppose?"

"Yes. In a full-blown way, she's a pretty woman. Welsh, I think, from Cardiff, but she affects semi-Oriental costumes, being a dark type, and makes a pronounced hit with the charabanc parties . . ."

We lighted our pipes and lingered on, chatting about what had been, until, glancing at my wrist-watch:

"We seem to have drawn a blank?" I suggested.

And almost as I spoke—we were seated near the door—came a nasal voice—that of a guide in the alleyway, outside. A "conducted tour" had arrived . . .

"The notorious Blue Lamp, ladies and gentlemen. Headquarters of a tong, or Chinese secret society. Opium is smoked here, and fan-tan played for high stakes. Visitors may also pick a number at *pakapu,* the famous Chinese gambling game, thus winning a packet or losing a bob." The man was reciting automatically. "The present proprietor formerly ran a gambling hell in Yokohama, but was expelled by request of the British naval authorities. He returned to China. His wife was a dancer in a house of entertainment in Shanghai, and was celebrated for her good looks throughout the East. We shall make her acquaintance tonight, ladies and gentlemen, and also have the pleasure of meeting Matari, formerly a member of the *harem* of the Shah of Persia."

The door was thrust open, and the party entered. They were not a lively-looking lot.

The guide indicated vacant tables, and Matari, the half-caste, hovered in the background.

"No point in remaining," I said.

"No," my friend agreed, "except that you should have a glimpse of Madame who, in her way, is unique."

"In that case, we shall have to order another drink."

At which moment a stocky, middle-aged Cantonese with a face wooden as that of a carven joss appeared mysteriously behind the short counter.

"Hullo!" said my friend—"there's Jo Chang."

I snapped my fingers to attract the attention of the Eurasian girl, who now was busied with the new arrivals. Coincident with my doing so, a door left of the narrow counter opened, and a woman came in. Jo Chang noted my signal, glanced at the woman, and pointed in the direction of our table.

"Mrs. Chang!" my friend whispered. "Take a good look at her."

I did as he directed, noticing as she approached us her peculiar gait, suggestively Oriental, although, despite the fact that she was a brunette, there was palpably no Eastern blood there. She wore a close-fitting black silk frock, rather short, and red, high-heeled shoes. Her legs were bare. She had a thickly knotted cord of red silk tied around her waist in the manner of a girdle, and a large coral necklace about her throat. She displayed no other ornaments, and jet-black hair was brushed straight back from her forehead. Her figure had once been beautiful and now, although somewhat heavy, she remained graceful. She had fine, dark eyes, but her complexion, as I noted when she drew near, was coarse. She was smoking a cigarette, which she extinguished in a cheap ashtray on the table.

"What do you boys want?" she asked familiarly.

I gave the order, and the woman turned away to execute it. I glanced at my companion.

His hat removed, one saw a skin darkened by long years in the tropics, clean-cut, angular features, and crisply waving gray hair. It was, I thought, an unforgettable face. And he was staring intently towards the other end of the cafe.

Looking in the same direction, I noticed a man standing in an open doorway. For a moment I raked in the lumber room of memory—and then identified him. He was Detective Inspector Yale, whom I had met in London two years before, and he was returning my friend's stare with a queer mixture of embarrassment and amazement.

A rapid signal was exchanged: and the Scotland Yard man im-

mediately came forward, threading his way among the tables.

"I didn't know if I ought to recognize you or not, sir!" he declared.

"Officially — not," was the reply. "But, unofficially, join us! You remember Mr. Greville?"

The inspector seized my hand in a mighty grip.

"Remember him, Sir Dennis!" he said, drawing up a chair. "I'm not likely to forget him! When I saw you here together, sir, I could hardly trust my eyes."

It was certainly a curious situation which, had the advertised pretensions of the place been supported by fact, must have been an awkward one for the proprietor. For my friend and guide was no less an official than Sir Dennis Nayland Smith, Assistant Commissioner of Police!

"Odd you should be here, Inspector," he said. "Is it the Wapping job?"

Yale nodded.

"It *was*," he corrected, "and I had reason to call at Limehouse tonight about the matter —which I think we now have well in hand, sir. I was at the station when the news came which brought me here. In fact, I walked straight out of one case into another."

"Drugs again?"

"No. Murder!"

"What!"

"Peter Anderman, the Eurasian solicitor. Maybe you haven't heard of him, sir. But he's been found murdered in his house."

"When was he murdered?"

"Sometime tonight. I only left there ten minutes ago." He glanced at Nayland Smith. "I thought the man I'm after might be in one of the local pubs!" he explained. "I looked in at two, and then I looked in here."

"But you haven't found him?"

"No. But I think it's only a question of time. Would you care to hear the facts, sir?"

"Certainly," Nayland Smith replied. "After all, Greville"— to me—"Chinatown is living up to its ancient reputation. Carry on, Yale."

The inspector, resting his elbows upon the table, was about to begin when Mrs. Chang approached us with a tray upon which our drinks were set. Her expression was hard; her thoughts, I determined, were remote from the Blue Lamp, from the duties which mechanically she was performing.

She held a freshly lighted cigarette between her full lips which, in contrast to the pallor of her skin, resembled a red scar. Yale glanced at her for a moment as she set the drinks upon the table, but declined my suggestion that he should have one himself; and when the woman had retired:

"It's this way, gentlemen," he went on: "Peter Anderman was

a half-caste lawyer with a big practice in these parts. His house is a sort of survival. It's Georgian, I'm told, and even boasts a bit of a garden at the back. I'd never been in before tonight. But I found quite a museum of queer things, which I might have expected, as I know that Anderman was a collector."

"What of?" Nayland Smith jerked.

"Eastern curios and so forth. Well, an old man called Michael and his wife ran the place. Anderman was a bachelor. Michael is some kind of a Levantine who's been with Anderman for twenty years. His wife I didn't see, as she's away in hospital with pleurisy. Old Michael has been running the place alone for the past week assisted by a daily charwoman. I have Michael's evidence; and I don't think he knows any more about the matter."

"What does he say?" asked Nayland Smith, beginning to refill his pipe.

"He rang up Limehouse tonight while I was there. He'd seen a man going out of the gate a few minutes before, and I have this man's description. Michael seems to have been used to people coming and going mysteriously, so this didn't alarm him at the time.

"It appears he was reading in his own room when he heard high words in the office below. He came and looked out of a window just in time to spot this man, who was cursing and swearing, go across the grass and out through the gate. Michael returned to his newspaper. At ten o'clock he went down to report that he was turning in and to take final orders. He banged on Anderman's door but could get no reply. The door was locked. This seems to have surprised him. He slipped out, walked around the house, and looked in through the French windows. Not long afterwards I went and looked, in too . . ."

He paused, bending forward across the table. Mrs. Chang had seated herself at a piano, and Matari was about to dance . . .

"At which point, sir—" the Scotland Yard man laughed uneasily—"I began to find myself stuck—"

"What!" I interrupted. "But I thought you had a description of the wanted man and had been looking for him in local pubs?"

"I had, Mr. Greville," said the detective grimly. "Half a dozen K Division fellows are on the job as well. I mean to find that man. Because what I saw wants a lot of explaining."

"How so?" Nayland Smith queried.

"Well, Peter Anderman was lying on the carpet, stabbed to the heart. And right beside him I found a jewelled dagger."

"A jewelled dagger!" I echoed.

"Exactly, sir. A wicked-looking thing, with a wavy blade."

"Good God!" Nayland Smith exclaimed. "You hear that, Greville?"

"I do!"

"Nothing could be clearer," Smith continued. "Find the owner of the dagger—whom I rather fancy I know—"

"What's that sir! You *know* him?"

"I believe so. But, find this man, and your case is ended. Simple enough?"

"Not so simple at all!" Yale declared. "Because, here's the puzzling thing: . . . There's no trace of blood on the blade!"

We arrived at the house ahead of the divisional surgeon, and saw, excepting the presence of a plainclothes man posted in the room, exactly what Detective Inspector Yale had seen.

Entering the premises by means of a door in a high brick wall (opened by a uniformed constable), we followed a gravelled path, crossed a patchy piece of lawn, and looked into a lighted room through closed French windows. The windows were approached by two low brick steps, so that the floor was a foot or so above the level of the grass.

It was a room primarily designed as an office. There was a conventional roll-top desk, closed, with a padded revolving chair set before it, a telephone, filing cabinets, and other business appointments. There were two shaded lamps hung from the ceiling; and, in addition to crowded bookcases, the walls were lined with cabinets containing all sorts of curios. There was a cushioned divan on the left as one looked in at the window, and a number of busts and objects of art upon side tables.

The man on duty, who had not been advised of our approach, sprang forward and threw the windows open.

"All right, Hill," said the inspector. "Stand clear. We want a view of the room."

Neither Nayland Smith nor I spoke, for we were both staring at something which lay upon the thick carpet, some ten or twelve feet from where we stood.

It was the figure of a man, heavily built man, wearing a dark lounge suit, prone, his face twisted towards us; one clenched fist shot straight out before him as though he had died in the act of striking a blow. His left arm was doubled gruesomely under his body, and the carpet, which was amber yellow, was dreadfully stained all about him. Fully six feet right of the stained patch a jewelled dagger gleamed in the purple light cast by one of the shaded lanterns

hung from the ceiling, the stones in its hilt glittering evilly.

"Nothing has been moved," said Yale in a low voice. "This is just as I found it. I picked up the dagger by the blade and laid it down again."

Nayland Smith glanced at me in the dim light.

"The Turkish yataghan," he said, "beyond a doubt. Let us go in."

As we filed in:

"Close the window, Greville," he added.

I did so, and turned, watching him.

When, following an informal dinner at his flat, he had agreed to act as my guide to Chinatown at my own request, I had counted on an unusual evening, for Sir Dennis Nayland Smith was an unusual man. But I had never anticipated that I should see him at work in his own inimitable way—see him as I saw him now, clear-eyed, keen, alert—the man who twice had stood between civilization and chaos and destruction—employing his peculiar genius upon this local tragedy intensively as though vast interests had been at stake. He carried out a detailed examination, watched by the two subordinate officers as a great surgeon in the operating theater is watched by students. Once, looking up:

"You have emptied his pockets," he said. "What did you find?"

"Nothing much, sir," Yale replied. "Keys, cigarettes, a few odd and ends in his notecase, but no money."

"No money?"

"No paper money. He had a little silver in his trouser pocket."

"H'm! Here's a burned match on the carpet. How did you come to miss it? A fastidious character of Anderman's type doesn't drop matches on his own carpets—unless under stress."

Yale took the match from Nayland Smith's extended hand and made a wry grimace at me.

Having examined the hands, clothing and hair of the dead man, Nayland Smith stared critically at the soles of his shoes; then:

"Have you been smoking?" he asked abruptly, addressing Hill.

"Smoking? No, sir! Why do you ask?"

"Use your nose, Hill. Someone has been smoking Maryland cigarettes in this room." He turned to Yale. "What kind of cigarettes were in Anderman's case?"

"Some kind of French things. All the exhibits are in the next room."

Nayland Smith stood up and walked into the adjoining room. I followed him. It was a sort of small smoking room. There were a number of framed photographs on the walls, all of women, and some indiscreet. The contents of

the dead man's pocket lay upon a side table. Nayland Smith laughed over his shoulder as I entered behind him.

"There are two points to be decided," he declared.

"What are they?" I asked eagerly.

"First, where Anderman dropped the cigarette which he lighted and partly smoked in the 'office,' and, second, which if any of these fair but frail ladies—" he indicated the mural decorations — "was here tonight."

"Good Lord!" came Yale's voice—"what makes you think a woman was here?"

From a coffee table placed beside a cushioned settee, Nayland Smith took up a procelain ashtray and held it out towards the speaker.

It contained the stump of a cigarette.

"Balkan Yenadi," he said. "A man with a palate for these could never smoke Caporal."

Yale stared blankly.

"But," he said, "another man may have been here—the man who murdered him! Why!"—his voice rose on a note of excitement—"the clue of the knife is strengthened. The man who smoked those cigarettes was the owner of the dagger!"

"You suggest that our friend the fireman smoked Balkan Yenadis?"

"Why not?"

Nayland Smith shook his head. "No *man* smoked this cigarette," he said.

"I don't follow you, sir."

Between finger and thumb, Smith took up the stump and held it directly under the shaded lamp.

"Examine it closely."

Yale and I bent forward, staring curiously, until:

"Faint red stains," said the assistant commissioner. "Lip salve, Yale—lip salve."

We sat in a bleak room in Limehouse Police Station, and our unhappy friend the fireman of the *Starry North* entered, escorted by two constables. He seemed to have added to his liquid cargo since parting from us, and his cunning eyes were now fish-like in their vacancy. He stared dully at me, he stared at Nayland Smith, and he stared at Detective Inspector Yale.

"The cops 'ave got me after all, gov'nor," he announced, addressing the commissioner. " 'Ere I am, 'igh an' dry, partic'ly *dry*. What I've done—Gawd knows! But 'ere I am!"

"You've been charged," said Nayland Smith sharply.

"Bet y'r bloody life I been charged. Charged with the murder of a bloke I never seen an' never 'eard of. Charged! I been charged all right. All these blokes—" he waved his arms vaguely—"all these blokes is

barmy! I ain't done nobody in. I ain't done nothink."

"Listen, my man," Yale began; but:

"One moment, Inspector," said Nayland Smith. "Allow me to interrogate the prisoner."

"Very good, sir."

"Where is the dagger which you offered to my friend and myself outside the Blue Lamp?"

"I sold it."

"That's his story," Yale interrupted. "Nearly six pounds in paper and silver money was found upon him—and you'll remember, sir, that Peter Anderman's case was empty."

"I never 'eard o' Peter—bloody—'andy-man!" roared the fireman. "Wot I got, and wot they took orf of me, was the 'alf quid you give me, mate—" addressing me—"a few bob wot I 'ad left after me pocket was picked an' a fiver I got for me knife."

"To whom did you sell it, and where?" Nayland Smith asked.

"A bloke I met in the Three Castles. I cut in there for a beer after you tellin' me to go to Scotland Yard. I needed one, see? An' I shows the knife to the landlord, over the counter. 'E's got a bit of collection o' these sort o' things hisself. 'E says, 'It's out o' my line,' 'e says. At which moment, a bloke wot was 'savin' a double Scotch started to go out, an' the landlord 'e says to me: 'There's your man,' 'e says; 'e's a buyer,' 'e says.

"Ho! I says, and 'ops after this bloke, finishin' me drink quick—see? I grabs 'im just outside the Three Castles, an' I shows 'im wot I got to sell. 'E seems interested, an' 'as a good look at it under a street lamp. 'E says—'I'll give you two quid.' I says, 'I want five.' We argues the point—see what I mean?—walkin' along, me 'avin' 'old of 'is arm. An' at last we comes to a door in a wall.

" 'E opens it, an' I thinks I ain't goin' to click—see? So I 'angs on to 'im—bloody tight I 'angs on. 'E says, 'Come inside and shut your bloody row,' 'e says. 'I only got four on me. Wait a minute and I'll get a quid—and you can 'ave your five.'

"I says, 'Right-o!' 'E goes up to the 'ouse, me keepin' pretty close alongside, an' wonderin' if 'e's goin to phone for the cops—see wot I mean? But presently 'e comes out, gives me me five, and says, 'Beat it! Beat it!' 'e says. 'An' to 'ell with yer.' 'To flamin' 'ell with *you*.' I says—'with brass knobs on! Then I goes out.

"I'm 'avin' a final at the Dock Gates, which is a favorite pub o' mine, when the cops nobbles me. That's all I bloody well know about it!"

He thrust his hands in his trouser pockets and stared with

drunken truculence from face to face.

"Anything further to ask him, sir?" said Yale.

"Yes. Answer this question carefully, my man: Was he smoking?"

"Smokin'? No—'e wasn't."

"Sure?"

"Dead sure."

"Good." Nayland Smith nodded. "Take him back."

As a constable hustled the prisoner from the room he turned, and:

"A bloody good night to all of yer!" said he.

Inspector Yale drove back with us from the garage where we had parked the car; and as we left dockland behind us and threaded the dreary highways of the East End:

"I must admit I'm not satisfied, sir," the detective said. "Although the case against Hawkes, the ship's fireman, is a strong one. Here's a man who on his own account is used to rough work and in need of money, gets on Peter Anderman's track at the Three Castles, follows him to his house, and failing to induce him to buy the dagger, commits a savage assault and empties Anderman's pockets, making his escape through the French window, and being actually seen by Michael."

"Unsatisfactory," Nayland Smith murmured. "There is the extraordinary circumstance that the knife, admittedly once the property of Hawkes, shows no trace of blood."

"He may have cleaned it."

"Why, having done so, leave it behind? Then, you must remember our discovery of the Caporal cigarette just inside the gate, the cigarette for which I was looking."

Yale was silent. He had, himself, picked up the partially smoked Caporal from the gravel path as we were leaving Peter Anderman's house.

"Hawkes is perfectly clear on the point that Anderman, whose name he didn't know—or so he professes—was not smoking when he parted from him."

"He might have lied."

"Not knowing the purpose of the question—why should he have lied?"

There was a further silence, and then:

"I take it your idea is, sir," said Yale, "that Anderman walked down the path with someone who came after Hawkes had gone, stood there for a while, smoking, then dropped the cigarette end, and—what? That he was followed back to the house?"

"Well, suggest an alternative."

"He may have been expecting someone. He was certainly anxious to get rid of Hawkes—if Hawkes' story can be believed.

You still think it was a woman, sir?"

"I do."

"And that she murdered him?"

"Not at all. No woman's hand struck that blow."

A long silence fell. The car ate up mile after mile of deserted Commercial Road East. Then Nayland Smith, who had been sitting tugging at the lobe of his left ear, which I knew of old to betoken intense reflection, suddenly grabbed the speaking tube.

"Pull up, Blake!" he shouted, while Yale and I stared in amazement. "Turn around and drive back as fast as you can go. Never mind regulations. I'll tell you where to pull up!"

He glanced at the inspector, and:

"In my preoccupation with the identity of the woman who visited Peter Anderman tonight," he said, "I had quite overlooked the character of the murderer. Let's hope we're not too late."

No glimmering of Nayland Smith's purpose dawned upon my mind until, tumbling out of the car, he set off at a tremendous pace along a narrow street. He plunged into an alley on the right . . .

He had led us back to the Blue Lamp!

In response to continuous banging, the door was cautiously opened a few inches, and:

"All shut—all shut!" came the sing-song voice of Jo Chang. "No more tonight!"

"Sorry to trouble you," said Nayland Smith, forcing his way into the passage. "But must speak to your waitress, Matari."

"Matari? She finish — go home."

At which moment, as Yale and I entered in turn, I saw the half-caste girl cross the cafe beyond. She had her coat and hat on, and indeed was evidently on the point of departure; but:

"One moment!" Nayland Smith cried.

Chang fell back into shadow and allowed us to pass. Smith whispered something rapidly to the inspector. Then, as he and I entered the room—from which the tables had been cleared and stacked at the further end—I saw the face of the girl Matari. It was deathly white, and her eyes were terror-stricken. I heard a muttered altercation and glanced over my shoulder. Detective Inspector Yale was gently but firmly pushing the Chinese proprietor back into his own cafe.

The man's face remained expressionless—wooden as that of a carved Buddha; but I noted that his curiously small, sinewy hands were clenched.

"Now, Matari," said Nayland Smith. "Will you please go and

find Mrs. Chang and request her to come and speak to me."

"She is . . ." the girl began in a trembling voice—"she is . . ."

"Asleep," said Jo Chang. "If someone go, I go. But I don't know why."

"If anyone goes . . . it must be Matari," Nayland Smith returned grimly.

"But . . ." the girl began again.

"She lock her door," said the Chinaman sullenly.

"Indeed? From which side?" Nayland Smith's voice had an odd inflection. The atmosphere was electric with suspense. What did it all mean, and where was it leading us?

"She lock her door," the Chinaman repeated.

"Then, if you will give Matari the key, her door can be *un*-locked."

Jo Chang darted a lightning glance from the speaker to myself, to Yale. He was calculating his chances. Evidently he assessed them as poor, for, with a slight shrug, he plunged his hand into a trouser pocket, closely watched by the detective, and pulled out a ring of keys. He selected one and handed the bunch to the girl. Matari, avoiding our eyes, darted off through a door-way left of the little counter. I heard her footsteps mounting an uncarpeted stair.

A moment later, from some place above, came a weird, muffled cry.

"You go, Greville," said Nayland Smith rapidly. "Yale and I . . . will stay here."

I nodded and set off. There was a short passage beyond the door, a stairway opening to the left. Up this I ran on to an uncarpeted landing. One of two doors was open; the room beyond dimly lighted. I stepped in, not knowing what to expect. What I saw was this:

The girl Matari, hands raised to her pale face, was swaying beside the bed . . . upon which Mrs. Chang, gagged and bound, her eyes blazing like those of a terror-stricken animal, lay, motionless.

Silent with amazement I set to work, and found it no easy task to loose the cunning knots with which she was fastened. First, I unlashed the towel tied over her mouth and spoke words meant to be reassuring.

She half sat up, moaned, and fell black, closing her eyes.

I could see no evidence of injury, but she was clearly incapable of answering questions; and leaving Matari in the room, I ran down to report.

Jo Chang was standing where I had left him. Nayland Smith fixed his piercing gaze upon me.

"Alive?" he snapped.

"Just," I replied. "She was tied up and gagged."

"Ah!" He turned to the

Chinaman. "There was *one* question I wanted to ask your wife," he said: "Where she obtained those choice Balkan cigarettes which she smokes."

Something vaguely resembling an expression crossed the immobile countenance.

"I tell you," Chang replied, without emotion, "because, tonight, I find out myself."

Most of the lights in the cafe had been extinguished; but even so I saw a gleam of sudden understanding dawn upon the countenance of Detective Inspector Yale. He rested his hand upon the Chinaman's shoulder.

"Jo Chang," he said, "I arrest you for the murder of Peter Anderman at his house tonight. I warn you that anything you say may be used as evidence against you."

Chang listened to the formal words unmoved, unless the act of slightly moistening his lips might be construed as a sign of mental disturbance.

"It doesn't matter," he replied calmly. "What is to be, always will be. Dishonor in wife deserve death. But for her this was not to be. I see that my wife has fine dress and silk stocking, and sometime jewels. I think she cheating me in my business. I tell her too that she paint her face too much. And always she smoke, smoke, those little cigarette, which she tell me sister send from Cardiff. She go out too much and business keep me here. But tonight, I follow.

"She go to house of Peter Anderman. A sailor who is drunk come out, and my wife stand close by wall until he go by. Then, she ring bell by door. When she has go in, I try door. It is not close. I too go in. There is light in big room shine out through window. But they are in little room far in, and I cannot see them. But I go so close I can hear, and I hear many word. It is quarrel, and I have no more for wonder for. Only thing must settle.

"For long time they there, and then, come out. She angry, but he smile and light cigarette. But his hand shake, and match fall.

"I hide as they walk to door. . . . When Peter Anderman go to go in, I appear. He hear my foot, turn, drop cigarette—run . . . but too late. I inside. He see what is to be will be, and strike at me. One blow, here, upon my head, and then I leap . . .

A sound of stumbling footsteps interrupted the unemotional story, and looking across the room I saw Mrs. Chang stagger in, supported by Matari. She leaned against the doorpost, staring wild-eyed across at us. Jo Chang appeared neither to have heard nor to have seen her. He continued:

"I throw my arm around him, but one hand he wrench free,

to get into one pocket. And I see the shining of long blade. I throw him off and fall back. He spring and strike. I catch his wrist—twist—and dagger fall on carpet—all jewel. So! it is *my* turn—and something must settle."

Suddenly, Jo Chang resorted to illustration. From somewhere (his sleeve, I think; it was like a conjuring trick) he produced a knife having a long wooden handle and a very slender, needle-like blade.

"I spring also."

The unemotional voice was raised to a high key. It became sibilant Eluding the vigilance of Yale. Jo Chang sprang like a leopard upon his wife!

Nothing, I believe, could have saved her, except that "what is to be, will be."

In sheer terror she dropped limply to the floor—no more than one second before that death leap.

The blade of Chang's knife was buried halfway to the hilt in a panel of the door!

Uttering a sound which I can only describe as a roar, Detective Inspector Yale hurled himself upon Chang's back, seized his thick neck, and thrust a knee against his spine. The man's iron grip on the haft of the knife, never relaxing, drew the blade from the woodwork as he was jerked backward.

"My God!"

Nayland Smith's words sounded like a groan.

Reversing the blade with incredible speed, Jo Chang grasped the hilt of his knife with both hands and plunged it into his broad chest!

Matari began to utter choking, wailing sounds, as Yale lowered the heavy body to the floor . . .

MEETING

When Commander Robertson walked towards the rubble-covered Seven Thieves district that night—casually and alone—somebody who saw him thought he was a little foolish. There was reason to believe the local people weren't exactly friendly—even some of the people working for us, there in Port Said, were obviously marking time—so they told me to follow him, discreetly of course. The old man has quite a temper.

What remained of the street we were soon on was lonely and dark—lonely except for the wild dogs sniffing in the rubbish, and the noises half-ruined houses seem to carry with them even when they're shells.

Suddenly there was a movement in the shadows. I saw Robertson stop—cock his head as if to listen—then move into the shadows. Visions of all sorts of things suddenly gripped me—I moved as close as I could—and then I heard his dry voice, "Come along, Harris. Don't stand out there like a blasted fool!" And Campion, one of our agents, was standing next to him—smiling.

the mark on the window

by...Melville Davisson Post

Contempt mounted as he hid. Did he regard the whole community of us as assassins that he should so protect himself?

I SHALL always remember this case, for it was one of the most remarkable that ever happened in Virginia. It turned on a tragedy that outraged the dignity of the State, and it presented a problem that could not be solved.

Judge Benton Woods had been shot down before a window in the courthouse.

It was a ruthless, cold-blooded murder, with no reason for it either in interest or passion that the world could see. The man was an irreproachable public servant; just and honorable, in the evening of his life, and at the very close of his career—for his successor had been elected and he was bringing his term to an end with the adjournment of his court.

It was night when the judge was killed.

It was his custom to remain in the courthouse in the evening and work on his chancery cases. There was a little chamber on the second floor, adjoining the great courtroom, in which he kept his books. It was before

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Not too many years ago Melville Davisson Post held an audience of millions, month after month, with his several detectives—remarkably different in their backgrounds. We have already brought you (May 1956) the story of Monsieur Jonquelle's encounter with THE WOMAN ON THE TERRACE; *now we have this story about the unusual Colonel Braxton, easily Post's most famous character.*

From: THE SILENT WITNESS

the open window of this room at night, with his big oil lamp on the table behind him, that he had met his death.

He had been shot from the street as he stood speaking to the people from the window.

The lead bullet from one of the long deer rifles of the time had gone entirely through his body and lodged in the wood of a poplar panel behind him. He was dead before anyone could reach the chamber, lying motionless on the oak floor.

Nor was there any mystery about the assassin.

It was clearly one of the crowd below, who had come in with their rifles and were firing in that riot. The final word of this sentence is descriptive. The demonstration in the street before the courthouse could be called nothing less than a *form* of riot. It was intended, by its very aspect of violence, to raise the country, if its persuasive effect on Judge Woods should fail. But it was not intended, in any manner, as a personal threat against the judge, for the people, without exception, held him in high regard.

This fundamental fact was established beyond doubt.

The persons taking part in this assembly were all known to one another. The identity of each one was established. He could be pointed out and named. And the persons to bear arms had been selected and their precise part in the demonstration laid out in advance.

There was no hot-head and no doubtful character in that company of armed men who had marched in from the land along the Ohio to make this demonstration.

They were of the pioneer stock of Virginia, fearless, determined men, deeply moved by a continuing outrage; but they did not go about in the night to do a murder. And, besides, this demonstration, with its unforeseen tragic sequel, had been considered and planned out, after counsel with some of the best men of the county. Even the officers of the court were cognizant of it. The clerk himself had been an instigator of it. The settlers along the waterfront of the Ohio had supported him at the polls, and he had been in sympathy with their position. He was not impressed that the demonstration would move the judge to any corrective act, nor, in reality, that Judge Woods could effect any corrective act, if he wished. But he thought the demonstration, if it had the aspect of violence, would force the government to take a hand in the matter.

It was an old feud that had developed into this violence. The river was the great highway on which the steamboats from

New Orleans traveled to Pittsburgh and the settlers along the river and these boats were continually at war.

In floodwater the boats, keeping toward the shore to avoid the current, overthrew the flooded cabins of the settlers with the wash of their paddle wheels. The settlers fired on the boats, and the boats came presently to barricade their decks and to carry sharpshooters; and so, while Virginia was at peace, the highway of the river was at war.

There was floodwater when this tragedy occurred.

For a week the valley of the Ohio had been inundated from the heavy rains. The barricaded boats traveled over the fields, and the settlers' houses, already deep in the water, were overthrown.

The intolerable situation could be borne no longer; and, on a night agreed, these men marched into the county seat to make their demonstration before the judge. They had been advised to give it the aspect of violence, and so took in their deer rifles for that purpose.

And they gave it that passionate aspect. They called out the judge and clamored for the protection of the law. The judge came to the open window and addressed them. But he could offer them no remedy in his court. The highway of the river was under the authority of the Federal Government. Their petition should be addressed to the Congress at Washington, and not to him.

There was a tumult in the street, and amid the shouting and the wild firing of rifles the judge was seen to sway a moment at the window and fall backward into the room.

The crowd poured into the courthouse and up the stairs into the courtroom. But the judge was dead, as I have written, when the crowd came to him—lying prostrate on the oak floor with a bullet through his body.

The tragedy lay like a sinister shadow on this frontier of Virginia, and the authorities sent for Colonel Braxton to sit as a special judge here and bring the murderer to justice.

The reputation of this eccentric lawyer added a new element of interest to the mysterious affair. It came on, ahead, before him, colored with exaggerated and imagined incident, and they looked to see a sort of ogre out of a fairy story land from the river boat; for he traveled on the yellow highway of the river.

But the imagined Goliath, after the manner of such fancies, crumbled before the reality in life.

A big, soft-spoken man with a drawling voice came down the

plank from the river boat. His aspect did not greatly impress us, for the governor or any of the large public figures of Virginia might have looked like that. But there was something about the way the man conducted this affair that did impress us. It impressed us with a decidedly unfavorable impression.

He acted like a man in fear.

It seems a severe thing to write down that verdict, for courage on the frontier of Virginia was held to be very nearly at the top of all human excellence. It came to our attention in the man's opening conduct of the case, and it increased in its impression as the proceedings in the case advanced. There could be no doubt about it. He acted like a man in fear!

And he disappointed the people in another manner:

It was supposed that he would make a great speech from the bench, in eulogy of Judge Woods and in condemnation of this outrage. The crowd filled the courtroom to the door, to hear him. It applauded as at a public meeting when he came in and, if he had spoken, it would have carried him on a wave of feeling.

But he did not speak.

He did not, in fact, go at that time on the bench.

He called the sheriff and the clerk and went into the chamber where the judge had died. He stood before the open window, where Judge Woods had appeared above the mob, looked at the mark of the bullet on the wall, listened carefully to all the details of the tragedy; ordered the court adjourned, and went down to the tavern.

But he did also a thing that impressed us with his sense of fear:

He directed the sheriff and his son, the deputy, to attend him, and he walked between them to the tavern.

It was a scene that made a bad impression. Did he regard the whole community of us as assassins that he should thus so conspicuously protect himself? And, withal, we began to feel a sort of gathering contempt. The sense of it deepened when he kept secluded in his room and when he went out that evening to walk with the sheriff and the deputy, with all the loitering persons warned away.

Still, the gossips were divided in their verdict.

Here was perhaps only a becoming modesty in a stranger who would presently be the storm center of this affair. It was clever business, this unpretentious entry. Tomorrow he would make his great speech from the bench, and, after Judge Woods' murder, there was some excuse for these precautions.

But this latter was felt to be

a lame addenda to the comment.

Fear we could not put up with.

But the people, and even the idle about the tavern, respected Colonel Braxton's wish. And when he went out with the sheriff and his son in the evening, no man loitered on his heels, and the people withdrew about their affairs. And so we awaited the tomorrow.

There was a great crowd in the courtroom on this morning; a greater crowd than on the day before, for the whole county had come in, drawn by the lure of the tragedy and the desire to see this stranger who had been selected to sit as special judge.

But what could he do?

The chimney-corner experts and the loiterers about the taverns had considered that, and they concluded that the mystery was a thing beyond him. He could do nothing but deliver his great speech, set in motion the usual inquisitorial machinery of the law, and take the defeat that awaited him. It was a case for Solomon, these experts said, referring to the only book they knew. And in its puzzling features it seemed a thing no less.

The bullet that had killed Judge Woods had been cut out of the wall and lay on the bench. It was the lead bullet of the deer rifle of the time.

But from what rifle had the deadly thing been fired?

Every man that had come in with a rifle was known, and these weapons, to be found in every house, were all alike, made in Baltimore for the frontier trade, of the same pattern and the same caliber of ball. And beyond these settlers in the demonstration there were a thousand of these rifles on the Ohio, as like in every detail as a handful of peas—the deer rifle of the time, with a long stock, or the stock cut down.

It *was* a case for Solomon.

And there was no Solomon sitting in Virginia, the chimney-corner experts said with pertinent comment, in their summing up.

One must realize the profound obscurities of the thing:

A released convict, sentenced by Judge Woods, might have taken a revenge like this; but there was no such person among the settlers who had marched into the county seat. Someone from a river boat might have fired the shot, to put the landsmen in the wrong; but there was no boat tied up on the Ohio and no alien from the river in the place.

The life of the community must be understood:

Every citizen was known, a stranger could not enter unnoticed. Such an hypothesis had to be excluded.

And there was another thing to realize: The demonstration in

the street was a deliberate affair, handled calmly for a desired effect. The very officers of the court had been consulted. As I have written, the clerk of the court, Mr. Chapman, had been freely talked with; and he had suggested the aspect of violence, not, as he frankly said, to influence Judge Woods, but to get the matter before the Congress. The government could not ignore a river war, nor overlook an armed rising, if it appeared that the frontier was determined. But, like other men, the clerk could not imagine this tragic outcome of the thing. It was a result wholly unforeseen, and he deplored it with every manifestation of regret.

It had been undertaken with extreme precaution: There was no ball in any rifle; a powder charge only had been used for this aspect of violence. And yet here was Judge Woods shot down! The loom of the mystery, as one considered it, deepened and became more impenetrable; and beyond this mystery of the act, there lay, also, the mystery of a motive.

And so the puzzling thing turned back on itself.

What could Colonel Braxton do? No man could find a way in this dark *cul-de-sac;* neither Solomon nor any special judge that the authorities of Virginia could send in! And so the people crowded into the courtroom to see what this substitute for Solomon could do.

There was a breathless interest when Colonel Braxton entered.

He came in with the sheriff and his son and, passing through the crowd, went on the bench. He put down some articles before him: a bit of paper and a piece of wood about a foot long and some two inches in width. He set the lead bullet on the fragment of paper to hold it down. The court was opened, and the people composed themselves to listen to the great speech that by custom he should now deliver.

But that day was freighted for us with the unexpected.

This inscrutable special judge said nothing.

He sat for some time looking at the lead bullet, the bit of paper, and the piece of wood, and then, vaguely, about the courtroom: at the sheriff, fingering his hat; at the clerk, writing with three fingers, for the index finger was bound up from some minor injury; at the tall settlers standing behind the crowded benches; at the door to the clerk's office opposite the chamber where Judge Woods had died. And finally he spoke.

But it was to open no oration.

It was to give a direction that at first amazed us, and then, as we understood its intent, lowered our respect.

He ordered the settlers who had come armed in the demonstration before Judge Woods to bring in their rifles, and, as if he feared a further violence, he added that every officer of the court should do the like—come in also with his rifle. And this was not the only precaution of the apparently fearful man. He adjourned the court until the afternoon and, going down from the bench, locked himself into the clerk's office, and set the clerk's assistant to keep watch before the door.

I cannot tell you how astonished the people were.

We went out with a feeling of disgust.

A judge who went about between the sheriff and a deputy, called upon the officers of the court to come into his session armed, and then, while he waited for the security of that guard, locked himself in behind a door was, for all his reputation in Virginia, a poor cowardly creature of no worth.

Besides, of what use was it for the settlers to bring in their rifles? Did he expect the guilty one to go white in his court and confess the crime when he was confronted with the bullet lying on the scrap of paper? Was there, perhaps, a charm of magic scrawled on this bit of paper that our timid Solomon had put down before him when he had come up on the bench! . . . And this piece of wood! Did the man intend to whittle!

The loiterers about the tavern laughed.

We no longer held this Colonel Braxton in our respect; but our curiosity remained. It remained with a consuming interest.

What further absurdity would he be about?

And so the people returned, crowding into the court on this afternoon. But it was a changed and disillusioned concourse. Our high regard elevating this special judge had slipped away. Nevertheless, his directions had been carried out. The settlers were in the courtroom with their rifles, and every officer of the court had likewise brought in his weapon from his house. They made, thus, a group of armed men standing opposite across the courtroom, as if they opposed one another in some feud, likely, on the moment, to break out.

The settlers were two to one in number over the officials of the court. But the weapons were the same, for this western border of Virginia was a game land and every citizen kept a deer rifle in his house; all of the same caliber and pattern—an octagon iron barrel, half stocked or with the wooden stock extending to the muzzle.

Colonel Braxton went on the bench and ordered the rioters to

bring their rifles before him. He would make sure, evidently, that no one among the settlers had his rifle loaded.

How careful for his safety was this imported Solomon!

One could feel about him the undercurrent of contempt. But the dignity of the people held. The settlers came forward, and handed up their rifles. Colonel Braxton glanced at each weapon a moment, long enough, we thought, to see if it were loaded, and returned it to its owner.

It was like a trivial inspection at a muster.

And then, weakly, as it seemed to us as if he would cover his concern for his safety with a show of equal treatment on both sides, he directed the officers of the court, also, to pass before him with their rifles.

They followed when the settlers had gone back to their places by the wall, each one in attendance, from the deputy by the door to the clerk of this circuit court. And Colonel Braxton, glancing at the weapons as they were handed up, returned them with no comment.

He did not speak and there was no sound but the footfall of each person passing before the bench! What evidential sign could he be seeking? What clue indicatory of the assassin of Judge Woods?

Evidently none, for, as I have said, the rifles were all of the same make and pattern. But he could take this precaution against a loaded rifle in the courtroom, and evidently, from what we have observed about the man, this was his sole intent.

While the men went back to their places he sat looking at the articles before him, the bit of paper, the bullet on it, and the piece of wood.

Then he spoke, looking down at the clerk. And at his words the sagging interest of the courtroom flashed like a flame into life.

"Write out an indictment," he said.

The clerk got on his feet astonished.

"An indictment, Your Honor!" he echoed.

"Yes."

The clerk twisted on his feet, searching the man's face with a curious expression.

"Against whom? Against what one?"

His voice halted and jerked.

"Write it in blank," replied Colonel Braxton.

"In blank!" The clerk repeated it. "A John Doe indictment. There is no such writ recognized in a Virginian court."

"Write it in blank," replied Colonel Braxton.

There was now a tense silence.

Every eye turned toward this inscrutable figure on the bench, and somehow that figure took

on a new and commanding dignity. No feature and no aspect of the man had changed, and yet he seemed, somehow, suddenly to dominate the courtroom.

The clerk sat down at his table and began to write. But he was shaken, like us all, with this new dramatic tension, and his hand with its injured finger trembled at the work.

He wrote on and the silence deepened.

We could all hear the scratch of the quill pen on the foolscap, and we could note, as with a sharpened vision, his puzzled features twisting about his face, as if his mind, independent of his writing fingers, labored at this dark enigma. Then the scratch of the pen slackened, went on, and finally ceased. The man stopped. His face had now a certain determination in it. He put down his pen, and looked up at the bench. And when he spoke, there was a queer note in his words.

"Your Honor," he said, "do you know who killed Judge Woods?"

Colonel Braxton did not seem to regard the man.

He looked instead at the people crowded into the courtroom, with their strained, silent, expectant faces; for this thing had taken an immense unexpected swing up into the light, and they were overcome by their amazement.

It was a moment of the highest tension, but Colonel Braxton took no attitude of either tone or manner from it. He spoke in a leisurely voice, as one about a commonplace, with no gesture and no emphatic word.

"I am about as tall as Judge Woods," he said. "I placed myself in his position before the open window. I knew where the fatal shot had entered his body, and where the bullet had lodged in the wall behind me; and it was at once evident, from a line drawn through the wound of entry to the mark on the wall, that the bullet had traveled on a level, and not on a slant, from below. And so it was at once clear that Judge Woods had not been shot from the street. He had been killed by someone who was practically on a level with him."

He paused as in reflection.

"There was another thing; but it was not clear and it could not be taken as decisive. The bullet did not seem to have been fired from directly before the open window. The wound of entry was precisely on the median line of the chest. But, in its exit, the bullet did not strike the spine. When I considered how it happened that a bullet fired near the median line of the human body in front did not lodge in the spine, instead

of passing entirely through the body, I made some inquiry about the exit wound, and I discovered that while the bullet had entered on the median line, it had come out at the left of the spinal column. Consequently, it seemed at least persuasive evidence that the shot had been fired diagonally from some position to the right of the open window, and not directly in front of that window.

"This could not be precisely certain, as Judge Woods might have turned at this moment . . . However, it was worth looking into.

"There is a vacant house to the right, diagonally across the street, and I determined to examine it. I did not wish a number of people present who might crowd in and destroy any evidences, so I asked the sheriff and his son to go with me to the tavern, and later to assist in the examination of the house."

There was profound silence in the courtroom, as we began to understand a thing that had misled us. He went on:

"We found the house closed, with a door at the rear fastened with an iron bolt. This bolt had rusted, and some force had been required to push it back. On the step by this door we picked up a bit of paper with a tiny smear of blood on it. It is here on the table before me."

He indicated the bit of paper under the bullet.

"We entered the house and went to the second floor. Here, in a room facing the courthouse, we found the window raised about four inches, and, on the sill of this window, impressed in the soft wood, which was beginning to rot, we found the mark of a rifle barrel . . . a half-stocked rifle, for the print was the print of the iron barrel, and the iron barrel would not have touched the wood if the stock had extended to the muzzle."

He paused again and indicated the piece of poplar wood beside the other articles on his table. Then he went on:

"We knew now that Judge Woods had been shot from this window, and that the rifle used was a half-stocked deer rifle. This information, however, did not greatly advance us, as half the rifles of this type in Virginia are made thus—with a half stock or cut down to half stock—to reduce the weapon's weight.

"But there *was* something in this print distinguishing and peculiar. There was a straight mark in the center of the print, parallel with the borders of it, and running entirely across the sill, making a long scratch in the center on the print of the soft poplar wood."

He leaned forward and held it up for all to see.

It was the sawed-out segment of the poplar sill of a window, soft as if turning to rot, and on it the print of a rifle barrel, with a scratch traversing the center of it clearly visible.

Colonel Braxton went on:

"Here was the indicatory sign by which this rifle could be distinguished from all others. There was evidently something on the under side of the barrel of this rifle near the muzzle that had scratched the wood when the assassin had pushed the barrel across the window sill, something hard and sharp attached, as I have said, to the under side of the iron barrel near the muzzle.

"I came on the bench then and ordered all the deer rifles brought before me, not only those of the settlers who had appeared in the riot before the courthouse, but also all the rifles of the officers of the court, for I had, I thought, a further indicatory clue."

"What did that bit of paper with its slight blood stain indicate? It meant something, lying there beside the door. What did it mean? Evidently, one thing only. The iron bolt fastening this door to the vacant house was, as I have said, rusted. It had been difficult to thrust it back, and therefore the one endeavoring to thrust it back had used some force and, in consequence, when it broke the rust and went suddenly back, the finger of the hand on the bolt struck the staple of the bolt and was injured. It bled. The one endeavoring to enter had wiped the blood from his finger on this bit of paper."

His voice was now slow and deliberate, like the pronouncement of a Fate:

"To find the assassin of Judge Woods then, it was necessary only to find the man who had an injured finger and a half-stocked deer rifle with something on the under side of the barrel, near the muzzle, that would make a scratch parallel with the print of its barrel."

Colonel Braxton turned sharply on the bench and, looking down at the clerk at his table, suddenly addressed him:

"Write the name of Abel Chapman into the blank of your indictment."

The whole crowd in the courtroom moved as with a common impulse.

We had not before this taken any particular notice of the clerk. But we now saw that he was trembling and that his face was coated over with an oily sweat; we marked the sheriff and his son on either side.

He got on his feet, and we could see his bound-up injured finger. And we could see that his deer rifle, which the sheriff held up before the courtroom, had originally been a whole

stock; but that the stock had been cut down and that the iron staple near the muzzle, which had held the wood, had been broken off—but not entirely broken off, for a sharp point of it, in the center of the barrel, remained.

The clerk, unsteady on his feet, stuttered before he could get his voice:

"Abel Chapman!" he said; "Abel Chapman . . . that is my name . . . Why should I kill Judge Woods? What motive could I have to kill Judge Woods?"

Colonel Braxton did not look at the man.

"I thought about the motive," he said, "and so, while the clerk here went with the others for his rifle, I put his assistant outside, as though to guard the door, and locked myself into his office to see if I could find the motive that had moved this man to kill Judge Woods . . . And I found it. Judge Woods' term was about to expire. It is a custom for the judges to examine and certify the clerk's accounts correct for their term.

"The clerk here has been robbing the people. His accounts have been falsified. He was on the point of discovery. He knew that Judge Woods would find his dishonest transactions and send him to the penitentiary, when he came to look at his books. He also knew that if Judge Woods were out of the way and his order book showed that his accounts had been examined, and found correct, the new judge would not go behind that record . . . And so, in a desperate corner, he encouraged this demonstration, and under the cover of it shot Judge Woods and forged the order approving his accounts."

He stopped, took a folded paper from his pocket, and laid it on the table.

"Here is the forged order . . . the signature of Judge Woods inked in over a pencil tracing."

There followed a scene of drama of which I have met no equal in any imagined tragedy.

The trapped clerk began to stagger about his table.

"You forced me to write my own indictment," he cried, "to write my own indictment . . . to write my own indictment on which to hang me!"

And Colonel Braxton answered him, now—in our reversal of feeling—big, dominant, inscrutable, like an avenging Nemesis behind the world.

"Yes," he said, "I forced you to write your own indictment . . . for it was an ancient custom of our fathers, in a particularly atrocious and cold-blooded murder, to compel the guilty man to dig his own grave before they hanged him!"

the cave of ali baba

by . . . Dorothy L. Sayers

"Stop! Wait! I have something to say! I don't ask for life—only for a quick death—I—I have something to sell. . . ."

IN THE front room of a grim and narrow house in Lambeth a man sat eating kippers and glancing through the *Morning Post.* He was smallish and spare, with brown hair rather too regularly waved and a strong, brown beard, cut to a point. His double-breasted suit of navy-blue and his socks, tie, and handkerchief, all scrupulously matched, were a trifle more point-device than the best taste approves, and his boots were slightly too bright a brown.

He did not look a gentleman, not even a gentleman's gentleman, yet there was something about his appearance which suggested that he was accustomed to the manner of life in good families. The breakfast-table, which he had set with his own hands, was arrayed with the attention to detail which is exacted of good-class servants. His action, as he walked over to a little side-table and carved himself a plate of ham, was the action of a superior butler; yet he was not old enough to be a retired butler; a footman, per-

Dorothy L. Sayers, one of the great names in this field, while a distinguished classical scholar, is undoubtedly better known as the author of the stories about Lord Peter Wimsey, art connoisseur and detective, who flourished in those calmer days that some of us still remember. Lord Peter, in the present story, practically returns from the dead as he fights a strange Society of Criminals.

From: LORD PETER VIEWS THE BODY

haps, who had come into a legacy.

He finished the ham with good appetite, and, as he sipped his coffee, read through attentively a paragraph which he had already noticed and put aside for consideration.

LORD PETER WIMSEY'S WILL. BEQUEST TO VALET. £10,000 TO CHARITIES

The will of Lord Peter Wimsey, who was killed last December while shooting big game in Tanganyika, was proved yesterday at £500,000. A sum of £10,000 was left to various charities, including (here followed a list of bequests). To his valet, Mervyn Bunter, was left an annuity of £500 and the lease of the testator's flat in Piccadilly. (Then followed a number of personal bequests.) *The remainder of the estate, including the valuable collection of books and pictures at 110A Piccadilly, was left to the testator's mother, the Dowager Duchess of Denver.*

Lord Peter Wimsey was thirty-seven at the time of his death. He was the younger brother of the present Duke of Denver, who is reported the wealthiest peer in the United Kingdom.

Lord Peter was a distinguished criminologist and took an active part in the solution of several famous mysteries. He was a well-known book-collector and man-about-town.

The man gave a sigh of relief.

"No doubt about that," he said aloud. "People don't give their money away if they're going to come back again. The blighter's dead and buried right enough. I'm free."

He finished his coffee, cleared the table, and washed up the crockery, took his bowler hat from the hall-stand, and went out.

A bus took him to Bermondsey. He alighted, and plunged into a network of gloomy streets, arriving after a quarter of an hour's walk at a seedy-looking public-house in a low quarter. He entered and called for a double whiskey.

The house had only just opened, but a number of customers, who had apparently been waiting on the doorstep for this desirable event, were already clustered about the bar. The man who might have been a footman reached for his glass, and in doing so jostled the elbow of a flash person in a check suit and regrettable tie.

"Here!" expostulated the flash person. "What d'yer mean by it. We don't want your sort here. Get out!"

He emphasized his remarks with a few highly colored words, and a violent push in the chest.

"Bar's free to everybody, isn't it?" said the other, returning the shove with full interest.

"Now then!" said the barmaid, "none o' that. The gentleman didn't do it intentional, Mr. Jukes."

"Didn't he?" said Mr. Jukes. "Well I *did*."

"And you ought to be ashamed of yourself," retorted the young lady, with a toss of the head. "I'll have no quarrelling in my bar—not this time in the morning."

"It was quite an accident," said the man from Lambeth. "I'm not one to make a disturbance, having always been used to the best houses. But if any gentleman *wants* to make trouble—"

"All right, all right," said Mr. Jukes, more pacifically. "I'm not too keen to give you a new face. Not but what any alteration wouldn't be for the better. Mind your manners another time, that's all. What'll you have?"

"No, no," protested the other, "this one must be on me. Sorry I pushed you. I didn't mean it. But I didn't like to be taken up so short."

"Say no more about it," said Mr. Jukes generously. "I'm standing this. Another double whisky, miss, and one of the usual. Come over here where there isn't so much of a crowd, or you'll be getting yourself into trouble again."

He led the way to a small table in the cornor of the room.

"That's all right," said Mr. Jukes. "Very nicely done. I don't think there's any danger here, but you can't be too careful. Now, what about it, Rogers? Have you made up your mind to come in with us?"

"Yes," said Rogers, with a glance over his shoulder, "yes, I have. That is, mind you, if everything seems all right. I'm not looking for trouble and I don't want to get let in for any dangerous games. I don't mind giving you information, but it's understood as I take no active part in whatever goes on. Is that straight?"

"You wouldn't be allowed to take an active part if you wanted to," said Mr. Jukes. "Why, you poor fish, Number One wouldn't have anybody but experts on his jobs. All you have to do is to let us know where the stuff is and how to get it. The Society does the rest. It's some organization, I can tell you. You won't even know who's doing it, or how it's done. You won't know anybody, and nobody will know you—except Number One, of course. He knows everybody."

"And you," said Rogers.

"And me, of course. But I shall be transferred to another district. We shan't meet again after today, except at the gen-

eral meetings, and then we shall all be masked."

"Go on!" said Rogers incredulously.

"Fact. You'll be taken to Number One—he'll see you, but you won't see him. Then, if he thinks you're any good, you'll be put on the roll, and after that you'll be told where to make your reports to. There is a divisional meeting called once a fortnight, and every three months there's a general meeting and a share-out. Each member is called up by number and has his whack handed over to him. That's all."

"Well, but suppose two members are put on the same job together?"

"If it's a daylight job, they'll be so disguised their mothers wouldn't know 'em. But it's mostly night work."

"I see. But, look here—what's to prevent somebody following me home and giving me away to the police?"

"Nothing of course. Only I wouldn't advise him to try it, that's all. The last man who had that bright idea was fished out of the river down Rotherhithe way before he had time to get his precious report in Number One knows everybody, you see."

"Oh!—and who is this Number One?"

"There's lots of people would give a good bit to know that."

"Does nobody know?"

"Nobody. He's a fair marvel, is Number One. He's a gentleman, I can tell you that, and a pretty high-up one, from his ways. *And* he's got eyes all round his head. *And* he's got an arm as long as from here to Australia. *But* nobody knows anything about him, unless it's Number Two, and I'm not even sure about her."

"Women in it, then?"

"You can bet your boots there are. You can't do a job without 'em nowadays. But that needn't worry you The women are safe enough. They don't want to come to a sticky end, no more than you and me."

"But, look here, Jukes—how about the money? It's a big risk to take. Is it worth it?"

"Worth it?' Jukes leant across the little marble-topped table and whispered

"Coo!" gasped Rogers. "And how much of that would I get now?"

"You'd share and share alike with the rest, whether you'd been in that particular job or not. There's fifty members, and you'd get one-fiftieth, same as Number One and same as me."

"Really? No kidding?"

"See that wet, see that dry!" Jukes laughed "Say, can you beat it? There's never been anything like it It's the biggest thing ever been known. He's a great man, is Number One."

"And do you pull off many jobs?"

"Many? Listen. You remember the Carruthers necklace, and the Gorleston Bank robbery? And the Faversham burglary? And the big Rubens that disappeared from the National Gallery? And the Frensham pearls? All done by the Society. And never even one of them cleared up."

Rogers licked his lips.

"But now, look here," he said cautiously. "Supposing I was a spy, as you might say, and supposing I was to go straight off and tell the police about what you've been saying?"

"Ah!" said Jukes, "suppose you did, eh? Well, supposing something nasty didn't happen to you on the way there—which I wouldn't swear for, mind—"

"Do you mean to say you've got me watched?"

"You can bet your sweet life we have. Yes. Well, *supposing* nothing happened on the way there, and you was to bring the slops to this pub, looking for yours truly—"

"Yes?"

"You wouldn't find me, that's all. I should have gone to Number Five."

"Who's Number Five?"

"Ah! I don't know. But he's the man that makes you a new face while you wait. Plastic surgery, they call it. And new fingerprints. New everything. We go in for up-to-date methods in our show."

Rogers whistled.

"Well, how about it?" asked Jukes, eyeing his acquaintance over the rim of his tumbler.

"Look here—you've told me a lot of things. Shall I be safe if I say 'No?' "

"Oh, yes—if you behave yourself and don't make trouble for us."

"H'm, I see. And if I say 'Yes?' "

"Then you'll be a rich man in less than no time, with money in your pocket to live like a gentleman. And nothing to do for it, except to tell us what you know about the houses you've been to when you were in service. It's money for jam if you'll act straight by the Society."

Rogers was silent, thinking it over.

"I'll do it!" he said at last.

"Good for you. "Miss! The same again, please. Here's to it, Rogers! I knew you were one of the right sort the minute I set eyes on you. Here's to money for jam, and take care of Number One! Talking of Number One, you'd better come round and see him tonight. No time like the present."

"Right you are. Where'll I come to? Here?"

"Nix. No more of this little pub for us. It's a pity, because it's nice and comfortable, but it

can't be helped. Now, what you've got to do is this. At ten o'clock tonight exactly you walk north across Lambeth Bridge" (Rogers winced at this intimation that his abode was known), "and you'll see a yellow taxi standing there, with the driver doing something to his engine. You'll say to him, 'Is your bus fit to go?' and he'll say, 'Depends where you want to go to.' And you'll say, 'Take me to Number One, London.' There's a shop called that, by the way, but he won't take you there. You won't know where he *is* taking you, because the taxi-windows will be covered up, but you mustn't mind that. It's the rule for the first visit. Afterwards, when you're regularly one of us, you'll be told the name of the place.

"And when you get there, do as you're told and speak the truth, because if you don't, Number One will deal with you. Understand?"

"I see."

"Are you game? You're not afraid?"

"Of course I'm not afraid."

"Good man! Well, we'd better be moving now. And I'll say good-bye, because we shan't see each other again. Good-bye—and good luck!"

"Good-bye."

They passed through the swing-doors, and out into the mean and dirty street.

The two years subsequent to the enrollment of the exfootman Rogers in a crook society were marked by a number of startling and successful raids on the houses of distinguished people. There was the theft of the great diamond tiara from the Dowager Duchess of Denver; the burglary at the flat formerly occupied by the late Lord Peter Wimsey, resulting in the disappearance of £7,000 worth of silver and gold plate; the burglary at the country mansion of Theodore Wintrop, the millionaire—which, incidentally, exposed that thriving gentleman as a confirmed Society blackmailer and caused a scandal in Mayfair; and the snatching of the famous eight-string necklace of pearls from the neck of the Marchioness of Dinglewood during the Jewel Song in *Faust* at Covent Garden. It is true that the pearls turned out to be imitation, the original string having been pawned by the noble lady under circumstances highly painful to the Marquis, but the coup was nevertheless a sensational one.

On a Saturday afternoon in January Rogers was sitting in his room in Lambeth, when a slight noise at the front door caught his ear. He sprang up almost before it had ceased, dashed through the small hallway, and flung the door open. The street was deserted. Nevertheless, as he turned back to the

sitting-room, he saw an envelope lying on the hat-stand. It was addressed briefly to "Number Twenty-one." Accustomed by this time to the somewhat dramatic methods used by the Society to deliver its correspondence, he merely shrugged his shoulders, and opened the note.

It was written in cipher, and when transcribed, ran thus:

"Number Twenty-one. — An Extraordinary General Meeting will be held tonight at the house of Number One at 11:30. You will be absent at your peril. The word is FINALITY."

Rogers stood for a little time considering this. Then he made his way to a room at the back of the house, in which there was a tall safe, built into the wall. He manipulated the combination and walked into the safe, which ran back for some distance, forming, indeed, a small strong-room. He pulled out a drawer marked "Correspondence," and added the paper he had just received to the contents.

After a few moments he emerged, re-set the lock to a new combination, and returned to the sitting-room.

"Finality," he said. "Yes—I think so." He stretched out his hand to the telephone—then appeared to alter his mind.

He went upstairs to an attic, and thence climbed into a loft close under the roof. Crawling among the rafters, he made his way into the farthest corner; then carefully pressed a knob on the timberwork. A concealed trap-door swung open. He crept through it, and found himself in the corresponding loft of the next house. A soft cooing noise greeted him as he entered. Under the skylight stood three cages, each containing a carrier pigeon.

He glanced cautiously out of the skylight, which looked out upon a high blank wall at the back of some factory or other. There was nobody in the dim little courtyard, and no window within sight. He drew in his head again, and, taking a small fragment of thin paper from his pocketbook, wrote a few letters and numbers upon it. Going to the nearest cage, he took out the pigeon and attached the message to its wing. Then he carefully set the bird on the window-ledge. It hesitated a moment, shifted its pink feet a few times, lifted its wings, and was gone. He saw it tower up into the already darkening sky over the factory roof and vanish into the distance.

He glanced at his watch and returned downstairs. An hour later he released the second pigeon, and in another hour the third. Then he sat down to wait.

At half-past nine he went up to the attic again. It was dark,

but a few frosty stars were shining, and a cold air blew through the open window. Something pale gleamed faintly on the floor. He picked it up—it was warm and feathery. The answer had come.

He ruffled the soft plumes and found the paper. Before reading it, he fed the pigeon and put it into one of the cages. As he was about to fasten the door, he checked himself.

"If anything happens to me," he said, "there's no need for you to starve to death, my child."

He pushed the window a little wider open and went downstairs again. The paper in his hand bore only the two letters, "O.K." It seemed to have been written hurriedly, for there was a long smear of ink of the upper left-hand corner. He noted this with a smile, put the paper in the fire, and, going out into the kitchen, prepared and ate a hearty meal of eggs and corned beef from a new tin. He ate it without bread, though there was a loaf on the shelf near at hand, and washed it down with water from the tap, which he let run for some time before venturing to drink it. Even then he carefully wiped the tap, both inside and outside, before drinking.

When he had finished, he took a revolver from a locked drawer, inspecting the mechanism with attention to see that it was in working order, and loaded it with new cartridges from an unbroken packet. Then he sat down to wait again.

At a quarter before eleven, he rose and went out into the street. He walked briskly, keeping well away from the wall, till he came out into a well-lighted thoroughfare. Here he took a bus, securing the corner seat next the conductor, from which he could see everybody who got on and off. A succession of buses eventually brought him to a respectable residential quarter of Hampstead. Here he alighted and, still keeping well away from the walls, made his way up to the Heath.

The night was moonless, but not altogether black, and, as he crossed a deserted part of the Heath, he observed one or two other dark forms closing in upon him from various directions. He paused in the shelter of a large tree, and adjusted to his face a black velvet mask, which covered him from brow to chin. At its base the number 21 was clearly embroidered in white thread.

At length a slight dip in the ground disclosed one of those agreeable villas which stand, somewhat isolated, among the rural surroundings of the Heath. One of the windows was lighted. As he made his way to the door other dark figures, masked like himself, pressed

forward and surrounded him. He counted six of them.

The foremost man knocked on the door of the solitary house. After a moment it was opened slightly. The man advanced his head to the opening; there was a murmur, and the door opened wide. The man stepped in, and the door was shut.

When three of the men had entered, Rogers found himself to be the next in turn. He knocked, three times loudly, then twice faintly. The door opened to the extent of two or three inches, and an ear was presented to the chink. Rogers whispered "Finality." The ear was withdrawn, the door opened, and he passed in.

Without any further word of greeting, Number Twenty-one passed into a small room on the left, which was furnished like an office, with a desk, a safe, and a couple of chairs. At the desk sat a massive man in evening dress, with a ledger before him. The new arrival shut the door carefully after he announced, "Number Twenty-one, sir," and stood respectfully waiting. The big man looked up, showing the number 1 startlingly white on his velvet mask. His eyes, of a curious hard blue, scanned Rogers attentively. At a sign from him, Rogers removed his mask. Having verified his identity with care, the President said, "Very well, Number Twenty-one, and made an entry in the ledger. The voice was hard and metallic like his eyes. The close scrutiny from behind the immovable black mask seemed to make Rogers uneasy; he shifted his feet, and his eyes fell. Number One made a sign of dismissal, and Rogers, with a faint sigh as though of relief, replaced his mask and left the room. As he came out, the next comer passed in his place.

The room in which the Society met was a large one, made by knocking the two largest of the first-floor rooms into one. It was furnished in the standardized taste of twentieth-century suburbia and brilliantly lighted. A gramophone in one corner blared out a jazz tune to which about ten couples of masked men and women were dancing, some in evening dress and others in tweeds and jumpers.

In one corner of the room was an American bar. Rogers went up and asked the masked man in charge for a double whiskey. He consumed it slowly, leaning on the bar. The room filled, presently somebody moved across to the gramophone and stopped it. He looked round. Number One had appeared on the threshold. A tall woman in black stood beside him. The mask, embroidered with a white 2, covered hair and face completely; only her fine

bearing and her white arms and bosom and dark eyes shining through the eye-slits proclaimed her a woman of power and physical attraction.

"Ladies and gentlemen." Number One was standing at the upper end of the room. The woman sat beside him; her eyes were cast down and betrayed nothing, but her hands were clenched on the arms of the chair and her whole figure seemed tensely aware.

"Ladies and gentlemen. Our numbers are two short tonight." The masks moved; eyes were turned, seeking and counting. "I need not inform you of the disastrous failure of our plan for securing the plans of the Court-Windlesham helicopter. Our courageous and devoted comrades, Number Fifteen and Number Forty-eight, were betrayed and taken by the police."

An uneasy murmur arose among the company.

"It may have occurred to some of you that even the well-known steadfastness of these comrades might give way under examination. There is no cause for alarm. The usual orders have been issued, and I have this evening received the report that their tongues have been effectually silenced. You will, I am sure, be glad to know that these two brave men have been spared the ordeal of so great a temptation to dishonor, and that they will not be called upon to face a public trial and the rigors of a long imprisonment."

A hiss of intaken breath moved across the assembled members like the wind over a barley field.

"Their dependents will be discreetly compensated in the usual manner. I call upon Numbers Twelve and Thirty-four to undertake this agreeable task. They will attend me in my office for their instructions after the meeting. Will the Numbers I have named kindly signify that they are able and willing to perform this duty?"

Two hands were raised in salute. The President continued, looking at his watch:

"Ladies and gentlemen, please take your partners for the next dance."

The gramophone struck up again. Rogers turned to a girl near him in a red dress. She nodded, and they slipped into the movement of a fox trot. The couples gyrated solemnly and in silence.

Their shadows were flung against the blinds as they turned and stepped to and fro.

"What has happened?" breathed the girl in a whisper scarcely moving her lips. "I'm frightened, aren't you? I feel as if something awful is going to happen."

"It does take one a bit short, the President's way of doing

things," agreed Rogers, "but it's safer like that."

"Those poor men—"

A dancer, turning and following on their heels, touched Rogers on the shoulder.

"No talking, please," he said. His eyes gleamed sternly; he twirled his partner into the middle of the crowd and was gone. The girl shuddered.

The gramophone stopped. There was a burst of clapping. The dancers again clustered before the President's seat.

"Ladies and gentlemen. You may wonder why this extraordinary meeting has been called. The reason is a serious one. The failure of our recent attempt was no accident. The police were not on the premises that night by chance. We have a traitor among us."

Partners who had been standing close together fell distrustfully apart. Each member seemed to shrink, as a snail shrinks from the touch of a finger.

"You will remember the disappointing outcome of the Dinglewood affair," went on the President, in his harsh voice. "You may recall other smaller matters which have not turned out satisfactorily. All these troubles have been traced to their origin. I am happy to say that our minds can now be easy. The offender has been discovered and will be removed. There will be no more mistakes. The misguided member who introduced the traitor to our Society will be placed in a position where his lack of caution will have no further ill-effects. There is no cause for alarm."

Every eye roved about the company, searching for the traitor and his unfortunate sponsor. Somewhere beneath the black masks a face must have turned white; somewhere under the stifling velvet there must have been a brow sweating, not with the heat of the dance. But the masks hid everything.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please take your partners for the next dance."

The gramophone struck into an old and half-forgotten tune: "There Ain't Nobody Loves Me." The girl in red was claimed by a tall man in evening dress. A hand laid on Rogers arm made him start. A small, plump woman in a green jumper slipped a cold hand into his.

The dance went on.

When it stopped, amid the usual applause, everyone stood detached, stiffened in expectation. The President's voice was raised again.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please behave naturally. This is a dance, not a public meeting."

Rogers led his partner to a chair and fetched her an ice. As he stooped over her, he noticed

the hurried rise and fall of her bosom.

"Ladies and gentlemen." The endless interval was over. "You will no doubt wish to be immediately relieved from suspense. I will name the persons involved. Number Thirty-seven!"

A man sprang up with a fearful, strangled cry.

"Silence!"

The wretch choked and gasped.

"I never—I swear I never—I'm innocent."

"Silence. You have failed in discretion. You will be dealt with. If you have anything to say in defense of your folly, I will hear it later. Sit down."

Number Thirty-seven sank down upon a chair. He pushed his handkerchief under the mask to wipe his face. Two tall men closed in upon him. The rest fell back, feeling the recoil of humanity from one stricken by mortal disease.

The gramophone struck up.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I will now name the traitor. Number Twenty-one, stand forward.

Rogers stepped forward. The concentrated fear and loathing of forty-eight pairs of eyes burned upon him. The miserable Jukes set up a fresh wail.

"Oh, my God! Oh, my God!"

"Silence! Number Twenty-one, take off your mask."

The traitor pulled the thick covering from his face. The intense hatred of the eyes devoured him.

"Number Thirty-seven, this man was introduced here by you, under the name of Joseph Rogers, formerly second footman in the service of the Duke of Denver, dismissed for pilfering. Did you take steps to verify that statement?"

"I did—I did! As God's my witness, it was all straight. I had him identified by two of the servants. I made inquiries. The tale was straight—I'll swear it was."

The President consulted a paper before him, then he looked at his watch again.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please take your partners. . . ."

Number Twenty-one, his arms twisted behind him and bound, and his wrists handcuffed, stood motionless, while the dance of doom circled about him. The clapping as it ended, sounded like the clapping of the men and women who sat, thirsty-lipped beneath the guillotine.

"Number Twenty-one, your name has been given as Joseph Rogers, footman, dismissed for theft. Is that your real name?"

"No."

"What is your name?"

"Peter Death Bredon Wimsey."

"We thought you were dead."

"Naturally. You were intended to think so."

"What has become of the genuine Joseph Rogers?"

"He died abroad. I took his place. I may say that no real blame attaches to your people for not having realized who I was. I not only took Rogers' place; I *was* Rogers. Even when I was alone, I walked like Rogers, I sat like Rogers, I read Rogers' books and wore Rogers' clothes. In the end, I almost thought Rogers' thoughts. The only way to keep up a successful impersonation is never to relax."

"I see. The robbery of your own flat was arranged?"

"Obviously."

"The robbery of the Dowager Duchess, your mother, was connived at by you?"

"It was. It was a very ugly tiara—no real loss to anybody with decent taste. May I smoke, by the way?"

"You may not. Ladies and gentlemen . . ."

The dance was like the mechanical jigging of puppets. Limbs jerked, feet faltered. The prisoner watched with an air of critical detachment.

"Numbers Fifteen, Twenty-two, and Forty-nine. You have watched the prisoner. Has he made any attempts to communicate with anybody?"

"None." Number Twenty-two was the spokesman. "His letters and parcels have been opened, his telephone tapped, and his movements followed. His water-pipes have been under observation for Morse signals."

"You are sure of what you say?"

"Absolutely."

"Prisoner, have you been alone in this adventure? Speak the truth, or things will be made somewhat more unpleasant for you than they might otherwise be."

"I have been alone. I have taken no unnecessary risks."

"It may be so. It will, however, be as well that steps should be taken to silence the man at Scotland Yard—what is his name?—Parker. Also the prisoner's manservant, Mervyn Bunter, and possibly also his mother and sister. The brother is a stupid oaf, and not, I think, likely to have been taken into the prisoner's confidence. A precautionary watch will, I think, meet the necessities of his case."

The prisoner appeared, for the first time, to be moved.

"Sir, I assure you that my mother and sister know nothing which could possibly bring danger on the Society."

"You should have thought of their situation earlier. Ladies and gentlemen, please take—"

"No—no! Flesh and blood could endure the mockery no longer. "No! Finish with him. Get it over. Break up the meet-

ing. It's dangerous. The police—"

"Silence!"

The President glanced round at the crowd. It had a dangerous look about it. He gave way.

"Very well. Take the prisoner away and silence him. He will receive Number 4 treatment. And be sure you explain it to him carefully first."

"Ah!"

The eyes expressed a wolfish satisfaction. Strong hands gripped Wimsey's arms.

"One moment—for God's sake let me die decently."

"You should have thought this over earlier. Take him away. Ladies and gentlemen, be satisfied—he will not die quickly."

"Stop! Wait!" Wimsey cried desperately. "I have something to say. I don't ask for life—only for a quick death. I—I have something to sell."

"To sell?"

"Yes."

"We make no bargains with traitors."

"No—but listen! Do you think I have not thought of this? I am not so mad. I have left a letter."

"Ah! now it is coming. A letter. To whom?"

"To the police. If I do not return tomorrow—"

"Well?"

"The letter will be opened."

"Sir," broke in Number Fifteen. "This is bluff. The prisoner has not sent any letter. He has been strictly watched for many months."

"Ah! but listen. I left the letter before I came to Lambeth."

"Then it can contain no information of value."

"Oh, but it does."

"What?"

"The combination of my safe."

"Indeed? Has this man's safe been searched?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did it contain?"

"No information of importance, sir. An outline of our organization—the name of this house—nothing that cannot be altered and covered before morning."

Wimsey smiled.

"Did you investigate the inner compartment of the safe?"

There was a pause.

"You hear what he says," snapped the President sharply. "Did you find this inner compartment?"

"There was no inner compartment, sir. He is just trying to bluff."

"I hate to contradict you," said Wimsey, with an effort at his ordinary pleasant tone, "but I really think you must have overlooked the inner compartment."

"Well," said the President, "and what do you say is in this

inner compartment, if it does exist?"

"The names of every member of this Society, with their addresses, photographs, and fingerprints."

"What?"

The eyes round him now were ugly with fear. Wimsey kept his face steadily turned towards the President.

"How do you say you have contrived to this information?"

"Well, I have been doing a little detective work on my own, you know."

"But you have been watched."

"True. The fingerprints of my watchers adorn the first page of the collection."

"This statement can be proved?"

"Certainly. I will prove it. The name of Number Fifty, for example—"

"Stop."

A fierce muttering arose. The President silenced it with a gesture.

"If you mention names here, you will certainly have no hope of mercy. There is a fifth treatment—kept specially for people who mention names. Bring the prisoner to my office. Keep the dance going."

The President took an automatic from his hip-pocket and faced his tightly fettered prisoner across the desk.

"Now speak!" he said.

"I should put that thing away, if I were you," said Wimsey contemptuously. "It would be a much pleasanter form of death than treatment Number 5, and I might be tempted to ask for it."

"Ingenious," said the President," but a little too ingenious. Now, be quick; tell me what you know."

"Will you spare me if I tell you?"

"I make no promises. Be quick."

Wimsey shrugged his bound and aching shoulders.

"Certainly. I will tell you what I know. Stop me when you have heard enough."

He leaned forward and spoke low. Overhead the noise of the gramophone and the shuffling of feet bore witness that the dance was going on. Stray passers-by crossing the Heath noted that the people in the lonely house were making a night of it again.

"Well," said Wimsey, "am I to go on?"

From beneath the mask the President's voice sounded as though he were grimly smiling.

"My lord," he said, "your story fills me with regret that you are not, in fact, a member of our Society. Wit, courage, and industry are valuable to an association like ours. I fear I cannot persuade you? No—I supposed not."

He touched a bell on his desk.

"Ask the members kindly to proceed to the supper-room," he said to the mask who entered.

The "supper-room" was on the ground floor, shuttered and curtained. Down its center ran a long, bare table, with chairs set about it.

"A Barmecide feast, I see," said Wimsey pleasantly. It was the first time he had seen this room. At the far end, a trap-door in the floor gaped ominously.

The President took the head of the table.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, as usual—and the foolish courtesy had never sounded so sinister— "I will not conceal from you the seriousness of the situation. The prisoner has recited to me more than twenty names and addresses which were thought to be unknown, except to their owners and to me. There has been great carelessness"—his voice rang harshly—"which will have to be looked into. How our investigators came to overlook the inner door of this safe is a matter which calls for inquiry."

"Don't blame them," put in Wimsey. "It was meant to be overlooked, you know. I made it like that on purpose."

The President went on, without seeming to notice the interruption.

"The prisoner informs me that the book with the names and addresses is to be found in this inner compartment, together with certain letters and papers stolen from the houses of members, and numerous objects bearing authentic finger-prints. I believe him to be telling the truth. He offers the combination of the safe in exchange for a quick death. I think the offer should be accepted. What is your opinion, ladies and gentlemen?"

"The combination is known already," said Number Twenty-two.

"Imbecile! This man has told us, and has proved to me, that he is Lord Peter Wimsey. Do you think he will have forgotten to alter the combination? And then there is the secret of the inner door. If he disappears to-night and the police enter his house—"

"I say," said a woman's rich voice, "that the promise should be given and the information used—and quickly. Time is getting short."

A murmur of agreement went round the table.

"You hear," said the President, addressing Wimsey. "The Society offers you the privilege of a quick death in return for the combination of the safe and secret of the inner door."

"I have your word for it?"

"You have."

"Thank you. And my mother and sister?"

"If you in your turn will give us your word—you are a man of honor—that these women know nothing that could harm us, they shall be spared."

"Thank you, sir. You may rest assured, upon my honor, that they know nothing. I should not think of burdening any woman with such dangerous secrets—particularly those who are dear to me."

"Very well. It is agreed—yes?"

The murmer of assent was given, though with less readiness than before.

"Then I am willing to give you the information you want. The word of the combination is UNRELIABILITY."

"And the inner door?"

"In anticipation of the visit of the police, the inner door—which might have presented difficulties—is open."

"Good! You understand that if the police interfere with our messenger—"

"That would not help me, would it?"

"It is a risk," said the President thoughtfully, "but a risk which I think we must take. Carry the prisoner down to the cellar. He can amuse himself by contemplating apparatus Number 5. In the meantime, Numbers Twelve and Forty-six—"

"No, no!"

A sullen mutter of dissent arose and swelled threateningly.

"No," said a tall man with a voice like treacle. "No—why should any members be put in possession of this evidence? We have found one traitor among us tonight, and more than one fool. How are we to know that Numbers Twelve and Forty-six are not fools and traitors also?"

The two men turned savagely upon the speaker, but a girl's voice struck into the discussion, high and agitated.

"Hear, hear! That's right, I say. How about us? We ain't going to have our names read by somebody we don't know nothing about. I've had enough of this. They might sell the 'ole lot of us to the narks."

"I agree," said another member. "Nobody ought to be trusted, nobody at all."

The President shrugged his shoulders.

"Then, what, ladies and gentlemen, do you suggest?"

There was a pause. Then the same girl shrilled out again:

"I say Mr. President oughter go himself. He's the only one as knows all the names. It won't be no cop to him. Why should we take all the risk and trouble and him sit at home and collar the money? Let him go himself, that's what I say."

A long rustle of approbation went round the table.

"I second the motion," said a stout man who wore a bunch of gold seals at his fob. Wimsey

smiled as he looked at the seals; it was that trifling vanity which had led him directly to the name and address of the stout man, and he felt a certain affection for the trinkets on that account.

The President looked round.

"It is the wish of the meeting, then, that I should go?" he said, in an ominous voice.

Forty-five hands were raised in approbation. Only the woman known as Number Two remained motionless and silent, her strong white hands clenched on the arm of the chair.

The President rolled his eyes slowly round the threatening ring till they rested upon her.

"Am I to take it that this vote is unanimous?" he inquired.

The woman raised her head.

"Don't go," she gasped faintly.

"You hear," said the President, in a faintly derisive tone. "This lady says, don't go."

"I submit that what Number Two says is neither here nor there," said the man with the treacly voice. "Our own ladies might not like us to be going, if they were in madame's privileged position." His voice was an insult.

"Hear, hear!" cried another man. "This is a democratic society this is. We don't want no privileged classes."

"Very well," said the President. "You hear, Number Two. The feeling of the meeting is against you. Have you any reasons to put forward in favor of your opinion?"

"A hundred. The President is the head and soul of our Society, if anything should happen to him—where would we be? You"—she swept the company magnificently with her eyes—"you have all blundered. We have your carelessness to thank for all this. Do you think we should be safe for five minutes if the President were not here to repair your follies?"

"Something in that," said a man who had not hitherto spoken.

"Pardon my suggesting," said Wimsey maliciously, "that as the lady appears to be in a position peculiarly favorable for the reception of the President's confidences, the contents of my modest volume will probably be no news to her. Why should not Number Two go herself?"

"Because I say she must not," said the President sternly, checking the quick reply that rose to his companion's lips. "If it is the will of the meeting, I will go. Give me the key of the house."

One of the men extracted it from Wimsey's jacket-pocket and handed it over.

"Is the house watched?" he demanded of Wimsey.

"No."

"That is the truth?"

"It is the truth."

The President turned at the door.

"If I have not returned in two hours' time," he said, "act for the best to save yourselves, and do what you like with the prisoner. Number Two will give orders in my absence."

He left the room. Number Two rose from her seat with a gesture of command.

"Ladies and gentlemen. Supper is now considered over. Start the dancing again."

Down in the cellar the time passed slowly, in the contemplation of apparatus Number 5. The miserable Jukes, alternately wailing and raving, at length shrieked himself into exhaustion. The four members guarding the prisoners whispered together from time to time.

"An hour and a half since the President left," said one.

Wimsey glanced up. Then he returned to his examination of the room. There were many curious things in it, which he wanted to memorize.

Presently the trap-door was flung open. "Bring him up!" cried a voice. Wimsey rose immediately, and his face was rather pale.

The members of the gang were again seated round the table. Number Two occupied the President's chair, and her eyes fastened on Wimsey's face with a tigerish fury, but when she spoke it was with a self-control which roused his admiration.

"The President has been gone two hours," she said. "What has happened to him? Traitor twice over—what has happened to him?"

"How should I know?" said Wimsey. "Perhaps he has looked after Number One and gone while the going was good!"

She sprang up with a little cry of rage, and came close to him.

"Beast! Liar!" she said, and struck him on the mouth. "You know he would never do that. He is faithful to his friends. What have you done with him? Speak—or I will make you speak. You two, there—bring the irons. He *shall* speak!"

"I can only form a guess, madame," replied Wimsey, "and I shall not guess any the better for being stimulated with hot irons. Calm yourself, and I will tell you what I think. I think—indeed, I greatly fear—that Monsieur le Président in his hurry to examine the interesting exhibits in my safe may, quite inadvertently, no doubt, have let the door of the inner compartment close behind him. In which case—"

He raised his eyebrows, his shoulders being too sore for shrugging, and gazed at her with a limpid and innocent regret.

"What do you mean?"

Wimsey glanced round the circle.

"I think," he said, "I had better begin from the beginning by explaining to you the mechanism of my safe. It is rather a nice safe," he added plaintively. "I invented the idea myself—not the principle of its working, of course; that is a matter for scientists—but just the idea of the thing.

"The combination I gave you is perfectly correct as far as it goes. It is a three-alphabet thirteen-letter lock by Bunn & Fishett—a very good one of its kind. It opens the outer door, leading into the ordinary strong-room where I keep my cash and my Froth-Blower's cuff-links and all that. But there is an inner compartment with two doors, which open in a quite different manner. The outermost of these two inner doors is merely a thin steel skin, painted to look like the back of the safe and fitting closely, so as not to betray any join. It lies in the same plane as the wall of the room, you understand, so that if you were to measure the outside and the inside of the safe you would discover no discrepancy. It opens outwards with an ordinary key, and as I truly assured the President, it was left open when I quitted my flat."

"Do you think," said the woman sneeringly, that the President is so simple as to be caught in a so obvious trap? He will have wedged open that inner door undoubtedly."

"Undoubtedly, madame. But the sole purpose of that outer inner door, if I may so express myself, is to appear to be the only inner door. But hidden behind the hinge of that door is another door, a sliding panel, set so closely in the thickness of the wall that you would hardly see it unless you knew it was there. This door was also left open. Our revered Number One had nothing to do but to walk straight through into the inner compartment of the safe, which, by the way, is built into the chimney of the old basement kitchen, which runs up the house at that point. I hope I make myself clear?"

"Yes, yes—get on. Make your story short."

Wimsey bowed, and, speaking with even greater deliberation than ever, resumed:

"Now, this interesting list of the Society's activities, which I have had the honor of compiling, is written in a very large book—bigger, even, than Monsieur le Président's ledger which he uses downstairs. I trust by the way, madame that you have borne in mind the necessity of putting that ledger in a safe place. Apart from risk of investigation by some officious policeman, it would be inadvisable

that any junior member of the Society should get hold of it. The feeling of the meeting would, I fancy, be opposed to such an occurrence."

"It is secure," she answered hastily. "*Mon dieu!* get on with your story."

"Thank you—you have relieved my mind. Very good. This big book lies on a steel shelf at the back of the inner compartment. Just a moment. I have not described this inner compartment to you. It is six feet high, three feet wide, and three feet deep. One can stand up in it quite comfortably, unless one is very tall. It suits me nicely—as you may see. I am no more than five feet eight and a half. The President has the advantage of me in height; he might be a little cramped, but there would be room for him to squat if he grew tired of standing. By the way, I don't know if you know it, but you have tied me up rather tightly."

"I would have you tied till your bones were locked together. Beat him, you! He is trying to gain time."

"If you beat me," said Wimsey, "I'm damned if I'll speak at all. Control yourself, madame; it does not do to move hastily when your king is in check."

"Get on! she cried again, stamping with rage.

"Where was I? Ah! the inner compartment. As I say, it is a little snug—the more so that it is not ventilated in any way. Did I mention that the book lay on a steel shelf?"

"You did."

"Yes. The steel shelf is balanced on a very delicate concealed spring. When the weight of the book—a heavy one, as I said—is lifted, the shelf rises almost imperceptibly. In rising it makes an electrical contact. Imagine to yourself, madame; our revered President steps in—propping the false door open behind him—he sees the book—quickly he snatches it up. To make sure that it is the right one, he opens it—he studies the pages. He looks about for the other objects I have mentioned, which bear the marks of fingerprints. And silently, but very, very quickly—you can imagine it, can you not?—the secret panel, released by the rising of the shelf, leaps across like a panther behind him. Rather a trite simile, but apt, don't you think?"

"My God! Oh, my God!" Her hands went up as though to tear the choking mask from her face. "You—you devil—devil! What is the word that opens the inner door? Quick! I will have it torn out of you—the word!"

"It is not a hard word to remember, madame—though it has been forgotten before now. Do you recollect, when you were

a child, being told the tale of 'Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves'? When I had that door made, my mind reverted, with rather a pretty touch of sentimentality, in my opinion, to the happy hours of my childhood. The words that open the door are—'Open Sesame.' "

"Ah! How long can a man live in this devil's trap of yours?"

"Oh," said Wimsey cheerfully, "I should think he might hold out a few hours if he kept cool and didn't use up the available oxygen by shouting and hammering. If we went there at once, I dare say we should find him fairly all right."

"I shall go myself. Take this man and—do your worst with him. Don't finish him till I come back. I want to see him die!"

"One moment," said Wimsey, unmoved by this amiable wish. "I think you had better take me with you."

"Why—why?"

"Because, you see, I'm the only person who can open the door."

"But you have given me the word. Was that a lie?"

"No—the word's all right. But, you see, it's one of these new-style electric doors. In fact, it's really the very latest thing in doors. I'm rather proud of it. It opens to the words 'OPEN SESAME' all right—*but to my voice only.*"

"Your voice?" I will choke your voice with my own hands. What do you mean—your voice only?"

"Just what I say. Don't clutch my throat like that, or you may alter my voice so that the door won't recognize it. That's better. It's apt to be rather pernickety about voices. It got stuck up for a week once, when I had a cold and could only implore it in a hoarse whisper. Even in the ordinary way, I sometimes have to try several times before I hit on the exact right intonation."

She turned and appealed to a short, thick-set man standing beside her.

"Is this true? Is it possible?"

"Perfectly right, ma'am, I'm afraid," said the man civilly. From his voice Wimsey took him to be a superior workman of some kind—probably an engineer.

"Is it an electrical device? Do you understand it?"

"Yes, ma'am. It will have a microphone arrangement somewhere, which converts the sound into a series of vibrations controlling an electric needle. When the needle has traced the correct pattern, the circuit is completed and the door opens. The same thing can be done by light vibrations equally easily."

"Couldn't you open it with tools?"

"In time, yes, ma'am. But

only by smashing the mechanism, which is probably well protected."

"You may take that for granted," interjected Wimsey reassuringly.

She put her hands to her head.

"I'm afraid we're done for," said the engineer, with a kind of respect in his tone for a good job of work.

"No—wait! Somebody must know—the workmen who made this thing?"

"In Germany," said Wimsey briefly.

"Or—yes, yes, I have it—a gramophone. This—this—*he*—shall be made to say the word for us. Quick—how can it be done?"

"Not possible, ma'am. Where should we get the apparatus at half-past three on a Sunday morning? The poor gentleman would be dead long before—"

There was a silence, during which the sounds of the awakening day came through the shuttered windows. A motor-horn sounded distantly.

"I give in," she said. "We must let him go. Take the ropes off him. You will free him, won't you?" she went on, turning piteously to Wimsey. "Devil as you are, you are not such a devil as that! You will go straight back and save him?"

"Let him go, nothing!" broke in one of the men. "He doesn't go to peach to the police, my lady, don't you think it. The President's done in, that's all, and we'd all better make tracks while we can. It's all up, boys. Chuck this fellow down the cellar and fasten him in, so he can't make a row and wake the place up. I'm going to destroy the ledgers. You can see it done if you don't trust me. And you, Thirty, you know where the switch is. Give us a quarter of an hour to clear, and then you can blow the place to glory."

"No! You can't go—you can't leave him to die—your President — your leader — my — I won't let it happen. Set this devil free. Help me, one of you, with the ropes—"

"None of that, now," said the man who had spoken before. He caught her by the wrists, and she twisted, shrieking, in his arms, biting and struggling to get free.

"Think, think," said the man with the treacly voice. "It's getting on to morning. It'll be light in an hour or two. The police may be here any minute."

"The police!" she seemed to control herself by a violent effort. "Yes, yes, you are right. We must not imperil the safety of all for the sake of one man. *He* himself would not wish it. That is so. We will put this carrion in the cellar where it cannot harm us, and depart,

everyone to his own place, while there is time."

"And the other prisoner?"

"He? Poor fool—he can do no harm. He knows nothing. Let him go," she answered contemptuously.

In a few minutes' time Wimsey found himself bundled unceremoniously into the depths of the cellar. He was a little puzzled. That they should refuse to let him go, even at the price of Number One's life, he could understand. He had taken the risk with his eyes open. But that they should leave him as a witness against them seemed incredible.

The men who had taken him down strapped his ankles together and departed, switching the lights out as they went.

"Hi! Kamerad!" said Wimsey. "It's a bit lonely sitting here. You might leave the light on."

"It's all right, my friend," was the reply. "You will not be in the dark long. They have set the time-fuse."

The other man laughed with rich enjoyment, and they went out together. So that was it. He was to be blown up with the house. In that case the President would certainly be dead before he was extricated. This worried Wimsey; he would rather have been able to bring the big crook to justice. After all, Scotland Yard had been waiting six years to break up this gang.

He waited, straining his ears. It seemed to him that he heard footsteps over his head. The gang had all crept out by this time . . .

There was certainly a creak. The trap-door had opened; he felt, rather than heard, somebody creeping into the cellar.

"Hush!" said a voice in his ear. Soft hands passed over his face, and went fumbling about his body. There came the cold touch of steel on his wrists. The ropes slackened and dropped off. A key clicked in the handcuffs. The strap about his ankles was unbuckled.

"Quick! quick! they have set the time-switch. The house is mined. Follow me as fast as you can. I stole back—I said I had left my jewelry. It was true. I left it on purpose. *He* must be saved—only you can do it. Make haste!"

Wimsey, staggering with pain, as the blood rushed back into his bound and numbed arms, crawled after her into the room above. A moment, and she had flung back the shutters and thrown the window open.

"Now go! Release him! You promise?"

"I promise. And I warn you, madame, that this house is surrounded. When my safe-door closed it gave a signal which sent my servant to Scotland

Yard. Your friends are all taken—"

"Ah! But you go—never mind me—quick! The time is almost up."

"Come away from this!"

He caught her by the arm, and they went running and stumbling across the little garden. An electric torch shone suddenly in the bushes.

"That you, Parker?" cried Wimsey. "Get your fellows away. Quick! the house is going up in a minute."

The garden seemed suddenly full of shouting, hurrying men. Wimsey, floundering in the darkness, was brought up violently against the wall. He made a leap at the coping, caught it, and hoisted himself up. His hands groped for the woman; he swung her up beside him. They jumped; everyone was jumping; the woman caught her foot and fell with a gasping cry. Wimsey tried to stop himself, tripped over a stone, and came down headlong. Then, with a flash and a roar, the night went up in fire.

Wimsey picked himself painfully out from among the debris of the garden wall. A faint moaning near him proclaimed that his companion was still alive. A lantern was turned suddenly upon them.

"Here you are!" said a cheerful voice. "Are you all right, old thing? Good lord! What a hairy monster!"

"All right," said Wimsey. "Only a bit winded. Is the lady safe? H'm—arm broken apparently—otherwise sound. What's happened?"

"About half a dozen of 'em got blown up; the rest we've bagged." Wimsey became aware of a circle of dark forms in the wintry dawn. "Good Lord, what a day! What a comeback for a public character! You old stinker—to let us go on for two years thinking you were dead! I bought a bit of black for an arm-band. I did, really. Did anybody know, besides Bunter?"

"Only my mother and sister. I put it in a secret trust—you know, the thing you send to executors and people. We shall have an awful time with the lawyers, I'm afraid, proving I'm me. Hullo! Is that friend Sugg?"

"Yes, my lord," said Inspector Sugg, grinning and nearly weeping with excitement. "Damned glad to see your lordship again. Fine piece of work, your lordship. They're all wanting to shake hands with you, sir."

"Oh, Lord! I wish I could get washed and shaved first. Awfully glad to see you all again, after two years' exile in Lambeth. Been a good little show, hasn't it?"

"Is he safe?"

Wimsey started at the agonized cry.

"Good Lord!" he cried. "I forgot the gentleman in the safe. Here, fetch a car, quickly. I've got the great big top Moriarty of the whole bunch quietly asphyxiating at home. Here—hop in, and put the lady in too. I promised we'd get back and save him—though" (he finished the sentence in Parker's car) "there may be murder charges too, and I wouldn't give much for his chance at the Old Bailey. He can't last much longer shut up there. He's the bloke you've been wanting, the man at the back of the Morrison case and hundreds of others."

The cold morning had turned the streets gray when they drew up before the door of the house in Lambeth. Wimsey took the woman by the arm and helped her out. The mask was off now, and showed her face, haggard and desperate, and white with fear and pain.

"Russian, eh?" whispered Parker in Wimsey's ear.

"Something of the sort. Damn! the front door's blown shut, and the blighter's got the key with him in the safe. Hop through the window, will you?"

Parker bundled obligingly in, and in a few seconds threw open the door to them. The house seemed very still. Wimsey led the way to the back room, where the strong-room stood. The outer door and the second door stood propped open with chairs. The inner door faced them like a blank green wall.

"Only hope he hasn't upset the adjustment with thumping at it," muttered Wimsey.

The anxious hand on his arm clutched feverishly. He pulled himself together, forcing his tone to one of cheerful commonplace.

"Come on, old thing," he said, addressing himself conversationally to the door. "Show us your paces. Open Sesame, confound you. Open Sesame!"

The green door slid suddenly away into the wall. The woman sprang forward and caught in her arms the humped and senseless thing that rolled out from the safe. Its clothes were torn to ribbons, and its battered hands dripped blood.

"It's all right," said Wimsey, "it's all right! He'll live—to stand his trial."

death and a salesman

by . . . L. B. Dunham

It was so fortunate that the poor lady had had the foresight to insure them all. . . .

"GOOD AFTERNOON," said the salesman, "you are Mrs. Sphink?"

"Oh, yes," that worthy housewife replied, "won't you come in?"

The insurance man, unused to such invitations unless he had both a brogan and briefcase blocking the door, blinked with happiness and hurried inside. The small hall had a lived-in look which stopped just short of a reproduction of the Battle of the Bulge. "Please come into the parlor . . ." said Mrs. Sphink holding the salesman's card carefully between her pudgy fingers.

He seated himself in a large upholstered chair; as he thoughtlessly lowered his weight, the springs sank and one leg wobbled unsteadily. Somewhat to his surprise he found himself seated within half an inch of the floor. Remembering, hastily, that one of the basic tenets of salesmanship is to dominate the prospect, he heaved himself to his feet and took a common chair where he could stare fixedly into Mrs. Sphink's eyes.

L. B. Dunham, describes the problem faced by a salesman for the Finger of Fate Accident Policy as he meets Mrs. Sphink, who had been so terribly unlucky in her marriages. And the salesman, wincing as he sees before him the slightly less than charming face of his manager, breathes deeply and tells her where to sign. . . .

From upstairs, he could hear sounds of pounding and the screams of many unhappy childish voices. "Just a moment please," said Mrs. Sphink as she removed her well padded, matronly figure to the foot of the stairs. She raised her voice pleasantly until it reached the decibel strength necessary to pierce the upstairs din. "Children, dear," she called, "shut up! Or mama will come up and slap out your teeth." The noise did not abate, but well pleased, Mrs. Sphink returned to her caller. "Now," she told him, "we can talk."

"Well," said the salesman, "we received your inquiry . . ."

"Oh, yes," agreed Mrs. Sphink, "that lovely advertisement in the newspaper." Her plump, pleasant, round face smiled happily. "I cut out the coupon and mailed it in, just like you said in the ad."

"We are very pleased you did, madam," replied the salesman, "because it gives me an opportunity to tell you all about our Finger-Of-Fate Accident Policy. The most liberal, comprehensive, accident and health policy known to man . . ." He was interrupted momentarily as the second floor of the house shook and quivered under the impact of running feet. Doors opened and slammed shut with the regularity of a line of falling dominoes.

"The children," explained Mrs. Sphink impassively.

The salesman smiled. "How many?" he inquired politely.

"Eight," replied Mrs. Sphink.

The salesman cleared his throat. "That's a nice family," he said rather unsurely.

"Yes, isn't it." Mrs. Sphink elaborated no further. "Now, please tell me more about your policy . . ."

"It covers everything," he said, "absolutely everything. All you really have to do," he laughed making his little joke, "is just have your accident in the house . . ."

"How about the yard?"

"No," the salesman shook his head regretfully, "not the yard. Just the house." But, as his sales quota was far from being reached this month, he hastened to add, "For an extra premium, we could include the yard."

"Oh," replied Mrs. Sphink "I think the house will be enough."

The salesman removed a long, white, printed form from his pocket, and uncapped a ball point pen. "Do you mind giving me some information. What is your husband's name?"

"Lother. Lother Sphink," replied the wife.

"Is he alive and in good health?"

"Yes."

"And the children?"

"Eight of them. Sabina, Serena, and Sibyl. Samuel, Steven,

and Stephen. Sidney and Silvia . . . they're unidentical twins."

"They are all your children?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Sphink, "they're all mine, but they're not all Mr. Sphink's. I've been married before."

"Oh," said the salesman. "How many times?"

"Three," said Mrs. Sphink. "Mr. Sphink is the fourth." Her calm, contemplative eyes roamed backward through the years. "My life has been a terrible tragedy," she said, "just one tragedy after another. My first husband was killed by a passing beer truck. Its wheel came loose and rolled over him."

"That was a real terrible thing," said the insurance salesman, sympathetically.

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Sphink, "but what made it doubly tragic was I was driving the truck at the time."

The salesman maintained a toothy smile of condolence. "And the second Mr. . . . ?"

"My second husband," Mrs. Sphink breathed the words softly, "gave up his life for his country. He was in the army, and he came home on a furlough. He accidentally shot himself while practicing marksmanship in the basement."

"Ah . . ." said the salesman to no one in particular.

"Yes," said Mrs. Sphink, "and he received the Purple Heart posthumously."

"And the last one . . . before Mr. Sphink?" asked the salesman.

"Nothing really," said Mrs. Sphink, "we think it was something he ate." She patted the wavy gray hair back from her face. "But," she continued earnestly, "you can see the awkward position it put me in. One . . . after another . . . these husbands . . . leave me. And I have nothing to show for it . . . but more children. Now, I must learn to think of them—the little ones."

The salesman chewed the end of his ball point pen thoughtfully. "Mr. Sphink is still alive and in good health, you say?"

"Oh, yes . . ."

"He hasn't had any premonitions, has he?" asked the salesman.

"Not that I know of," replied Mrs. Sphink.

The salesman recalled the grim face of his sales manager. It was not a pleasant face to recall, and the salesman . . . breathing deeply . . . attempted to blot it from his memory. "Well," he said finally, "our Finger-Of-Fate family policy requires no individual medical examination . . . and I suppose I could give you your policy now . . ."

A long wailing scream descended the stairs. For a moment, it echoed in the hall, then seemed to sink into the wood-

work. "That was Serena," said Mrs. Sphink.

"Incidentally," asked the salesman, "does anything ever happen to the children?"

"Oh, no," replied Mrs. Sphink, "nothing ever happens to the children." The sound of hammering began again.

"You understand," said the salesman, "that our Finger-Of-Fate policy goes into effect immediately, and pays up to one thousand dollars for each accident, and ten thousand dollars in case of accidental death."

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Sphink breathlessly. "I understand all that. Where do I sign?"

"Right here," said the salesman. He pushed the printed form to her and gave her the ball point pen. "Sign two copies please." Mrs. Sphink hurriedly signed them. The salesman returned one to her. "And now for a check, too?" He tried to conceal his anxiety at this most critical of all points in his business.

"Yes indeedy," replied Mrs. Sphink. She removed a large roll of bills from inside the bosom of her dress and counted them out for the salesman. He exhaled in pleasant relief and arose, grasping his briefcase firmly.

Mrs. Sphink escorted him to the door. The policy was in her hand. At the head of the stairs a large, square face appeared. The eyes slanted sharply at the corners, and the eyebrows were separated from the hairline by a single wrinkle of flesh. "Hey, Mom," he croaked in a changing adolescent voice, "I got the stairs all fixed."

As the salesman stepped out the door, he heard her say, "That's a love, Steven. Now tell the children to stay in their rooms 'cause daddy's coming home." The door closed solidly.

The salesman put on his hat, and shuddered. He decided to go straight home. At least his quota had been made for the week.

shadow of a bird

by . . . Rodolfo Walsh

Fear glazed his large, dark eyes, half opened his mouth, and vibrated the long-fingered hands. He shook like a leaf.

CALMLY looking back on the sensational events of the Mariana Lerner affair—the one that bounced into the headlines of the Buenos Aires newspapers last summer—it now seemed to Daniel Hernández that the world had generously pardoned the girl. True—Mariana was beautiful. But she was also the victim, and the world, it seems, is always ready to pardon victims.

What other sanctions of her conduct the public might have conceded her it was not easy to say. But in spite of all of it, in spite of the lurid details, Mariana will still be long remembered as beautiful.

Unfortunately, she didn't look it when Daniel Hernández and Inspector Jiménez first saw her. She was stretched out on the floor of the game room of her home, at the foot of one of her husband's many trophy cases. Her glistening blonde hair which had gladdened so many bright and noisy afternoons, so many receptions, which had inspired so many tender glances

Rodolfo Jorge Walsh returns to THE SAINT *with this story of a strange murder, translated by D. A. Yates. Editor of the pioneering anthology, "Ten Argentine Detective Short Stories," which appeared in 1953, Walsh is a popular detective fiction critic, a mystery and science fiction writer (he's been called Argentina's Anthony Boucher!), and has translated Ellery Queen and William Irish.*

now seemed opaque on the varnished wood of almost her last resting spot in this world. Her eyes were greatly dilated and her face was twisted into an odd grimace of pain or of hate.

Two policemen were managing with difficulty to restrain Gregorio Altabe, the noted national sports figure—a huge, terrifying form—who was struggling to reach the body of his wife. Finally they succeeded in leading him to the adjoining room, and from there, for a while afterwards, could be heard his uncontrollable sobbing.

"This is starting off all wrong," said the inspector ominously. He stooped next to the dead woman and observed her through half-closed eyes. He put his index finger out cautiously and touched the lifeless throat. Withdrawing the finger, he examined it closely, then turned to Daniel with a puzzled expression.

"Paint," he murmured.

Daniel looked at him, unblinking, through his glasses.

"Are you sure, Inspector? Then that must be more—there on her dress."

Jiménez bent down quickly to confirm the observation. It was true. On the white dress, near the shoulder, there was in fact an oddly irregular smudge of green paint in the fabric. At that moment, someone finally thought to turn on the overhead light. There then could be clearly seen overlaying the bluish prints of strangulation a set of green stains.

"I don't like it," murmured the inspector.

His men began to shift nervously. When Jiménez didn't like something he showed it with a crackling of orders. This instance was not the exception.

"Carletti. Cut off a piece of this material! Not there, idiot! Where it's painted! Now, off to the laboratory! Ramírez, bring me a can of green paint. What? Where should you look for it? Here! In the house! Sergeant Lombardo. Find out what the devil Dr. Meléndez is doing. He knows I'm too busy to be waiting around for him all day!"

The three men departed like shots, while two others began to dust all the flat surfaces in the house with different colored fingerprint powders. It wasn't hot but Inspector Jiménez brought his finger up to his collar and loosened his tie with one jerk. "Well, what do you think?" he appealed to Daniel.

"It looks like murder," he said slowly.

"Oh! So it looks like murder, eh?" whined the inspector. "Thank you so very much, *Señor* Hernández!"

"I was going to say," Daniel continued calmly, "that it looks

like murder—with some interesting twists."

"You've got to find him," cried Altabe urgently. He clenched his powerful fists tightly. *"Give him to me!* Today. Even if he's someone in my own house . . ."

The celebrated athlete stopped suddenly.

"We'll do everything possible," the inspector said slowly. "First we have to find the murderer. Then, afterwards, the law—"

"The law!" exclaimed Altabe disdainfully, smashing a fist into a meaty palm. He tottered for a moment, wordlessly, then dropped into an armchair, overcome by his own anger. Daniel perceived in the man, a colossus in size, the first signs of age. He was almost bald, and on his forehead a swollen blue vein pulsed rapidly.

"All right," he murmured quietly. "I suppose this is all useless . . . I don't want to delay your investigation. There'll be time . . . afterwards. Oh, yes, there'll be time."

Inspector Jiménez turned away from him to consult his papers. They had removed the corpse, and the police doctor had since passed on a preliminary report to him. *Death by strangulation effected between nine and eleven in the morning.* The autopsy would perhaps permit this period to be cut down somewhat.

There were no other signs of violence in the room. The glass doors enclosed an impressive collection of trophies, medals and parchments. From the walls hung a multitude of objects linked to Altabe's sports activities: pennants and colors, a baseball glove, a billiard cue and a polo mallet, a little rubber squash ball with the inscription "National Championship—1936—First Place," a squash racquet with a similar legend, and autographed photos of Andrada, Carrera and naturally Bernabé Ferreyra.

The inspector had quickly abandoned robbery as a motive. There was nothing of value missing in the house. The criminal obviously had entered and left by the street door, because in the fresh earth of the garden and the flower beds bordering it there were no footprints.

The fingerprint men had completed their job. From the beginning it appeared that the only prints to be found were those of the occupants of the house: Mariana, her sister, and Altabe. Two other groups of prints probably belonged to the house servants who, since it was Sunday, had the day off.

"Anything you could suggest might be helpful," said Jiménez, glancing up at Altabe. "The first thing we have to find out,

of course, is if your wife had any enemies."

Altabe uttered a brief, sullen laugh.

"Someone hated her enough to kill her. I would never have believed she had an enemy in the world. She was married earlier, but her husband died. My first wife also died."

The inspector grunted comprehension. "Did your wife leave a large estate?"

"I never concerned myself about her finances."

"Oh, I see." Jiménez cleared his throat noisily. "I have to ask you now a rather unpleasant but necessary question. Is it possible, remotely possible shall we say, that the crime could have been motivated by passion?"

Gregorio Altabe's face grew slowly red. He made a move to get up, a homicidal spark showing in his eyes. Then, with equally quick decision he began to laugh.

"Don't be silly," he said simply.

"Very well. That eliminates one of the motives which must always be considered. Can you tell me where *you* were between nine and eleven this morning?"

Altabe lit a cigarette with trembling hand and then regarded the ribbon of smoke closely.

"I see you're not forgetting your business. Well, you're right, of course. Yes, I can tell you. At five minutes past nine I left home and walked to the repair shop where I had my car. I talked with the garage mechanic until quarter to ten. Then I went for a ride. I wanted to try out the car to see if it ran all right. I went as far as San Isidro. And when I returned . . ."

His face grew red again. The inspector interrupted him hastily.

"Did you meet anyone you knew on the road?"

"No."

"Well, I suppose it's not important," lied the inspector. "Routine inquiries. Now, the last question: do you have a can of green paint in the house?"

"Paint? What do you mean?"

"Nothing special," said the inspector, smiling. "An idea of mine. But if you don't know anything about it, I think we can let you go now."

"One moment, Inspector," interposed Daniel Hernández. "I'd like to ask a question, if you've no objection."

Jiménez nodded.

"Señor Altabe, are you still active in sports?"

The athlete looked at Daniel as if he were seeing him for the first time, although the latter had not been absent from the room during the entire interrogation. He fixed his eyes at some point on the ceiling and responded in a low voice. "Not as much as before. But still, I think—" he gently rubbed his

clenched fist in the palm of his other hand—"I think I can kill a man with one blow."

"I wasn't thinking of that," said Daniel firmly. "I was referring to other sports."

"What sports?"

His tone had become unmistakeably aggressive.

"Baseball, for example. Or tennis, or—"

Gregorio Altabe sighed. "No," he said sadly. "I'm not as young as I used to be. Those years for me are far, far behind . . ."

The woman impeccably dressed in black was Angélica Lerner, the victim's sister; but there were no traces of tears on her makeup. She was a tall brunette, about thirty-five years old. She gave the address of the friend's house where she had been between ten and eleven that morning. From nine to ten, she declared, she had been taking in the sun at a nearby park. Unfortunately, she had seen no one she knew.

"And what do you know about your sister's death?"

"Nothing. Poor Mariana. I told her—"

She bit her lip, leaving the sentence unfinished. But the inspector's ideas in regard to incomplete sentences were quite well defined.

"You told her? You told her what?"

"Nothing. Please excuse me. My nerves are carrying me away."

The inspector made a face. He had never known a single woman in all his experience who didn't prefer to be pressed to reveal what she knew.

"You told your sister that it was going to end this way. Why?"

"I don't know. I must have misspoken."

The inspector was undisturbed. He called Sergeant Lombardo. "Escort this woman to the Palacio de Justicia," he said. "Place her incommunicado—at the disposition of the criminal court judge."

He got up, signalling the end of the interview.

The woman turned visibly pale and dropped into an armchair. "All right," she said, smiling vaguely. "You don't think it was *me* who killed Mariana?"

"I don't think. A bad habit. You're the one who has to think."

"It wasn't me. I have no ideas about anyone else. The fact is we've almost always lived apart. But during the short time I've been here, I've come to love her more than ever before. Although—at times I criticized her—her conduct."

"What do you mean?"

"Men. Do I have to go into detail?"

"That would be preferable. What men?"

"Oh, anyone. Poor Mariana never established many preferences. I never criticized her for moral scruples, understand that. But I always advised moderation. She paid no attention . . . And this is the result."

"Can you identify any of the men?"

"I can tell you of no one specifically."

The inspector exchanged glances with Daniel.

"Did the husband know?"

"Who, Gregorio?" She shrugged her shoulders. "I doubt it."

"Your sister was married once before?"

"Yes. The first husband was a big businessman. It was from him that she inherited the fortune. She paused. "Now it passes into Gregorio's hands. Compulsory inheritance."

"And you?"

"I don't know if there are any legacies in Mariana's will or not."

"Are you sure your sister left a will?" injected Daniel.

She looked at him intensely. She didn't seem convinced of the need to answer, but a gesture from the inspector decided her."

"I don't know," she replied. "Probably not. She wasn't thinking about dying."

"Any insurance?" persisted Daniel.

"Yes. I was going to mention it. A hundred and fifty thousand pesos—in my name."

"Her idea?"

"No, mine. I've always been afraid of being left destitute. On Mariana's part it was a generous impulse, I suppose. A way of telling me she was happy to have me here—at her side."

"You don't think much of your sister's husband," ventured the inspector.

"I don't have anything against Gregorio," she replied, measuring her words carefully. "I knew he was a famous athlete, champion in a lot of things . . . years ago, of course. I suppose it was that aura of sporting glory that attracted Mariana. At least . . ."

"At least for a while?" said the inspector, completing the sentence for her.

"That wasn't what I meant."

At this moment, the face of Sergeant Lombardo appeared at the door and signalled with a questioning look.

"Have him come in," ordered the inspector. "But before you do, call the laboratory and see what the results are."

"May I go?" asked the woman.

"Yes," said the inspector. "Thank you for your cooperation."

If there were any irony in the formality, Angélica Lerner showed no sign of being aware

of it. Cooly excusing herself, she left.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Jiménez. "And don't tell me it looks like murder!"

"It's exactly what it seems," replied Daniel kindly. "A murder plus some partial alibis. I'm inclined to think that that woman is uncommonly interested in seeing the guilt pinned on her brother-in-law."

"Why?"

"Oh, come now, it's very simple. If Altabe were the murderer, he couldn't inherit the fortune, of course. *Ergo* . . ."

"So you think she's guilty?"

Daniel smiled. "Really now," he said. "You can't be serious. I don't have the least idea."

"Common paint, inspector," announced Lombardo, sticking his head through the doorway again. "For painting doors and windows. A high quality paint, imported. Nothing unusual about it."

"Order a complete analysis. And if you see Ramírez, get him in here."

As Lombardo disappeared from the doorway, Ramírez, the detective who had gone off in search of the paint, entered hurriedly with a can in his hand.

"Here it is, sir."

"Ah, yes. Leave it here."

"It wasn't in the house, sir. It was in the place next door. I think we've found the murderer."

The inspector jumped up. "Who?"

"Esteban Valverde is his name, sir. A neighbor of ours," he explained. "That is, I mean, a neighbor of these people."

"Are you sure?" Jiménez demanded. "This isn't a lot of nonsense, now?"

"Positive," replied the detective.

He appeared to be still an adolescent; and he was afraid. Fear glazed his large, dark eyes, half-opened his mouth, and vibrated the long-fingered hands. The bustle of the crowd of men hardly altered his immobility; it shook him imperceptibly, like a leaf.

"Is it really true?" he asked in a low, almost inaudible voice.

No one answered him.

"She's dead," he said. "It's true, then, that she's dead." The boy seemed to be on the point of tears. "I'm the guilty one," he murmured. "I killed her."

The inspector felt a shock in the pit of his stomach. He sat down before the boy and put a hand on his shoulder. "What was it all about, son?"

Esteban flinched at the inspector's touch as if he had been struck. He gazed down at his long, strong fingers. It seemed as though he were seeing them for the first time. "What do you mean?" he said. "I don't know what you mean."

The inspector exhaled noisily. "Very well, let's start over again. Didn't you just say that you killed her?"

The youth looked back with anger, almost with repugnance. "Me? *Mariana?*" He scrutinized the men who surrounded him, as if the world had suddenly gone mad and he was seeking somewhere a trace of sanity. "What are you saying?"

"The inspector thinks that you killed Señora Altabe," said Daniel smoothly. "You yourself just said—"

Esteban ran his hand through his hair in a disoriented gesture. "Oh, yes. I did say that. Now I understand . . ." He smiled confusedly, but the fear in his eyes remained. "I meant to say something else. I meant to say that if I—"

The inspector came down to earth with a sudden change of tone. In a thundering voice he exclaimed, "Just a minute. Let's get this straight right now. You killed Señora Altabe. Yes or no?"

(He had lost his paternal attitude.)

"No. I didn't kill her."

Jiménez turned and strode like a fury to where Ramírez was standing. The latter looked as if he'd like to have cut a hole in the floor and dropped through.

"Well, what have you got to say now?"

"Don't pay any attention to him, Inspector. He swears he didn't now, Inspector. But he was the one for sure, believe me. Let's have a look, Junior," he exclaimed, trying to capture a little mastery over the embarrassing situation. "Show the inspector your hands."

Esteban didn't move. Jiménez stalked over to the suspect and roughly raised the boy's hands. The index finger of the right hand had several dry green paint stains on it. And on the back of his left hand was another green paint smear.

A slow smile came over the inspector's face.

"All right," he said. "You don't have to say anything more. Those stains speak for themselves. Deny it all you want!"

Daniel's petulant voice shook the inspector's poise.

"Excuse me, Inspector," he murmured, "but it would seem to me that, to put it one way, paint-stained hands aren't necessarily the same as blood-stained hands."

"What the devil—"

"Just that it's possible that this lad can explain how he got paint stains on his hands."

"Oh, you think so, eh? Then perhaps he can explain how he happened to paint the neck and dress of the corpse, too!"

Esteban appeared detached from what was occurring about him.

"Now look here," Jiménez persisted. "You—you get busy explaining this or I'll pack you off somewhere where you can think it over for a while!"

The boy went pale again. His hands continued to tremble. "All right," he said weakly. "What do you want me to explain?"

"Everything. *Every — thing.* Why did you say you killed her?"

"I meant it was my fault. She wanted us to run away together. I was afraid to. I knew that my father would have died for shame."

The inspector looked at him with absolute incredulity.

"You—you were her lover?" he stammered.

Esteban blushed deeply.

"You don't have to talk that way," he said. "You don't have to—"

"I'll talk as I please," the officer cut in, now furious. "Where are your parents?"

"They're not at home. They're spending the week end out of the city."

"Why are you smeared with paint?"

"I was painting some shutters."

"Ah, some shutters! How nice! Nothing more than shutters?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Show me the shutters."

Esteban got up and opened the glass casement window that faced onto the patio. At the left of the patio, in a wing of the same building, were two windows: one on the ground floor, opening from a bedroom, and another higher up that seemed to face out from a garret. The shutter on the garret window was entirely of wood and had recently been painted green. There was a tall ladder leaning against the wall, and at the foot of it a newspaper, a paint brush, a metal scraping brush, and a can of turpentine. It was there that Ramírez had found the can of paint.

At the right of the patio a six-foot high wall divided the property from the garden of the home next door where the murder had taken place. A part of the house and an edge of the garden could be seen over the top of the wall, a perfect situation.

The inspector went outside and examined every nook and cranny of the patio, which was laid with white paving stones decorated with pale blue designs, without discovering anything of note.

Turning about he discovered Daniel Hernández perched at the top of the ladder making strange gestures, like a trained monkey, in front of the solid wood garret shutter.

"What are you up to now?"

he shouted. "It's a painted shutter, that's all!"

Daniel inched down with extravagant care, brushed his hands off on his coat and smiled happily.

"I know it," he replied. "I wanted to know if it were also an unpainted shutter."

The inspector shrugged his shoulders unappreciatively. He was seldom in the mood for jokes.

Esteban Valverde's room, where the final questioning was taking place, was a sort of library, with solid antique furniture. On top of the old, low desk there was a vast mass of disorganized papers. The inspector looked them over with repugnance.

"All right, Valverde," he opened in a cool, measured tone, "what did you do this morning?"

"I was painting that shutter and—"

"Yes, I know," interrupted the inspector. "Afterwards."

"From nine o'clock to ten I listened to a concert. The state broadcast. Works of Mozart."

"Note that," the inspector said, turning to Lombardo. "What else?"

"From ten o'clock on I was writing."

"What were you writing?"

Esteban blinked nervously but did not answer.

"What were you writing?" demanded Jiménez.

"Poetry," mumbled the boy.

The inspector broke into rude laughter.

"Ah, poetry! I should have known. May we see your verse?"

Esteban made a quick movement toward the desk. Ramírez and Carletti followed, but the inspector beat them all and emerged triumphantly, waving above a jumble of arms a single sheet of manuscript. Only the first two lines of the poem were perfectly legible, written in the precise hand of a student. The rest was a confusion of erasures, unfinished lines, fragmentary metrical schemes that illusorily finished them, and probable rhymes in vertical columns. The two initial lines were hendecasyllables:

In the shadow of a bird that passes by
Time I see on silent wings to fly . . .

The inspector snorted contemptuously.

"What were you going to put after 'fly'?" he grunted. "Sigh?"

He handed the sheet over to Daniel who read the lines with profound attention. In the middle of his reading, a striking change suddenly came over him: the vertical furrow of his forehead deepened; his eyes, absorbed in thought, seemed to be

turning in on a secret region of his soul. Quickly he turned on Esteban. "What gave you the idea for this poem?" he asked with more asperity than was common for him.

"Oh," replied the boy slowly, "time . . . change . . . the brevity of it all—"

"Yes, yes, I know," interrupted Daniel impatiently. "I wasn't talking about that. Something else. Ideas don't just come out of the blue. Something fires them and gives them life. Something which could be insignificant, but which is now decisive. Think! Try to remember!"

Esteban stroked his head thoughtfully. Twice he shook it, discouraged. Then, suddenly he raised his eyes toward Daniel in great astonishment.

"Now I know," he said. "But how—how did you—"

"*What was it?*" insisted Daniel.

"A bird," he answered. "Now I remember. I wouldn't have dreamed—"

Jiménez clamped his hands to his head. "Oh, no, no, no, no!" he cried with the precision of a machine-gun. "Not this! Don't give me any business about birds now! This is *mur-der!*"

"Shhhh," urged Daniel, turning back to the boy. "You saw it? And I mean *saw it?*"

"No. I saw the shadow. Now I understand what gave me the idea for the first lines. That's why I wrote them so quickly. But I don't see—"

"Never mind," interrupted Daniel. "You saw a bird's shadow. You saw it pass in the patio, isn't that right?"

"Yes. I had sat down to write. Nothing came to my mind. I looked outside. The white paving stones were brilliant in the sunlight. The shadow crossed the patio—like an arrow—then returned instantly."

"It came from the right?"

"Yes."

"And you had the doors closed. You saw it through the glass panels, didn't you?"

"Yes, but how—"

"One last question. Think carefully. *What time was it?*"

"That's easy," replied Esteban. "The concert ended at ten. It lasted an hour. So it must have been about five minutes after ten."

Daniel Hernández released a pent-up sigh of relief and turned a pensive smile to Inspector Jiménez. "A bird passes," he murmured. "Even less then that—the shadow of a bird—and a poem is born. Tell me, Inspector, is there anything more trifling, more insubstantial, more immaterial than the shadow of a bird? There's a mystery for you that's greater than the one you're now investigating."

"That's all very nice," said the inspector. "But that's not a solution."

"Yes. Very nice," agreed Daniel, pointing out the window. "But that wasn't a bird!"

"Ugh!" snorted the inspector. "That was a bad moment—when you went back and faced Altabe, and told him he had killed his wife. If we'd let him, he'd have killed you!" He ran his hand along his right cheek bone where a bruise attested to the potency of the old champion's fist.

"Your boys are very efficient," said Daniel smiling. "I never dreamed that Ramírez knew judo."

"Oh, I do too," Jiménez commented modestly.

They were walking along a street in the quiet Belgrano residential district, flanked by trees, peaceful in the half-shade of dusk.

"How you figured Altabe got to that paint I can't imagine," said Jiménez. "The can was in the house next door. Altabe couldn't have jumped the wall without leaving footprints in his own garden. And he couldn't have entered the house by the street door and crossed the patio without Valverde seeing him."

"It's very simple," said Daniel. "He used a squash ball."

"A squash ball?"

"A rubber ball."

"Then that was—"

"Yes, that was the shadow that Esteban saw streaking across the patio of his home. The shadow of a bird. A rubber bird, fleeting and well-aimed, which crosses in a second and returns instantly—"

The inspector looked at him questioningly.

"Can we prove it?"

"Of course. Almost in the very center of the garret shutter is a little circular impression, about an inch to an inch and a half across. The unmistakeable impression of a ball. Esteban saw the shadow pass a few minutes after ten. Of the two occupants of the house next door, Gregorio Altabe is the only one who has no alibi for that time."

"You suspected him, then, when you climbed down the ladder."

"Yes. When I saw the shutter I remembered the trophy room. Every sport that Altabe played implied mastery in the manipulation of a ball. And the person who launched that ball so it would bounce off a shutter situated some thirty feet away, and hit the mark almost in the exact center, certainly possessed that skill.

"Altabe knew about what was going on between Mariana and Esteban. Eliminating his wife, then, he was killing two birds with one stone: he was satisfying his desire for revenge and was ending up with a fortune to boot. And if along the way he could incriminate Valverde and have him shipped off to prison,

then the plan was perfect. Esteban himself presented Altabe with the opportunity when he began painting the garret shutter which faced Altabe's own place. The murderer waited for him to finish, sent the ball flying with great force and deadly accuracy against the painted wood surface, caught it on the fly and set about to take care of her."

"The quantity of paint that can adhere to a squash ball isn't great, but for Altabe it was sufficient to leave on the neck and clothing of the body markings that were destined to implicate Valverde. You'll remember that you yourself had difficulty in perceiving the paint traces on the victim's throat. I had thought it was just a print in the material too."

Inspector Jiménez nodded, quite satisfied.

"The murderer," Daniel continued, "didn't use a very big ball, one that would lose its force on hitting against a sticky surface. I rather think it was one of those extraordinarily resilient balls that you've often seen bounding with enormous speed and force off the walls of a squash court.

"Any other person less expert than he would have thrown the ball. Altabe, I think, drove it with a squash paddle. Perhaps the same one with which he won the National Championship, 1936. . . ."

CONTRAST

Midnight—and drums. Sweat poured down gleaming bodies as the dancers paused, glazed eyes on the raised arm of the old man, waiting for the signal to resume. . . . There was a familiar smell in the air.

Police Constable Morris, calmly watching from the shadows, thought for a moment he could hear the dry voice of the District Officer as he was telling them how much of the violence sweeping the island could be blamed on this ganja (marijuana) smoking. A number of factors had cut short the activities of the police anti-narcotic squad. A member of the squad had testified in open court how he'd described himself as a professor studying flowers and plants when he was hunting for the locations where the ganja plant was grown, and people had laughed. True, more than three hundred had been arrested in '56, for selling the narcotic, but at least another three hundred had probably never been caught. For instance, the dancers at these ceremonies certainly smoked ganja; where did *they* get it?

There was a shout from the old man—and an answering shout from one of the dancers. Constable Morris recognized the voice—it was Johnson, the pharmacy assistant. The flames were high again—and the shadows were taller and moving faster and faster. . . .

Across the Bay the tourists were dancing to the latest Calypso. Jamaica was so thrilling—so unspoiled. . . .

THE saint's RATINGS

Herewith we inaugurate a new service for our readers.

It occurred to us that since you are all, obviously, buyers of reading matter in the 25- to 50-cent bracket, you would like to know more about the books which are being published for the first time at that price, which don't usually make the review columns. We only propose to cover the *new* books, not reprints of more expensive editions.

This will be our grading system:

ooo	Three haloes:	Outstanding.
oo	Two haloes:	Above average.
o	One halo:	Passable reading.
⋔	A pitchfork:	For the ashcan.

To match what we think is the caliber of SAINT MAGAZINE readers, our standards are going to be tough. Three haloes will not be easily won. But lest any irate publishers, indignant authors, or even dissenting readers, are impelled to take off after any of our editorial staff with shooting irons, we hasten to state that this department has been turned over to a contributor of whose good taste we are convinced but whose anonymity we have guaranteed.

THE BIG BITE, by Charles Williams (Dell, 25¢):

Powerful straight-line story worked out with the relentlessness of Greek tragedy. Too bad there isn't one character we can feel sorry for, except perhaps the first corpse—but he's well out of it. Top quality writing just puts this over. ooo

JULIE, by Andrew L. Stone (Signet, 25¢):

Painfully crude adaptation of a movie script, obviously intended only to cash in on the picture of the same title. The picture may be good suspense entertainment, but all the "book" proves is that a movie writer doesn't necessarily have literary talent. ⋔

JOHNNY LIDDELL'S MORGUE, by Frank Kane (Dell, 25¢):

Tough private eye, hard-boiled yeggs, lush dolls, in 8 variations of the usual brannigans. Somewhat more inventive than the run-of-the-ginmill product of this school, and commended for avoiding most of its grubbier clichés. oo

WHO KILLED SWEET SUE, by Henry Kane (Avon, 25¢):

Similar ingredients but, related or not, this Kane is less Able. The tongue is in the cheek so loosely that sometimes it seems to slip out and point at the reader. o

adventure of the triple kent

by . . . August Derleth

One of the victims was almost at the threshold. Both lay in dark pools of blood which had flowed from gaping wounds in their backs.

IF MR. SOLAR PONS had not visited Sussex that summer of 193-, it is very probable that the singularly sanguine affair of the triple murder in Kent—filed among my notes under the unimaginative heading of the "Triple Kent"—might not have come his way, and I would have been deprived of a notable example of that fascinating power of ratiocination which was indisputably his.

We were on the way back from the South Downs, where Pons had paid an almost reverential visit to an old bee-keeper whose retirement concealed the identity of a brilliant genius to whom Pons habitually referred as "the Master," when the train drew to a stop at Tunbridge Wells. Pons had been slumped in his seat in our compartment, his head on his chest, his arms folded, and his lean, ascetic face in repose, when suddenly his eyes flashed open, he raised his head, and became instantly alert.

"There is some disturbance ahead, Parker," he said. "What can it be?"

While a mutual friend, Anthony Boucher, has described the first adventures of Solar Pons as "a superlative collection of Holmesian pastiches," classicists in Baker Street circles have at times deplored the similarity of the adventures of the gentleman at Praed Street and those of the great man, the Master, who lived for so long at Baker Street. The present adventure is in the noble tradition.

At the same moment, I was aware of the commotion.

"Ah, someone is going from compartment to compartment, opening and shutting the doors," said Pons.

"Looking for someone?"

"That is all too likely," agreed Pons.

So saying, he lowered the window and stuck his head out. Almost immediately he drew back again, his eyes twinkling.

"I know you are in haste for London, Parker, but I fear we shall not be on this train. Did not Mrs. Johnson know our destination?"

"Indeed, she did. I never leave without telling her just where you can be reached."

"I fancy I am about to be reached."

As he spoke, the door of our compartment was opened. An apple-cheeked young police sergeant stood there. At sight of Pons, he gave a glad cry of relief.

"Mr. Pons! At last! Thank heaven you weren't on the earlier train, or I should have missed you."

"Pray compose yourself, Sergeant Lester. Will you come in?"

"Mr. Pons, I cannot. I implore you instead to step out. There has been a terrible crime in the vicinity and I am at my wits' end for some clue by means of which to fathom it. I telephoned you earlier. Your landlady was kind enough to tell me you had gone on a holiday in Sussex, and to give me an address where you might be reached. I telephoned there only to learn that you had gone. I hoped you might be on this train, and I have not been disappointed."

My companion looked to me. "What do you say, Parker? Can your practice spare you for another day?"

"My *locum tenems* will manage very well without me," I said.

"Capital!" exclaimed Pons.

Forthwith he came to his feet, snatched his small bag, and stepped from the train. I followed him.

"I have a car waiting, Mr. Pons," said Sergeant Lester. "I have only just now left the scene of the crime, and we are waiting on my finding you to move the bodies."

"Bodies?" repeated Pons.

"Bodies, Mr. Pons," said the sergeant again, with the utmost gravity. "Three of them. Three harmless ladies murdered. They are at their cottage, which is not far from Tunbridge Wells. But here is our car. After you, Mr. Pons."

"Now, then," said Pons, when we were riding off, "let us just have a brief resumé of the affair. There is no doubt it is murder, I take it?"

"None whatever, Mr. Pons.

The three ladies were found shot to death. We have not discovered either the weapon or the shells. A shot-gun was used."

Pons listened now without interruption, sitting with his eyes closed, one arm folded across his chest, the other resting on it and held aloft, with his fingers gently stroking his ear-lobe.

"The victims are Mrs. Edith Norwood, who was forty-five; her daughter, Louise, who was twenty-three; and her housekeeper, Miss Elizabeth Sothern, who was fifty-two. Mrs. Norwood owned the house. She and her daughter were found in their sitting-room; Miss Sothern was some distance from the house, in a little coppice. All three ladies had been shot in the back at quite close range.

"The most curious part of the problem is the complete absence of motive."

"Say, rather, obvious motive," interrupted Pons. "What is obscure today may not be so tomorrow."

"As far as can be determined," continued Sergeant Lester, "nothing has been removed from the cottage. There is, in fact, not the slightest sign of any disturbance, apart, of course, from the havoc caused when one of the poor ladies fell against a tea-table and knocked it over; as a result, there is an upset table, and broken crockery is scattered on the floor. The ladies were evidently at tea."

"And Mr. Norwood?" asked Pons.

"Mr. John Norwood was in London. He has been notified and is on his way here. The bodies were discovered by a postman three hours ago. I should tell you, however, that these three ladies were the sole occupants of the cottage. Mr. and Mrs. Norwood had been divorced five years ago. Since then, Mr. Norwood has remarried, and he and his second wife live in a house in Crowborough. He was a frequent visitor at the home of his first wife, and so on occasion was his second wife. They were all on the friendliest of terms, and apparently had been old friends before the divorce and remarriage of Mr. Norwood. He seemed very much distressed at hearing this sad and shocking news and volunteered to come immediately.

"The late Mrs. Norwood and her daughter lived on a competence afforded them by her ex-husband. Another daughter of the couple, who will inherit the cottage and all else left by her mother and sister, is married and lives in the United States. Her inheritance now also includes the competence from her father, and she remains his only child, since no children were born to him by his second wife. No one within reach thus stands to gain

by the death of Mrs. Edith Norwood and her daughter."

"You have eliminated robbery and gain," mused Pons. "What remains?"

"Mr. Pons, I do not know. The ladies lived very quietly. Except for Louise, who went occasionally to London, they went nowhere save very rarely to Crowborough to take an afternoon or an evening with Mr. and Mrs. Norwood there. Apart from the reciprocation of these visits, there was little social life at the cottage. The ladies were much given to reading, listening to the wireless, and playing cards. They were highly respected, regularly attended church services, and contributed to every charity. They had no known enemies."

"But one unknown," murmured Pons.

"The house is just ahead there," continued Lester. "As you see, it lies over a knoll in a little valley, which explains the fact that no one heard the shots."

"The police have examined the bodies to determine the time of death?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. The ladies were shot some time yesterday afternoon."

He finished speaking as the car drove up to a gate which opened on to a well-kept lawn. A constable stood on guard there, and another was stationed at the door of the house. A few people had collected curiously in the road outside, but, since nothing of the crime was visible from that point, they shifted uneasily and moved restlessly to and fro, unable to get past the constable.

"No one has been in but the doctor and myself," explained Sergeant Lester. "In the circumstances, it was thought best to disturb absolutely nothing so that any assistance you might be able to extend to us would not be hampered by the destructive curiosity of the people."

"Commendable, indeed," said Pons, but already his keen eyes were darting here and there, looking past a trio of fruit trees to the only visible coppice nearby, doubtless the scene of Miss Sothern's death.

The path leading to the house was of crushed gravel, and carried no footprints. The house itself was a modest cottage, snug behind laburnum bushes, and naved by yew and box-elder trees. Some roses blossomed besides the door, of a color which was no less bright than that which had burst forth inside, and was now darkened by the intervening hours.

For the scene inside was shocking, indeed. Two comely women—one in her prime, the other at the height of her beauty and youth—lay done to death. One of them was almost at the threshold, with the appearance

of having crumpled against the door-frame before striking the floor; this was the younger. The other had knocked over the tea-table and lay in the midst of crockery, spilled tea, and scones. Both lay in dark pools of blood, which had flowed from gaping wounds in their backs.

Pons picked his way delicately to stand beside the body of the older woman. He crouched over her for a few moments, his sharp eyes scanning the floor, flickering from object to object. Then he walked over to the body of Miss Norwood, stepped around her, and vanished into the adjoining room.

He reappeared in a short time.

"I take it the coppice and Miss Sothern's body are ready of access from the outer door leading off the kitchen," he said to the sergeant.

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"Let us leave Miss Sothern for the moment," said Pons, returning to Mrs. Norwood's body. "Is there not something singularly suggestive about this scene?"

Sergeant Lester looked his perplexity at Pons.

"Let us ask rather," said Pons, "what the scene suggests to you?"

"Obviously, the ladies were having tea," answered Lester.

"Say, rather, about to have tea. If you will look closely at the broken cups, you will find that none had as yet held tea. But there is even more to be seen in these shards. Are there not four cups? I daresay, if you will piece them together, you will discover four—not two, or three. Two would account for Mrs. Norwood and her daughter. A third possibly for Miss Sothern."

"They were very informal people," put in Sergeant Lester. "They would certainly not exclude the housekeeper from tea."

"Very well, then. I submit they were expecting a visitor to tea."

"Would not their visitor have found them thus and reported their murder to us?" asked Sergeant Lester.

"I should be inclined to doubt it very much, in these circumstances," said Pons dryly, "because it is fairly certain that their visitor was their murderer. Moreover, I submit that the murderer's primary objective was the death of Mrs. Norwood; Miss Louise and Miss Sothern were slain because they could reveal the identity of their visitor."

Sergeant Lester stood for a moment in deep thought. "I fail to follow you in that, Mr. Pons," he said presently.

"It is elementary, my dear fellow. Consider—the presence of four cups on the table indi-

cates that a visitor was expected. The presence of the tea itself suggests that the approach of their expected visitor had been observed, and tea had been brought in. The fact that it had not been poured is sufficient to enable us to postulate that their visitor had only just arrived. Mrs. Norwood was surely on a basis of casual and friendly relations with her murderer. She was almost certainly about to pour tea when she was shot from behind. Miss Louise was very probably a witness to her mother's death; as she turned to flee, she, too, was shot. The housekeeper, perhaps having come far enough to discover what had taken place, turned and ran, pursued by the murderer, who shot her in the coppice nearby. The primary object of the murderer's attention was, then, Mrs. Norwood; the other two were shot only because they were witnesses to the first murder. A singularly callous and brutal crime. But, tell me, Lester—it suggests nothing to you that in these circumstances a place had been laid for Miss Sothern?"

"No, sir, except that the Norwood ladies were not departing from their custom of having their housekeeper to take tea with them."

Pons smiled enigmatically. "Pray consider it, while I look about outside."

So saying, he was off, pushing through the kitchen. Sergeant Lester turned and went out the way he had come in, and I followed him. From the front of the house we could see Pons moving toward the body which lay as it had fallen among the trees of the coppice. Once there, however, he dropped to his knees and proceeded to make the closest possible scrutiny of the grassy ground, crawling back part of the way he had come.

When he had finished, he rose and went around the house, vanishing from our sight. He next reappeared around the corner of the cottage nearest us. There once again he dropped to his knees beneath a window opening from the room in which the dead ladies lay. Sergeant Lester watched him in absorbed silence, until at last Pons rose, brushing grass blades from his knees, and came toward us.

"Miss Sothern's footprints are quite clear," he said. "She ran from the cottage. Her flight was erratic. She was evidently so shocked and frightened that she ran without direction and only turned toward the coppice when she saw that she was being pursued. Her pursuer, however, caught and killed her."

"We found no trace of his footprints, Mr. Pons," said Sergeant Lester.

"There is indisputable evidence of the pursuit of Miss Sothern," said Pons. "I com-

mend a closer examination of the turf to you. Manifestly, Miss Sothern was not shot at as close range as her employer and the young lady; but her wound was no less mortal. The murderer then apparently gathered up such shells as were ejected and quietly made off."

As Pons was speaking, the constable at the gate came up the walk and bent to whisper to Sergeant Lester.

"Let him come in," said the sergeant. Turning to Pons, he explained, "Mr. Norwood has arrived."

A patently agitated man of approximately fifty years of age came hurriedly up the walk at the constable's direction. He was broad-shouldered and well-dressed. He wore a dark mustache, and carried gloves and walking stick. His eyes were a light blue, his mouth sensuous, his cheeks full and at the moment very pale.

"My God, my God! Sergeant Lester, where are they? Who has done this dreadful thing?" he cried, as he came up.

"Pull yourself together, Mr. Norwood. Your daughter and Mrs. Norwood are just inside. Miss Sothern is in the wood. Please disturb nothing, Mr. Norwood."

But Norwood had already pushed past and into the cottage, from which presently came a heartrending cry of anguish. In a few moments Norwood came unsteadily out, visibly shaken. His face was ghastly. He sat down heavily on the stoop before the door, dropping his gloves and stick, and covered his face with his hands, fighting for control.

Sergeant Lester, however, gave him but a few moments of respite. Then he moved grimly closer.

"I am sorry, Mr. Norwood, but we must ask you a few questions."

Norwood looked up haggardly. "I understand," he said quietly.

"Do you know of any enemy of Mrs. Norwood's who might have done this thing?" asked Sergeant Lester.

"No, sir. None of them had an enemy in the world. They were gentle and kind. You know that, Sergeant."

"Yes, Mr. Norwood," replied Lester. He would have gone on, had not Pons indicated that he wished to question Norwood.

"Tell me, Mr. Norwood," said Pons, "was your ex-wife in the habit of allowing Miss Sothern to set a place for herself at tea?"

"At all meals, sir," said Norwood. "Except, of course, in case of special guests. At such times, Miss Sothern served. Otherwise everything was always very informal. It was a tradition in our family."

"You have another daughter."

"I spoke with her by transatlantic telephone before I came down," answered Norwood. "She and her husband live in Baltimore."

"Does Mrs. Norwood have any other surviving relatives?"

"A sister, Mrs. Sybil West, lives in Brisbane, Australia."

"Your ex-wife's sole heir is your other daughter?"

"Yes, sir."

"We understand that you and the present Mrs. Norwood occasionally visited here."

"Yes, sir. Sometimes I stopped myself on my way up to or down from London, where I have my office.

"Sometimes, of a Sunday, Iris and I came together to spend the afternoon here. You should understand, sir, that my present wife and my first wife were neighbors and friends before my estrangement and divorce. We lived on adjoining places near Twickenham. After my divorce, I married Iris, who was the widow of a Colonial officer."

"When did you last visit here, Mr. Norwood?"

"I spent a day here within the week—just five days ago, sir."

"Alone?"

"My wife was indisposed. She knew I had been invited to visit Louise and Edith, of course."

"Who else commonly visited here, to your knowledge?"

"I know of no one." At this point a note of caution entered his voice. "Of course, you must realize that Edith and my daughter lived their own lives. Who came here between my own visits I have no way of knowing. But I should be inclined to think that they entertained no one, or I should very probably have heard."

"Mrs. Norwood would have told you?"

"Yes, Edith would have mentioned it, I feel sure."

"Your first wife lived on a competence you paid her. How is this now affected by her death?"

"Not appreciably, sir. It continues, though in somewhat reduced form, and goes to our American daughter."

Pons appeared briefly lost in thought, noticing which Sergeant Lester excused himself and went back around the cottage toward the coppice, signaling to one of the constables on guard.

"The present Mrs. Norwood," resumed Pons, "is a small, light woman?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. She was a dancer and actress before her first marriage."

"In England?"

"In the provinces particularly. She was first married in Calcutta. Though how you could know of her is beyond me."

"The first Mrs. Norwood suggests the contrast. Second marriages are often made to very

different types," said Pons with unusual glibness.

Norwood, however, was quite satisfied. He came to his feet just as Sergeant Lester returned.

"I'm afraid, Pons, your vision is better than mine," said Sergeant Lester. "There are none but the woman's prints in the turf between the house and the wood."

"I hardly think your vision is at fault, Sergeant," said Pons. As he spoke, he looked at his watch. "Mr. Norwood appears quite shaken, and, since Crowborough is not very far away, do you not think it possible for us just to drive him home?"

Sergeant Lester was somewhat taken aback, but, despite Norwood's immediate protestations, he rallied to Pons' suggestion.

"I must give instructions to Mr. Denton for the removal of the bodies," he said. "Then we will set right off."

In a short time we were on the way, passing along the lime-trees of the Pantiles in Tunbridge Wells and then by the gorse and bracket-grown Common and the curious sandstone High Rocks on the way to Groombridge. The day was ideal; the summer sun shone upon a landscape which soon changed from the Tunbridge Wells Common to the Weald with its forests of oak. A light wind blew from the Channel coast, and the freshness of the sea reached even so far inland as the road along which we were traveling.

Now and then, out of the forest areas that remained of the Weald, rose picturesque rocks, and at last the towers of Eridge Castle. Crowborough was indeed not far away.

"This was Jeffries country, if I am not mistaken," I said.

"Yes, Richard Jeffries had the Downs Cottage," answered Norwood.

"And there is also a certain literary doctor living near Crowborough," said Pons, with a twinkle in his eye. "In more than one way a colleague of yours, eh, Parker?"

I did not reply, for at that moment, Norwood leaned forward to direct our driver, and in but a very little while we drew up before a pleasantly-situated cottage on the outskirts of Crowborough.

"This is the Brown House," said Norwood. "I thank you for bringing me home."

He got out and would have shut the car door, had not Pons intervened. "I have a fancy to look about, if you do not mind, Mr. Norwood."

"But of course not, Mr. Pons. Do come in. Perhaps Mrs. Norwood could brew a cup of tea for us?"

"There will hardly be time, Mr. Norwood," said Pons, getting out of the car. "Do Mrs.

Norwood and you live here alone?"

"No, sir. We have a housekeeper, Mrs. Mayfield, and her son, Fred. My wife retained them when we took the house."

Pons turned to Sergeant Lester. "Perhaps we had better let Mr. Norwood go in before us. His news will grievously upset his wife, and these little scenes are scarcely to my liking. Come, let us walk about a bit."

"Just as you like, Gentlemen," said Norwood.

Pons' consideration was futile, as it happened, for even as we were turning away, a slender woman came running from the house toward Norwood. She was a pretty, sweet-faced woman in her forties, and she had obviously been weeping. Oblivious of us, she threw herself into her husband's arms.

"Oh, John, John—I heard it on the wireless. How terrible!"

"Yes, my dear. But, please—we have visitors."

We were formally introduced, Mrs. Norwood with an effort holding back her emotions, and clinging to her husband rather pathetically; clearly he was needed at his home, for the triple murder had shocked her profoundly.

Pons, however, was not to be deviated from his purpose. He had meant to walk around the property, and now, excusing himself, he set out. Sergeant Lester elected to remain with the Norwoods as they walked toward the house, from one window of which a short, slender, thin-faced elderly woman stood watching us.

There was a row of sheds along one line of Norwood's property, and it was toward them that Pons now bent his steps. The door to one of them stood open, and the figure of a man could be seen moving about inside. It was to this shed that Pons went.

The man inside observed our approach and came to the door. He was a dark-faced fellow, with high cheekbones and a small mouth, and his brown eyes watched us suspiciously.

"I take it you are Fred Mayfield," said Pons, coming up.

"That's right," said Fred crisply.

"Mr. Norwood has given us permission to look around a bit," Pons went on. "I see you've a fine array of tools here."

"Mr. Norwood's."

"Is all this then Mr. Norwood's? I should think he scarcely had time to work at the bench here, or to fish, or hunt."

"Oh, the fishing gear and the guns are mine," said Fred. "He don't have time, no, that he don't. He do sometimes get down here by noon or thereabouts from the city. But he don't often take out a gun and never a fishing pole."

"And Mrs. Norwood?"

Fred grinned. "She's afraid of fish. Can't look a fish in the eye, or a worm, either. And as for hunting—hoh! Why, the other day, she says, 'Teach me how to shoot that gun there, Fred'—that's the shot-gun," he explained, obviously with a poor opinion of our knowledge of weapons—"and she took it out and practiced, but she couldn't hit much with it, not as I'm saying she couldn't if she tried a bit—and yesterday she went out with twelve shells and came back with the gun unused. Got so scared, she did, she just threw the shells away and brought the gun back."

"It looks a fine gun."

"That it is, sir. Just feel how light it is."

He lifted the gun out of the rack and tossed it to Pons, who caught it deftly. Pons held it close to his face.

"But this gun has been fired recently, and not cleaned," said Pons. "The smell of the powder is still strong."

"Could be Ma had it. She's a crack shot, she is."

Pons handed the gun back to him and stood looking idly around. Then he asked, "Does not Mr. Norwood own a car?"

"Yes, sir, that he does. Mrs. Norwood took it in to Crowborough yesterday at noon for repairs. It's still there." He probed around in the pocket of his vest. "I expect I ought to go in after it; they've had it since noon." He drew from his pocket a receipt. "Ah, yes, here 'tis. They received it at twelve-thirty-five. Should have had plenty of time, I expect. Mrs. Norwood waited for it, but it took longer than they thought, and she came back on foot just before he came down from London."

"Thank you, Fred. If you'll excuse us, we'll join the Norwoods."

Pons walked toward the house in deep and troubled silence.

"You suspect someone, Pons," I said.

He shook his head. "No, Parker, I have long passed beyond suspicion. I know who killed those unfortunate ladies."

"Indeed! I suppose you have seen something Sergeant Lester and I could not see."

"No, no, the very nature of the crime was enough. Thereafter every little shred of evidence which presented itself fit the suggested pattern. I have had to do many disagreeable things in my life, Parker, but this I am about to do is bound to be one of the most unpleasant. There is no need to prolong it. Did you not observe anything interesting about the features of the man, Fred Mayfield?"

"I cannot say I did."

"He has the same high cheekbones, the same dark complex-

ion, the same kind of hair as Mrs. Norwood. He is certainly her brother. Very probably the housekeeper is their mother, all unknown to Norwood himself. His wife, you will recall his saying, retained the staff."

We had reached the house, the door to which stood open. Pons tapped lightly and walked in. Mr. and Mrs. Norwood were sitting together on a couch, and Sergeant Lester sat facing them. They ceased to speak as we came in, but only for a moment; then Mrs. Norwood spoke.

"Will you have some tea, Gentlemen?"

"Thank you, no," said Pons with unaccustomed brevity. "I am sorry, Sergeant Lester, but it is your duty to place Mrs. Norwood under arrest for the murder of Mrs. Edith Norwood, Miss Louise Norwood, and Miss Elizabeth Sothern yesterday afternoon."

For a moment there was not a sound. Then Norwood, his face blanched, rose with a growl of rage in his throat, his fists clenched. Sergeant Lester was too surprised to make a move. Pons stood his ground grimly, unalterably, while across from him the pretty, sweet face of Mrs. Iris Norwood underwent a ghastly transformation—the sweetness washed from her features, her eyes took fire, her mouth was contorted. Then, even before her husband could reach Pons, she sprang at him like a tiger.

Pons caught her by the hair, twisted it, and brought her to her knees, clawing at his hands.

"Sergeant Lester," said Pons. "Mr. Norwood, control yourself."

There is no need to dwell upon that painful scene—the subduing of Mrs. Iris Norwood, the collapse of John Norwood, and the ultimate taking away of Mrs. Norwood by officials from Crowborough, acting at Sergeant Lester's direction. Afterward, riding back toward Tunbridge Wells, Sergeant Lester spoke anxiously.

"I suppose, Mr. Pons, that the evidence is all there—but for the life of me I have not seen it."

"Perhaps it is all too elementary, Sergeant Lester," said Pons. "Some of us have an unhappy tendency to make a problem far more complex than it is. The evidence is not quite all there—some of it you must discover for yourself. For instance, guards on the train will need to be found who remember Mrs. Iris Norwood's having traveled to Tunbridge Wells yesterday; I daresay you will find them. Mrs. Norwood certainly left her car to be repaired when the receipt indicates, and entrained immediately afterward for Tunbridge Wells, after telephoning to say

she was coming for tea at the Norwood cottage.

"But, of course, the facts which present themselves at the scene of the murder are circumstantially quite conclusive. Was not the crime essentially that of a woman? Indeed it was. The table had been set for four, including Miss Sothern. Yet we were given reason to believe that Miss Sothern would not have been seated with the Norwoods if their guest had been any but a familiar one. The very incidence of tea at a cottage occupied by three women suggests another woman; if a strange man had come for tea, Miss Sothern would have been serving, not joining them.

"An examination of the turf beneath the window of the sitting-room indicates that Mrs. Iris Norwood stood there for a moment to look in. The circumstances suggest that she may even have shot Mrs. Edith Norwood from that window. She may also have stepped quietly into the house and shot her from the threshold of the room. Certainly Mrs. Edith Norwood was shot in the back. Her daughter fled, and was shot down. Then Miss Sothern in turn took flight, with Mrs. Iris Norwood in pursuit. You said, you will remember, 'There are none but the woman's prints in the turf between the house and the wood.' Not 'the woman's,' Sergeant Lester—but 'women's'—a close scrutiny will show you that one of the women was somewhat heavier than the other—that was Miss Sothern. Hers was a size six shoe, but there are also prints, however similar to the untutored eye, not as heavily indented, made by a slight woman who wears a four and a half shoe, Mrs. Iris' Norwood's size.

"The very reclusive nature of life at the Norwood cottage left one with but little alternative in the identity of the murderer. Did not every testimony we had, including that of Norwood himself, indicate that the ladies entertained very few people? Indeed, the only names which were ever brought forward as familiar visitors, were those of John and Iris Norwood. An intimate serving of tea to a solitary woman guest in mid-afternoon suggests only Iris Norwood.

"She used her brother's gun, beyond question. I fancy she convinced him she could not shoot, so that he was ready to believe her story that she had thrown away the shells rather than shoot. She threw them away, certainly—both the unused and the used shells she calmly gathered up after her brutal crime."

"But her motive, Mr. Pons?" protested Lester.

"There is surely but one possible motive, Sergeant. The

woman was jealous of the first Mrs. Norwood, nor was her jealousy of any recent origin. It must have existed a long time ago, even before she managed to break up the Norwood's home. Norwood himself never suspected it. He mentioned that she had been an actress. She was never anything else. She fiercely resented every visit he paid to that house, and his spending a day there within the past week was finally the goad to activate her jealousy toward so cruel a crime, the effect of which now falls equally upon her murdered victims and the man she strove to possess so completely. There is no hatred so great as that of one woman for another.

"An ugly, stupid crime, peculiarly feminine in its essential nature. Do you wonder that I subscribe so firmly to single blessedness?"

pill roller

by . . . James E. Gunn

DAN says I am wasting my time, but I want you should know the truth about Benny.

With everything what's been said and written, it's time you learned the real story and why you can't get Topsies any more. Because the real loser is you.

For a little while it seems like you are going to get a real crack at happiness. That's another way to spell Topsies. It's the life of Riley rolled up in a pill. That's what you lost.

"We're one step from Paradise," Benny says once, and he chuckles, soft in his throat.

But Something don't want people happy. "Misery makes the world go round," Benny says. "Contented people don't buy television sets."

That's Benny. Nobody ever understands him like me. He is always thinking about somebody else, how they can get something they ain't got. "Give the people what they want!" he says. And he makes a business out of it.

"We're clean. I've already bought myself a fistful of medics. Nobody can touch us." They didn't need protection.

Don't get me wrong; Benny has no allergy to money, and it is a good business. When times

James E. Gunn, better known to readers of our companion magazine, FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, *tells the story of the building up of a $1,000,000 business. Restless after years of practically legal retirement, Benny becomes interested in the possibilities of goof balls, after all just "kind of" illegal, like hooch "in the good old days." Benny does something about it—very much so—and things hum.*

are good, he makes a few million at it, I guess, even if the T-men can't never prove anything.

Benny's smart. Somebody wrote once Benny is a genius born to organize the U.S. into one big racket. It all come natural with Benny, as he leaves high school before the first year is over. But what Benny don't have, he knows where to get it.

People don't like him say Benny never had an idea of his own, he could only take somebody else's idea and shine it up like new. Maybe so. When Prohibition come in, Benny isn't the first to see that the market is built in, but he starts out with two coins in his pocket to jingle together and he ends up bigger than any of them.

That's when I start working for him.

People say Benny never thinks of nobody but hisself. This is a lie. I seen him pass out lettuce by the sackful—what's more, it is to cops and D.A.'s and Benny never has no use for either one.

And take me. Benny keeps me around for 25-30 years, and I am doing nothing but bringing him a drink or a smoke or persuading some guy that he should not stand in Benny's light.

That's another reason I got to set you right.

I hear it said that Topsies is the Professor's idea and Benny hijacked it like a truck of hot hooch. That's all wrong. The Professor don't hardly have anything to do with it. With him it's nothing. Benny takes it and sees how he can use it in his business.

It starts real small.

We are just sitting around—the three of us—in Benny's Beverly Hills place, trying to keep cool with some bonded stuff, but this does not have the *zing* of the rum we used to run in from Cuba in the old days. Benny has been getting restless lately after ten years of practically legal retirement. Suddenly he looks up from his glass and says, "What's with these goof balls?"

The look in his eyes is far away, like I remember from the Thirties and earlier. The back of my head starts tingling, and I think there's something going to happen. This is maybe the only thing the same about Benny.

When he starts in the business he is just a young punk, no different looking from a thousand of them; what is different is inside. He is skinny then and short—no more than five-five even with the one-inch heels like he wears—but he has the darkest, hottest eyes I ever seen.

Since then he ain't growed any up, but he growed some out. He's got a belly on him, and his face is blurred when I see him sudden, not expecting it. Other

times I see only the Benny I used to know, like I got X-ray eyes to see through the fat to the man underneath.

"Amphetamine," the Professor says, not looking up from his book.

Amphetamine. You're surprised I should know the word. You're not half as surprised as Benny when he sees me with the medical dictionary. But that comes later.

"Who?" says Benny.

"Goof balls," says the Professor. "Known as stimulants or antidepressants in the trade. Trade names: Benzedrine, Dexedrine. Until the manufacturers changed the formula, convicts used to chew up the wafers from inhalers. You aren't supposed to get 'em without a prescription. Too dangerous. They're not strictly addicting, but users feel so lousy when the goof ball wears off, they reach for another."

"Bet I could get some," says Benny, thoughtful. "Bet I could go in any drug store in town, lay down a twenty and say, 'Here's my prescription.' "

"You'll always find corruption if you look for it."

Benny's eyes are bright. "People want 'em and can't get 'em?"

"People want lots of things they can't get—opium, heroin, cocaine, marijuana. . . ." the Professor says.

"You never did get it," Benny says, shaking his head sorrowful. "Who makes the laws? A lot of bluenoses. A bunch of killjoys. They don't want nobody to enjoy nothing they can't get a boot out of. And another thing. Dope is against the law. Goof balls is just kind of illegal, like hooch was in the good old days, and them things nobody gets hot about."

"Relax, Benny. Enjoy your ill-gotten gains." The Professor still has not looked up, which is a mistake as he does not see the look in Benny's eyes. I know, though, that the Professor has gone too far; sooner or later he will be sorry he said that. Benny has been respectable for ten years now, and he don't like nobody reminding him different.

"I like to have a person's attention," Benny says, real quiet.

Like he was begging to be stepped on, the Professor just keeps on reading and says, "If you got to get back in the game, there's something new I been working on which is the next great step in pharmaceutics: multi-purpose pills."

"Lay down the book, Professor," says Benny. This time the Professor gets the idea.

He puts it down careful with a bookmark for his place instead of open, because he thinks more of books than he does of people. This book, the Professor tells me later, is on the de-

cline and fall of the rum empire; it is about Repeal, I guess. He also says it is wrote by a monkey, which I know is a joke because no monkey could have wrote such a thick book.

The Professor has a thin body and a thin face; there is even a thin, gray tuft of beard on the chin. He has deepset blue eyes which always look like they are laughing without no joke. He is no professor, though; he ain't never taught in college. That is just what we call anybody who knows more about books than the rest of us.

Once the Professor is a doctor, medical type. Benny bought him a long time ago, and he has his license lifted shortly afterward for dispensing narcotics and being careless about the records.

He tells us about the pills. They are made in layers like a onion with a coat of shellac between. On the outside, say, they got a sedative, inside, a stimulant. This does away with all the sleep problems that people are having these days.

Instead of not getting waked up in the morning until the afternoon, they take the pill at night. The barbiturate on the outside sings them a lullaby; before the guy has time to worry about his bank balance, he is pounding his ear. In eight hours the shellac melts, the amphetamine goes "Zowie!" and he's out of bed, cheerful, rested, and ready for bear.

It seems like nine-tenths of a guy's troubles are worrying about not getting enough sleep; this keeps him awake so that next day he is too sleepy to work. The Professor calls it a vicious circle.

Benny sits in his wrought-iron and canvas chair, not moving, looking through the glass wall distant over the hills toward the Pacific. Finally he says, "Man cannot live on sleep alone."

So you see it was Benny's idea after all.

For a while it is like Saturday night in the red-light district until I begin to wish for some of them pills the Professor tells about, being just as big but not as young as I used to be. Benny and the Professor sit up until the night turns gray, just talking, using the big words and the funny names. That's when I sneak out and buy the dictionary; I write down the words and look them up later.

Benny writes a check for the Professor. When I see the amount, even I am startled. Benny laughs and says you could have knocked my eyes off with a stick.

With the money the Professor leases a plant that has gone broke making laxatives (the owners are too old-fashioned to

fake it up like candy or chewing gum). It has a laboratory and a production line, and he buries himself there with his assistants.

One of these is Dan Cooper. Dan is a young pill roller with ideals and not much money (it is funny how these things seem to go together). He is handsome, tall, and brown, and he has a fine future. He also has a sister named Alison who is no bigger than a bug and just as cute.

I know a lot about Dan Cooper. Benny has his eye on him from the start. Benny likes smart young guys; he tells me to find out everything I can—the good and the bad. And I do.

Then, just as we are ready to swing into production, the Professor collapses. It don't surprise me none, as he has been working twenty-eight hours a day for a month. I do not see this myself (being on the Dan Cooper job). In fact only Benny is there.

He calls Dan in to hear the news, how he and the Professor are in the Beverly Hills place and suddenly the Professor breaks down. Benny brings him a drink, but he is past that. What he needs is a long rest. This is what he is going to have, Benny tells Dan, real sorrowful, no matter how bad he is needed at the plant.

Dan gets a funny look on his face like maybe he is remembering something or waiting for something. It could be what Benny tells him then: he is putting Dan in charge of the plant, and production should start immediately.

Dan sits back, his tan fading. He is surprised and maybe pleased, too. This he should be, as he is only out of pharmacy school a few years, and he has answered our ad from his low-paying job as a chain store pill roller.

"From now on," Benny says, real cheerful, "you are our Pill Roller in Chief."

Dan gets back his color. I think he don't like the name, but he says only, "How much?"

This is sensible, and Benny says, "Ten thousand flat or five thousand and five percent of the net. Think it over. One thing we got to have fast—a name."

"Nostrum?" says Dan.

"The public don't go for these fancy Greek names," says Benny. "We need something they'll remember."

"Panacea?"

"Elixir?"

"Tonic?"

"Pill-O?" I toss in, caught in the game.

Benny gives me a nasty look, but Dan says it is not so bad for the sedative-stimulant pill. Benny shrugs and points out that we need a name for the whole line.

"Taps?" suggests Dan.

Benny makes a face and says that's what the bugles blow over the graves of dead soldiers.

Dan thinks for a little and says, hesitant, "Remedy?" Benny considers it but shakes his head.

"I got one more," Dan says, sighing. "Topsies."

Benny gets this distant look in his eyes again. When he comes back he says, thoughtful, "Topsies?"

"I 'spect I growed, said Topsy," Dan says in a falsetto. "Don't think nobody never made me."

"Yeah," says Benny, soft and easy. "Yeah. They just growed. Danny boy, you just earned yourself a thousand buck bonus."

Dan sits back again, not realizing yet how Benny does things—big. People say a lot of things about Benny, but nobody ever says he is small.

There is just one thing, says Dan. What about distribution?

Benny says Dan should not worry about this. Dan's business is research and production, and Benny will take care of everything else.

This is a nice way of telling Dan to mind his own business, but that is Benny—always thinking of the other guy.

Dan needs money—he has some old debts, and he is putting Alison through college—but he frowns and says, "A lot of drugs we're using—Federal law prohibits dispensing without a prescription. I want to make it clear that I want no part of any conspiracy to break the law."

Benny looks thoughtful and then laughs. "Of course you don't. We're clean. I've already bought myself a fistful of medics. We're all set. Nobody can touch us. Why, we don't even need protection."

Dan studies the Persian rug on the floor like there is writing on it to tell him what to do. "I'll take the ten thousand," he says, and his voice is kind of hoarse.

"Okay, Pill Roller," Benny says, sort of sneering. I don't see what he got to sneer about. Dan has just saved Benny at least a hundred Gs.

A week later the ads start. Like I say, when Benny hasn't got it, he knows where to go for it. He hires him the highest-priced publicity man in L.A.—where publicity men grow big and come high—but Benny says you get what you pay for, and in this case he is right.

For a few days, this question runs on almost every page in every paper in Southern California: "TOPSIES! WHAT ARE THEY?" This is followed by: "LITTLE ANNIE ROONEY CAN DO IT—WHY NOT YOU? TOPSIES—THE NEW WAY TO FEEL GOOD ALL OVER." And: "IS YOUR DAY

TOO MUCH FOR YOU?—ADJUST WITH TOPSIES!"

Finally comes the quarter-page ads, dignified, with a lot of white space like in the wedding announcement when Louie the Enforcer married the daughter of One-Shot McGee. I got it in front of me now:

FEELING LOW?

Topsies!

Revolutionary Discovery

Topsies!

We can cure what ails you

ONE PILL

And You're a New Man

Tailored

For You—And You Alone

Topsies!

(Under Medical Supervision)

After this come the billboards and the commercials. For a while Benny is using a theme song called "You're the Tops," but a man named Porter complains and Benny has a new one written special in a jiggling rhythm he calls calypso.

Well, the line forms on the right, and it is quite a line. Before the cut-rate drugs can figure out what hit them, we got all the business, and they got bottles on their shelves and counters which collect nothing but dust.

Because Topsies has got it. I know. When Dan says he needs someone to test new Topsies on, Benny looks around and his eye lights on me. "What," says Dan, "your Boswell?" Since Benny only smiles, I do not resent it. It is not in my medical dictionary, but Benny tells me it is about my writing down words.

From then on I have no trouble sleeping. Life, like the radio says, can be beautiful. At bedtime I am taking Pill-Os. When the deluxe model comes out, I take that, too. I never do figure out how they do it. A couple minutes after it goes down, I hear far-off chimes playing "Rockabye Baby." Ten hours later (I need a lot of shut-eye), I get kicked out of bed with a jolt of amphetamine and a bugle playing "Reveille."

As I was in the Army, I am not fond of this last, and I get them to change it to "Red Red Robin."

That is only the beginning.

Before it is over it gets so walking down the street is like taking a stroll through a record store; you are haunted by muffled tunes.

The way Benny explains it, the idea is so simple that you

wonder why nobody thinks of it before. Benny says that is the way with all great ideas.

A man isn't a machine to oil and gas up and send on its way. A man needs a lot of different things at a lot of different times. Maybe he needs a kick in the pants to get him started in the morning. Maybe at night he needs a pat on the back to unstring him, a shove through the fun-house door, and a rocking chair to send him to dreamland when the fun is over.

Life, says Benny, is a lot like a roller coaster. It's not the ups and downs get you; it's not being ready for them. What a man needs is something to help him enjoy the ups and make the most of them, to smooth out the downs and start him back up again.

It seems like the good things in life happen when a man can't enjoy them, like girls when you're too young to know and too poor to do anything about it. And when you're old enough and rich enough, the importance is gone. Topsies can't do much about the first thing.

Topsies growed all right.

From two layers, they go to four, then six, eight, and finally —Dan's masterpiece—a 16-layer pill that lasts all week end. I am the guinea pig for all of them.

They're simple, too. All the medics need is a schedule, and they prescribe enough pills to last a week, a month, a year. They ain't too expensive, neither—not for what you get, which is a personality tailored to your day. Not many of us can tailor our days to ourselves.

Take the standard eight-layer Topsy. Wake up with a cheerful Benzedrine glow. A hour later pepsin and bismuth help you digest your breakfast. Shortly afterward you get your daily dose of vitamins, which you will otherwise forget. Layer four is caffein and dextrose for quick energy to combat the midmorning slump; this also saves time, as it replaces the coffee break.

After the eat-and-run businessman's special, there's more pepsin and bismuth. Layer six is cascara; nature may forget, but Topsies never do. The next layer is optional, depending on your plans for the evening. If you're going on the town, it's more amphetamine to make sure you enjoy it; if you're staying home, it's an aphrodisiac for the same purpose.

And finally, of course, Nembutal for a well-deserved rest.

This is living. There is no pain, no strain, no worry about will you be ready for what happens. If you've planned right, you'll be ready. You got to be ready.

There's problems. There always is, in anything. Bugs, like

they say in the airplane racket. People got to learn to make schedules and stick to them. Otherwise they find themselves digesting their own stomachs or all heated up and no place to go.

These things iron themselves out.

We have a lawsuit or two. The troubleshooting department takes these in stride. There's the traveling salesman who got unexpected orders to stay on the road. A word to the judge, a few bucks to the chambermaid, and a call from the salesman's district manager (a faithful customer), and there's no difficulty.

In spite of the medics on the payroll and the hand-tailoring of every pill, the price is right. Assembly line methods make them practically cheap. At the peak, Benny is selling nearly a million a day, and that is just on the West Coast.

You'd think the pills would be too big to swallow. Funny enough, nobody ever has any trouble. Maybe it is the slick coating Dan puts on them. Benny, though, he says what with politics and commercials, people have got so they'll swallow anything.

Some of them pills is planned so careful that when it's time to head home from the nightclub a layer of vitamin B-6 hits the driver to sober him up. And next morning there is a layer of vitamin B-1 and some concentrated sauerkraut juice for the hangover.

Benny and Dan have pills for everybody. There is no more need to worry about baby's schedule; he's awake only to eat and say "Gah!" when Daddy comes home. In the evening the kids are out of the way on time; when it is time for them to get sleepy, they're sleepy. There are even Topsies for housewives to match their favorite soap operas. And there is one well-known actress who is playing a tough role on Broadway that she could never have touched without Benny.

Special jobs like this, of course, cost extra.

It seems like there is no limit to what Topsies can do.

Once in a while we are annoyed by Food & Drug snoopers, but they can't touch us. Everything we dispense is prescribed. The local medical society gets blood in its eye. They suggest that the medics we have bought for the business are not what they should be; they can't treat that many people a day. This is mere jealousy; the business of the local medics has been cut in half.

We're all pretty much the same.

Benny quietly points out to each and every one of them that they are all wide open to malpractice suits. The subject is dropped.

And then there is the Revenue agents. The poor and the T-men, Benny says, we always have with us. Benny has filed only one quarterly estimate, and they are suspicious already. Benny shows them the books, how he is scarcely making a dime, what with rent, expenses, and salaries. Each of the docs, for instance, is getting a hundred grand each.

It is practically philanthropy on Benny's part.

The T-men suspect, of course, that Benny is getting a kickback from the medics and maybe a few others, but if so it is done so clever they can't prove nothing.

That is Benny; he is always legal.

I am in the middle of a 16-layer-special when I discover what is in the basement. And boy, do I feel sick.

Dexedrine has lifted me out of bed, humming, a shot of B-complex vitamins has cured my hangover and give me a appetite, and I am going down to pick me out a steak for breakfast.

When the doorbell bongs I am glad to come up. Extremely glad!

It is Dan Cooper. He looks at me like he thinks I am a ghost, and he only gets a little off the track. He is excited himself, as he is supposed to meet Benny here and where is he?

Benny comes down the stairs in his silk robe, so quiet you are surprised, and he says what's the matter, Danny boy?

Dan jumps and then blurts out that he's been taking inventory for the Feds and there is chlorpromazine missing from the laboratory. Also some Phenergan and Dolosal.

There is nothing to get upset about, Benny says, but Dan insists that the stuff is dangerous. Somebody could fool around with it and get hurt, as it is not fully tested.

Well, what does it do? asks Benny, but he is not much interested.

The chlorpromazine makes drugs work better, says Dan, like anesthetics, sedatives, and narcotics. Alone, it makes like winter on bears, a sort of three-months sedative. With Phenergan and Dolosal, it makes a cocktail that nobody would ask for refills, as it blocks the automatic nervous system.

All of this I do not understand, even later when I look up the words, but somehow I breathe easier about what I seen in the basement.

Besides, Dan winds up, he is responsible for the stuff and suppose the Food & Drug boys drop around?

This is nothing, says Benny. In the first place the drugs are probably gone from when the Professor was in charge. And

the Professor was always a little careless with records.

Benny looks at me and chuckles.

So the Professor is holding the sack. In the second place, says Benny, he is getting in his own bookkeeper to take care of petty details like inventory so that Dan will not be bothered.

There is only one thing for Dan to do, and he does it. He shrugs. By the way, he says, like he just thought of it, where *is* the Professor?

"Who wants to know?" Benny asks sharp.

"Something might come up we need him," Dan points out. "He kept a lot of details in his head."

Benny laughs, easy. "Don't worry. You want him, we got him on ice."

I jump then. Dan looks at me funny. "Sure, sure," I say, and Benny looks at me funny.

Some days you can't win.

"One more thing," says Dan, "I want you should take away the men who been watching my sister."

Benny looks sad and shakes his head. "You don't understand, Danny boy. Those men are only for your sister's protection. After twenty-thirty years, there's men who still got it in for me. They're scared to come at me direct, so they take it out on the people who work for me."

He waggles his head sorrowful. "There's crazy people walking the streets. You should never see what they did to the wife of a runner of mine. Acid. . . ." Even Benny looks a little sick. "We wouldn't want anything like that to happen to your sister."

See what I mean about Benny? A real, sweet guy.

Dan don't get it. He sits there, white as heroin, not saying a word.

What's more, Benny goes on, there is that time Dan rolled the wrong pills at the chain-store pharmacy. Well, we all know it is a accident, what with working double shifts to pay expenses; even the police are convinced. But Alison might not understand. Dan wouldn't want some louse to spill that story, would he?

Still Dan don't understand. "You got to see what you are doing to the kid!" he blurts out. "Why should she be tortured because of me?"

Benny puts his arm around Dan's shoulder and hugs him like when he is special fond of a person. "Look, Danny boy," he says real gentle, "all you got to do is take care of your end of the business, and you got nothing to worry about. You roll the pills; I'll take care of everything else. Okay?"

Dan takes a deep breath and shakes his shoulders like he

don't want Benny's arm on him but can't get rid of it. Finally he realizes that Benny is only worried about him for his own good. "Okay," he says. His shoulders droop.

As he goes out he looks back at me like he thinks I know something and can maybe help him.

He is half right. When he is gone, I turn to Benny and say, "The boy is scared. You shouldn't oughta scare him, Benny."

Benny is looking off toward the Pacific. "A man got to be a little scared," he says soft. "It keeps him honest. One thing wrong with the Professor—he wasn't scared any more."

"The Professor—" I begin.

He puts his eyes on me like he used to. "The Professor is all right, understand. He's taking a rest. He don't need no help from you, what he's doing."

"Sure, but—"

"Jim," he says, sadlike, "don't you turn on me, too."

"Who turned on—" I stop; his eyes are hot. "Sure—I mean—of course. You know me, Benny."

For a while after that everything is rosy. The narcotics charge is just a bag of wind; there is nothing in it, and I want everyone should know Benny don't have nothing to do with snow or horse or anything like that. He is too smart to lay himself open for a Federal rap when he can make his legal.

Sure, maybe he does a favor for a friend and has a Topsy made up for a special occasion, harmless like hashish, yohimbine, Seconal, Dexedrine. . . . But nobody will scare into spilling anything for the Feds to work on, and the charge gets dropped fast.

It ain't all just sit back and count the moola, either. A man with a good thing gets competition. Benny, though, he knows how to handle competition. He knows from away back. The boys who try to use their muscle for an in get muscled right out on their fannies; they should know better. The legitimate boys are helpless for another reason: they can't figure out how we do it.

Think it over. A 16-layer pill to last for two days, three days, all week? Swell. Anybody can do it, and nobody can get a patent on it. We ain't got no protection. But we got what Dan calls a trade secret which keeps us from losing our monopoly: we know how to keep the Topsy in the stomach all week!

Some people say "Cork!" but that's silly. If we have a ball of cork in the middle to make the Topsy float, as soon as we sell the first one, it's no secret. Somebody else says they are

hollow and what makes them float is the air pocket. They're all wet, too.

The idea I like the best is that the core of each Topsy is iron and with each pill we furnish a little magnet that fits in the navel. Anybody what ever took a Topsy knows how funny this is.

And then there's people—doctors, some of them—say Topsies ain't nothing but sugar. Placebos, they call them. Psychological. They should know better. Any lab could tell them different.

What is it? I ain't telling. The Professor worked it out, and it's worth money in large, unmarked bills, which I am not giving away. I'll tell you this much. It ain't sugar. It ain't cork, it ain't iron, and it ain't air. And I'll whisper something else: don't give up hope—maybe Topsies ain't dead.

But, as I say, everything goes as smooth as two-hundred-buck call girl. L.A. is practically in our pocket. We got the Hollywood trade, we got the tourist trade, and what's most important we got the retired-Iowa-dentist trade. We are just about to go national.

Benny is talking production with some big-time pill rollers (Squibb and Merck look down their noses at us, which I figure is their neck). He is talking distribution with the top men in the rackets who would otherwise take it personal should we move in without their okay and percentage. He is talking, more quietly, to some union leaders with the same purpose. And some men with bankrolls to choke a alligator are pleading with Benny to take it and make it grow—like Topsies.

Then it happens.

Benny is in Dan's office at the plant, talking about a new 32-layer special, when the telephone rings. Dan reaches for the receiver, but Benny, still quick, beats him to it. Even where I am sitting I can hear the voice squeaking over the wire. The words I can't make out, but I watch Benny's face. It gets pale, then red, then funny gray like stone. His eyes are hard and hot—a mixture that makes my legs weak.

"Somebody," he says softlike as he sets down the receiver, "has tipped off the cops." And he looks at me.

"My God, Benny!" I say, squeaking a little myself. "You don't think I did it?"

"I don't know, but I tell you this—if you did it I advise you to head west and keep going."

"But the ocean is out that way!"

"That's what I mean," says Benny.

I shudder. "What's going on?" I plead.

"The cops are on their way

to the Beverly Hills place. They should be there by now. And you know what they're going to find."

"Yeah," I say, shaky, remembering what is in the basement.

"After that," says Benny, "they'll be coming after me."

"Maybe we both should start walking west," I say.

"Nuts!" Benny snarls. "They got nothing on me. They can't prove a thing. The only stuff can hurt me I got locked up in the one place they got no key to —my head."

"A lot of hard guys thought that," I say, sorrowful. "Only the cops got a rubber key that fits most of them."

Benny looks thoughtful like he is remembering. Then he shakes hisself, and he is the old Benny. "They used to pull me in two-three times a month back in the old days. They never beat nothing out of me."

"That is twenty-five years ago," I remind him. "You ain't as young nor as hard as you used to be."

"For once, Jim, you are right. I got no right to take chances," says Benny. "I got my responsibilities." He turns to Dan, who has been sitting in front of the desk not saying a word; he does not look as worried as he might be. "Dan. You are going to make me up a Topsy, and it is going to be timed tighter than a bank job."

"Okay, Benny," says Dan. "I'm just the pill roller. You tell me what you want, and I will roll it."

"The first layer will be Benzedrine," Benny says, looking distant. "When the cops come, I want to be on top of them. It is five miles from here to the station downtown; the patrol car will make it in ten minutes. I will spend thirty minutes talking to the brass before they take me to the little room. They will then take twenty minutes to warm up before they get impatient. That is an hour. One hour of amphetamine and brainwork. Then I want a sedative to hit me."

"I got it," says Dan, looking interested.

Benny studies his watch. "It is now 8:23. The cops will be here by 9:00, even if they can't find anybody knows I am here. An hour later is 10:00. To be on the safe side, the sedative will last for twelve hours. By that time my lawyer will be there with a writ. That's when the last layer will start to work. I want another jolt of amphetamine so I can laugh at the slobs in blue as I leave. Okay?"

"Right," says Dan, and he is smiling as he hurries past me into the lab.

He is back within half an hour, the Topsy lying in his hand like a golden marble. By then Benny has finished off the

legal details with his lawyer, and there is nothing more he can do.

"The cops just passed me," says the squawk box on Dan's desk, in a nervous voice.

"Happy days," says Benny, and downs the Topsy without a chaser.

The cops find the Professor, as Benny knows they will. He is just as I seen him when I went to the freezer for a T-bone and lost my appetite—stretched out in the long box like it was a new kind of coffin.

The freezer is not as cold as you might think. Benny has bored holes through the sides and the lid, and the cold sort of leaks out. But it is cold enough, and the Professor is stiff and blue.

I seen corpses look healthier.

But the Professor is no corpse, even though he has frost in his whiskers. When the coroner starts probing him, he sits up and complains bitterly because they have interrupted his sleep. He swears—and the cops cannot break down the story—that he is experimenting with chlorpromazine, and he is using himself as a guinea pig.

Benny, he says, agrees to help, and the Professor asks him to put his body away to see how long he will hibernate. Maybe, he tells the cops, he has discovered something that will revolutionize the world—a new way to spend the winter. In hard times the unemployed can be put away until needed.

This does not make the boys at headquarters feel too happy, as they have pulled in Benny and treated him with little respect. This is a mistake when they have not caught him with the smoking gun in his hand.

It looks then like Benny has beat the rap. His lawyer brings the writ to the station like he is the jailor hisself and the writ is the key to Benny's cell.

He is in for a shock which ruins what little is left of his respect for human nature.

The cops have Benny four ways from Sunday. They have him wrapped up as tight as the lowest petty larcenist ever caught. The D.A. is rubbing his hands, thinking about how he is going to like living in the governor's mansion. And Benny has done it all hisself.

The Topsy is to blame for it all. If there is ever a Frankenstein's monster, that is it.

The first layer works like an Alabama convict. Then the second layer melts, and the cops sit there with their eyes bugging out and their ears flapping. Just in time they remember to bring in a recorder and a stenographer. Both.

Benny answers questions, and the cops don't even lay a pinky on him. He tells them things

even I don't remember, about New York and the old days, details, names, addresses. Where he gets them I do not know, as his memory is never so good before. He sings like he is the biggest stoolie ever lived.

The cops get everything, from the waterfront rackets and numbers drops to the awful details about the Topsy business. They will be years picking up after the leads Benny gives them, even with the help of the F.B.I., the T-men, and police departments all over the country.

It is amazing how much a man can say in two hours before he falls asleep.

The sedative works fine. He does not feel a pain. There is only one small drawback. The sedative Dan uses is scopolamine, which is what he calls a hypnotic.

Get the picture. Benny full of scopolamine, that bright light shining in his eyes, voices asking him questions out of the darkness. It is sickening.

Before Benny goes out, they get his signature on the statement. And he is never able to show a bruise.

The amphetamine hits Bennie at ten a.m. sharp. It goes "Zowie!" Benny sees the statement. He goes "Argh-gh!"

Topsies are finished.

The Feds step in. The licenses of the docs Benny has on the payroll are quietly lifted. The plant is closed down, and the stock of Topsies is tossed to the fishes. Who said "poor fishes?"

Dan, funny enough, has his pick of a dozen high-priced jobs. I guess a good pill roller is hard to find.

The ones what got taken, as always, is you—the people. For a little while you got a chance to live the life the gods would of lived if they had invented Topsies. Then it gets took away.

Seems like Something don't want people happy.

Look at Prohibition! Look at the Narcotics Act! Look at the anti-gambling laws! And now look at Topsies!

The reason I am telling you is I want you should know the truth about Benny. He ain't near as bad as they make out. All he ever is interested in is to give the people what they want.

On a lot of the raps the statute of limitations has run out, but the cops got enough on Benny to hold him until he can use his beard for a mattress. This is all right with Benny. He don't want out. There are too many people waiting for him.

By the time you read this it will be too late to do anything. Because Benny is so cooperative, the cops refuse extradition and aren't near as hard as they might be.

He's doing life—without benefit of Topsies.

So are the rest of us.

what's new in crime

by... Hans Stefan Santesson

Recent essays in the somewhat less gentle arts—and comments on the year's best—

OF THE hundred or so mysteries that this column has read in the course of the year (this is being written a few hours before we usher in the New Year) three novels stand out as—each in their way—examples of a trend sometimes obscured by the trade emphasis on the more basic school of writing.

In 1955—J. J. Marrick's superb portraiture of the methodology of Scotland Yard at work, GIDEON'S DAY (Harper's), and Henri Catalan's earlier novel about the gently shrewd and very French little Sister of the Poor, SOEUR ANGELE AND THE EMBARRASSED LADIES (Sheed & Ward), shared honors as the most satisfying examples of the genre this column had read.

This year I nominate these three—

John Dickson Carr's delightful PATRICK BUTLER FOR THE DEFENCE (Harper's), which you had the feeling Carr thoroughly enjoyed writing;

Ellery Queen's sensitive INSPECTOR QUEEN'S OWN CASE (Simon and Schuster), a beautifully handled description of the retired Inspector, incredulously

Still dedicated to the premise that a certain school of writing, which shall be nameless, is not to be confused with the field as a whole, this column again discusses some novels that will be remembered—and mysteries you should read

facing the long dull years ahead; and

Leigh Brackett's THE TIGER AMONG US (Doubleday), a challenging study of what is all too often dismissed—in appropriately hushed tones of course—as juvenile delinquency.

Sorry! Not a frustrated blonde in the lot! And not even a tired bottle of rye! Merely novels, to a large degree reflecting our somewhat less than settled times, and reflecting our complacency—or confusion—as we stare ahead. . . .

But to the recent titles!

A number of authors familiar to readers of *The Saint* will be found in the annual, ELLERY QUEEN'S AWARDS (Simon & Schuster. $3.50), the authors represented being the winners of the 11th Annual Short Story Contest sponsored by our friends over at EQMM. David Alexander's sensitive *The Man Who Went to Taltaul,* Stanley Ellin's *The Blessington Method,* Rufus King's *Miami Papers, Please Copy,* Veronica Parker Johns' appealing *Mr. Hyde-de-Ho,* and Michael Forrestier's interesting *Gifts to My People,* are all recommended.

John Creasey's THE GELIGNITE GANG (Harper's, $2.95) is undoubtedly the best of the Inspector West novels published over here. Creasey, the phenomenally prolific President of the British Crime Writers Association, takes you through the streets of London and into the conference rooms at Scotland Yard in this excellent and exciting novel of detection.

It is quite possible that Leigh Brackett's disturbing THE TIGER AMONG US (Doubleday, $2.95), is not going to be popular with some people. Terror—so long as it remains at a proper distance—has a certain vicarious and intriguing appeal, but here is no escapism, here is no synthetic stimulant; here is the very smell and sweat of Terror in the shadows of your own world. . . .

This is not the illiterate, mono-syllablic urge to hurt and torture and to mutilate This is weak and immature and unformed and reasonably well-mannered—and sniggering. . .

This story of what happens to Walter Sherris when and after he is attacked by five young men who wanted the thrill of beating a man senseless, is a dramatization of that wave of violence—that tittering, adolescent urge to violence—that is so quickly buried under a juvenile delinquency heading.

What makes these youngsters tick? What prompts that look in their eyes, and that almost atavistic laugh, as they close in? What is there in our times that has

contributed to this impulse—to this national wave of violence—that admittedly crosses social barriers? Perhaps Leigh Brackett's novel will make some people think about this Tiger that lives in our shadows. . . .

Robina Mellanby, in E. X. Ferrars' KILL OR CURE (Doubleday, $2.95), had no inkling of the jealousy and the hate which were so much a part of the tiny village when she first came to Burnham Priors. From the very first moment, through the hours—the long, frightening hours—when her husband was accused of murder, Robina felt there was no one to whom she could turn. It so happened, of course, that both she and the murderer did not really understand people. . . .

Brett Halliday, whose Michael Shayne is very much a part of the history of American detective fiction in a way imitators have never quite succeeded in equalling, brings back an early adventure in his HEADS YOU LOSE (Dodd Mead—Torquil, $2.95), reissued for the many who have asked the author, "What happened to Phyllis?" Meet Herbert P. Carlton, that interesting witness, and meet again (it *can't* be the first time, I'm sure) tough, hard-hitting Michael Shayne himself, plunging into danger with his usual disregard for his personal safety.

Murder is (as is usual in Arcadia novels) discreetly proper in Miriam Lynch's A MEETING WITH MURDER (Arcadia, $2.50), where a Society Editor discovers—and eventually explains—a rather understandable murder.

The somewhat more than decorative Alix Hildebrand had a past. Perhaps I am wrong, but I have an idea many of you will understand both the reactions of Captain Gridley Nelson, New York Homicide, *and* the complex behavior of Alix Hildebrand herself. These could very well be people who are neighbors of yours, living just around the corner, the way harrassed Alix Hildebrand is a neighbor of the Nelson family. Ruth Fenisong's recent BITE THE HAND (Doubleday, $2.75) is the story of a woman surrounded by some decidedly unpleasant people who threaten to destroy her marriage.

Frances Crane's latest, THE ULTRAVIOLET WIDOW (Random House, $2.95) is described by the publishers as one of her "finest ventures into the world of rigor mortis." Be that as it may, it *is* a pleasant excursion to an uncomplicated world into which murder intrudes, and Mexicans (the action takes place in Mexico) walk softly. . . .

the man in the shade

by . . . T. S. Stribling

The story might sell if it would end up in a murder or something. Anything less than murder was unthinkable!

HE WAS merely a tourist standing under the shade of the banyans around the Tiamara Yacht basin watching the boats come in. Nothing about him even caught my attention, much less tickled my suspicion, yet Poggioli, after only a couple of appraising glances pondered, "Wonder what he's spying on and why?"

This disturbed me. Not that Dr. Henry Poggioli, ex-professor of criminal psychology, has not a right to suspect whom and when he pleases. He has. But I did not want him to head into a research so obviously empty of fraud, crime, deceit, murder and malfeasance as was this healthy, well kept, genial gentleman, standing in the shade. Time spent on such a man would be a direct financial loss to me for I make my living by writing and selling my notes on Dr. Poggioli's criminal researches. I tried to ease my friend away from this pointless extravagance.

"He's standing in the shade because the sun's hot," I said casually.

Here is an unusual story about the famous Henry Poggioli, former Professor of Criminal Psychology, which may at first seem to have no place in a magazine dedicated, as the title might suggest, to the Detective Story. But Professor Poggioli's role in this story of high finance is of course very *much apropos. . . .*

"Do you believe a tourist would do that?"

"Certainly, why not?"

"These tourists," he nodded at the spatter wandering around the basin, "pay forty dollars a day to come here, get blistered in the sun so they can go back North and prove they have had a vacation in Tiamara. No thrifty Yankee would waste time and money standing in the shade."

I should have let it go at that. Poggioli might have come along and stirred up some real mystery and illegality for my daily literary provender but I didn't stop talking in time. I said:

"He's watching the yachts come in," for there really were an uncommon number of yachts heading into the basin.

"Not that precisely, he's watching for some particular yacht to come in."

"How do you make that out?"

"If he were looking at the yachts in general he would continue walking as the others are doing, but when a man wants to pick out some particular boat, he stops and looks carefully."

Here I made my second mistake. "Why would he get back among the banyans to do his looking, why wouldn't he stand on the seawall?"

The criminologist nodded approval. "Good question, excellent question! That shows some surreptitious intention, an instinct to hide while he watches. It's why I knew he was a spy of some sort."

I laughed. This was the limit of the absurd. I asked Poggioli: "Don't you know the man is more conspicuous among the banyans than if he were walking around with the crowd?"

"Possibly he has something which he doesn't want anybody to see, not even fellow sightseers. Is he carrying a package of any sort?"

"I don't see any."

"Of course you don't see any. If you saw one I'd see it too. I'm asking you doesn't his posture suggest he is carrying a package in his left arm away from traffic?"

"I don't know what his posture would be like," I said.

"It would be like he's standing now," uttered Poggioli a little impatiently, "with his left shoulder a trifle higher than his right."

I, too, was out of patience. "You think he's a spy of some sort because his left shoulder is fractionally higher than his right!"

"It's one, just one, indication of all I've mentioned. It would mean little or nothing taken by itself, but the sum total . . ."

Once well started there is utterly no end to Poggioli's deductions. Among the sightseers I was glad to see coming Bill Gebhardt, the *Tiamara Times*

crime reporter. I hoped I would turn Poggioli away from this unfruitful will-o'-the-wisp onto some good solid crime which I trusted Gebhardt was investigating. When I hailed him and asked what he was up to, Bill gave me the high sign of a man in a hurry and called that he was on his way to a stockholders' meeting.

I hurried after him and joined him. So did Poggioli.

I said, "Gebhardt, you're not holding back something from me, are you? Wouldn't do that, would you? You are no financial writer, you're a police reporter and you know that I have always taken your stories and worked them up into something readable . . ."

"Sloane, the city editor, sent me over here, to a stockholders' meeting at the City Yacht Club." He seemed evasive to me.

"He couldn't have sent you to a stockholders' meeting at the Municipal Yacht Club because the club hasn't any stockholders." I felt quite a logician catching Gebhardt up like that.

"He means all the stockholders of this company are yacht owners," explained Poggioli absently, "and they sail in here and use the yacht clubhouse for their convenience. It explains why so many boats are coming in this morning."

Gebhardt seemed relieved that Poggioli had found out something which he had not been at liberty to tell.

"That's it exactly," he agreed, "this is strictly a blue chip company."

"I imagine the chairman of the board must have asked the city editor to send you specially," hazarded Poggioli, "or he never would have sent you."

The crime reporter seemed a bit surprised at the psychologist's deduction. "I believe I was sent for," he admitted.

It seemed this might be something of interest from a mystery writer's viewpoint even if it weren't out and out murder, which, of course, I would have preferred. So I said,

"Look here, Gebhardt, take me and Poggioli along with you. No telling what's going to pop up and three experts are better than one."

"Have only one ticket of admission," regretted Gebhardt, "and only one photograph to prove that I am myself. Awfully sorry. Wish I could wangle you both in but I can't," and he started around the basin toward the clubhouse.

"Listen," called Poggioli after him, "if you need me send a boy."

"Thanks, I'll do that, Dr. Poggioli, I certainly will," and he was gone.

I was never more reluctant to see a man go. I had utterly nothing to write about. I said

to Poggioli, "Do you suppose we could follow him and somehow get into the room next to the stockholders' meeting? I want to see why a big corporation asked the city editor to send a crime reporter to cover their meeting."

"I think we'll find out anyway, and if we don't it won't make any difference."

"How do you mean, 'we'll either find out or it won't make any difference'?"

"If the problem is too deep for Gebhardt, he'll send for us. If it isn't too deep for him, it would hold no intellectual interest for me."

"Yes, that's all right for you," I said drily, "your bread is already baked but I've got to eat. I'd like to know more about this story Gebhardt's after. It might sell, if it could end up in a murder or something."

"That's not likely," said Poggioli.

"Well, what are we going to do now?" I asked. "Let the morning slip away without any copy at all?"

"I believe we'd better go back to the man under the banyans," said Poggioli.

I was never so outdone. "That fellow!" I ejaculated. "Leave a vague but rather hopeful hint to go stare at a tourist under a banyan!"

"We have nothing to do now, unless Gebhardt sends for us," said Poggioli. "We might drop back and talk to this fellow. If he is communicative, we'll go off and leave him. If he is reserved I'll probably be able to find out why and that might be something for you to write about."

As he started back the way we came there was nothing I could do but follow him. If I went to the clubhouse and bribed my way into the room adjoining the board meeting, I knew I wouldn't be able to make any of those acute deductions which Poggioli seems to turn out effortlessly, and which I sell. My dependence upon this obstinate old criminologist, poling off in the wrong direction, galled me. If I could have deserted him and lived, I would have done so. Back we went around the curving promenade among the usual pedestrians until again we reached the particular banyan under which the fellow had stood. The place was empty. An ironic gratification filled me.

"So here we are," I said, "with our walk for nothing."

"Nothing!" snapped Poggioli, looking at me, "him not being here is the very thing I expected, because it is now past twelve o'clock. However, I wanted to check on him and make sure."

Now I was quite at a loss, "What do you think went with him at twelve?"

"That's the hour the board

of directors meet. Evidently his boat came in. He either joined it at the wharf or went on to the clubhouse for the meeting."

I was completely up in the air. "Listen, you said he had a package he was concealing . . ."

"Yes, I noticed he held his left shoulder higher than his right."

"Then what do you think it was?"

"Since he was looking for a special yacht to come in, I don't know. Now if he had been a tourist with a package as you thought he was, he'd have carried a kodak, a pair of binoculars, a bottle of sun lotion, dark glasses, swimming fins for his feet and a watch guaranteed to run under water."

Poggioli's flippancy annoyed me. Somehow I myself had begun to feel the man was not an ordinary tourist. "What are we going to do now?" I asked. "Just stand here like this?"

"It's all we can do at the moment."

"Don't you want to find the banyan man again and see what he's doing now?"

"Certainly, that's the problem, what's the fellow doing now?"

"Let's go look for him," I suggested under a certain nervous pressure.

Poggioli took hold of my arm. "No, wait. Gebhardt left us here and he'll send a club attendant here to find us."

"But will he certainly send a boy?" I questioned uneasily.

"If the man under the tree has anything to do with the stockholders' meeting, Gebhardt will certainly send for me."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because the situation will be complicated; he will need my help."

"Suppose he can work it out by himself?"

"In that event the problem would be too simple to interest us in the first place."

"I don't believe the man under the trees had anything to do with the stockholders' meeting."

"Maybe not, in that instance, Gebhardt, of course, won't send for us."

"Then what will we do?"

"Let's wait a few minutes. If nothing happens, we'll take a taxi home."

I was exasperated but mainly at the correctness of Poggioli. If there were no complications between the man and the meeting then neither one really furnished dramatic stuff. But I wanted to see what each one was. The idea of just walking off and leaving an unresolved situation gaffed me even if it all turned out to be a very simple matter. Poggioli on the other hand was philosophic, the moment he saw a situation lacked intellectual complications, he was through with it. I wished I were like him but I wasn't. Presently he got

to his feet, glanced at his watch and obviously began looking for a taxi. He hailed one which drew up near our bench. He motioned me inside and followed me. As he did so a boy with a blue cap came running up the promenade with a letter.

"Is this Dr. Poggioli?" he gasped out of breath.

My companion said yes and reached for the letter.

My relief squeezed my chest. I said, "Boy, how did you guess this was Dr. Poggioli?"

"Mr. Gebhardt described you, sir. He said you would be with Dr. Poggioli, and there was no way to miss you, sir, among these wealthy tourists, sir."

I was somewhat taken aback. I said, "Yes, I see; there probably wasn't."

Poggioli said, "Driver, take us to pier twenty-three."

It is my misfortune when I'm following a clue like this one to get so excited that I can hardly put heads and tails together.

I asked in a low tone, "Will Gebhardt be at twenty-three?"

"Gebhardt sent the note from the club," said Poggioli.

"I see, so Gebhardt is at the clubhouse!"

"Presumably."

"What did he say in the note?"

"Go to twenty-three and use your discretion."

"Is that all?"

"That's all."

"What does he mean?"

"I don't know. If I knew I wouldn't go."

This in a way was allegorical. It meant if he understood the whole mystery on which we had embarked, he naturally, would finish the business by going home to lunch. His interest in criminals and crime was always admiring and purely intellectual, never retributive. In fact it was the typical American standpoint. In the midst of these reflections, I suddenly ejaculated:

"Look! Look, Poggioli, yonder's the man we saw under the banyan!"

And sure enough it was. He was one of a kind of receiving group on the deck of a large Latin-American vessel; rather too large for a yacht, but it evidently was a yacht nevertheless. Everybody was shaking hands in the manner of very wealthy men who have not been financially scuttled up to now.

There was a crowd on the quay, of course, watching the scene on the yacht. Poggioli paid off our taxi driver and we moved together through the sightseers to the boat's gangplank. I don't know whether anyone would have stopped us or not, I mean if nobody had recognized our criminological importance, which no one seemed to do. But just at this moment that collective resistance which keeps social and financial groups separated from

intruders was broken up by a very peculiar happening.

A man, an outsider whom I knew, a customs inspector named Sloane, had also come aboard, whether professionally or as sightseer, I don't know. At any rate he was walking around over the polished deck and paused at the well containing the anchor chain. He reached down into the well, finally lifted himself over into it and came out with a bundle.

The whole matter was simply nothing. No one paid him the least attention. But Sloane looked at his bundle, examined it, then with a queer expression walked straight into the felicitating group to the yacht's owner. He showed the bundle to the owner. I am sure nobody would ever have paid any attention to Sloane at all but he wore the cap of a customs inspector. Amid the genial chatter he said something to the skipper. The skipper said *"Que?"* and looked at him. Sloane repeated whatever he had said. A circle of surprise, then of amazed embarrassment spread over the group on deck and reproduced itself in excitement and curiosity among the sightseers on the dock.

"Ca, Señor, that ees emposseblay," ejaculated the skipper in amazement, "the presidential yacht with a theeng like that on board!"

Sloane made a gesture. "It's always a surprise to the crew of a boat. It is even to me, in a case like this."

Everybody heard them. Nobody was talking but the two. The officer said:

"Señor Inspector, I am truly shocked. I suppose you will confiscate that. Eef you do eet ees all right with our crew. We did not even know eet was there . . ."

"As a matter of fact," said Sloane, "it is my duty to confiscate your boat and everything on it. Nothing can be removed from the boat . . ."

"Pero Señor . . . but, Señor, we did not know eet was there!"

"I know that, Captain, a complete surprise . . . !"

"But, Señor, Dios mio! Do you eemagine we would have risked the ship and her cargo for a . . . a . . . leetle package like that. What ees it worth?"

"It's about fifteen thousand dollars' worth of marijuana, Captain."

"Feefteen, thousan' . . ."

"That's right."

"Leesten, ees eet sensible, ees eet reasonable that we would risk two hundred and twenty meelion in stock securities, not to mention our boat, to smuggle in feefteen thousand dollars worth of marijuana?"

"No."

"Then, Señor, let us go. We

come to a stockholders' meeting with stock and proxies . . ."

"Captain, if we let people go who do idiotic things, the government might as well abolish customs and discharge its inspectors."

Suddenly all the guests aboard began talking. "It was absurd!" "Stake a vast fortune for a penny!" "Something was wrong!"

"Leesten," suggested the captain suddenly. "Eet was not taken ashore. Eet would never have been taken ashore. I myself am a . . . an addict . . . a slave to the drug . . . my liquors, eef I keep them een my bar, closed up, they are legal till I sail out again, no? Would that be true also weeth my marijuana?"

"Not dropped down in the well of your anchor, Captain, and it is more than you could use for the rest of your life."

"Listen, my frien's," called the captain to the group, "weel not some of you vouch for me and my ship, and let us go to the stockholders' meeting in the clubhouse?"

Came a rush to do this. The man whom we had seen under the banyans came forward to protest for the captain. "If the captain was subject to a weakness, it was not the duty of American customs officers to seize on his ship which was visiting our port to cast a majority of votes in a great financial decision. He arrived as a guest, he should transact his business and depart as a guest!"

It's a great pity that rhetoric no longer rules the South. Sixty years ago it did and at that time the captain would certainly have got off free. Now it was different.

"Nothing goes off this boat, Captain," repeated Sloane, "the boat itself stays here where it's moored until the government disposes of this case."

The sightseers on the quay began a kind of mumbling, shuffling protest at this ruling. In the midst of this Poggioli approached the official. "Inspector Sloane," he suggested reasonably, "the question is not whether el Capitan Guiterrez uses a narcotic, it is whether or not he brought this package of narcotics in with him on his boat."

"He practically admitted he brought it in when he said he smoked the weed himself."

"That's true but he thought by that he might get some important business property ashore. Those two things contradict each other. A smoker of reefers would never be put in charge of a million dollars worth of securities at a stockholders' meeting. So you can forget the captain's vague plea of personal privilege."

Now a great many persons recognized Poggioli and the

inspector was grateful for his assistance.

"That's my opinion. I hate to tie up a yacht but I'll have to do it."

"Wouldn't a good deal depend on whether the package really came in on the yacht?"

"Certainly, that's the gist of the charge."

"Wouldn't it be proper for you to look at the matter in action and see for yourself?"

The inspector looked at his parcel undecidedly. "I don't see anything on it that says where it comes from."

"The knot," suggested the criminologist. "A new knot is fairly easy to untie but an old knot, long in salt air, is quite difficult."

Somebody on the quay broke into relieved laughter and called,

"Go to it, Poggioli! That's a fact, Inspector!"

Inspector Sloane did manipulate the tie of the string and I could see that it slipped easily.

"I couldn't let him off on a point like that. Dr. Poggioli," said the official between a question and a statement.

"No, certainly not, just a beginning. The string, what about the string? It's the flat, waxed variety which you don't find in this boat's port of origin."

Delight from the quay, a mixed reaction on the yacht's deck. The man from the banyan shade seemed quite at a loss at Poggioli's simple analysis. The tourists on the shore began calling, "Turn the captain aloose, he's all right!"

"He could have got some American twine," said the inspector half to Poggioli and half to the onlookers.

The criminologist waved the matter away, "A mere detail, Inspector, which proves nothing just as you say. How about testing the salinity of the paper?"

"The . . . what?"

"Salinity."

Inspector Sloane rubbed a tentative finger over the parcel. "If it did have salt on it, Dr. Poggioli . . . then what?"

A laugh went up from the quay at the inspector's ignorance although all of the sightseers were probably in the same boat.

"It would mean this," explained the scientist, "if that package came here on the yacht it has been in the salt air for several days and must be highly saline. If it has just been put aboard it may or may not be salty. The person who tied up the parcel might have known enough to rub salt on the paper, or sprinkle it with salt water. A microscopic test would show either method. On the other hand he may have been innocent enough to forget all about the salt air. In that instance proof that this package came aboard here in Tiamara is complete. In

short a test for salinity could clear Captain Guiterrez but it can't convict him with certainty."

Some of the crew members cried, "Bien! Bravo!" From the dock, "Go to it. Inspector, give the captain a break!"

I do not believe the inspector knew how to test for salinity. I myself thought of chewing a bit of the paper around the bundle and then noticing the middle of my tongue where I believe salt is tasted.

"All you need," explained Poggioli casually, "is an alcohol lamp. Burn a piece of paper which you know has been on the yacht all the time, then burn a bit of this wrapper. The first flame will certainly show the yellow of sodium, that wrapper may or may not show yellow when it burns. That's what we want to find out."

The moment he said this everybody knew all about the experiment and there was much relief on deck and dock. One of the crew went to get an alcohol lamp. In the interim I made a note of how to test for salinity because if the time ever comes when I will be forced to unravel criminal mysteries for literary purposes on my own, I certainly want a scientific technique to fall back on.

As I wrote the man from under the banyan came across deck to me and Poggioli.

"I had no idea there were so many ways to tell where a parcel came from," he said, looking at the inspector manipulate the alcohol lamp.

"Those were just a few gross methods," said the criminologist. "If you go into microscopy, chemical analysis, a Latin-American package would bear no more resemblance to a North American package than a rabbit to an elephant."

This, of course, was putting it on a bit thick, as Poggioli sometimes does. But it impressed the man from under the banyan.

"Would you like a position, Dr. Poggioli, where you would have very little to do and draw say about forty or fifty thousand a year?"

A cold chill ran over me at this proposition and I was deeply relieved to hear Poggioli say he had an honorarium quite sufficient for his needs.

I felt sure, in fact everybody felt sure, that the test would come out clear of salt and it did. A great cheer went up from dock and something that passed for a cheer from deck. A guard instantly assembled on deck bringing envelopes containing stock certificates and a big leather bag full of proxies.

They marched off the gangplank to the applauding quay and then on around the tiled surface of the promenade to the rococo entrance of the Tiamara Municipal Yacht Club.

Frankly I was heartsick. We had spent that entire morning utterly for nothing. Not a murder, not even a smuggling case. The only thing that was smuggled was going the wrong way; trying to get out, apparently, not in.

I said to Poggioli, "Call a taxi and let's get home."

"Look here," he said. "Doesn't it strike you as odd that somebody should spend fifteen thousand dollars trying to get a visiting yachtsman into trouble?"

He was trying to defend himself and I had no interest in his defense. I saw a taxi and waved it in. As the man drove up, I stepped inside. "Twenty-three Acacia Street," I said.

Poggioli hesitated and then exclaimed, "Wait, wait just a minute!"

"What for?" I said, "I need a lunch and a drink."

"It's Gebhardt," said Poggioli. "He's coming this way. He's running!"

I was half-minded not to wait for him. Gebhardt always runs or seems to and he never writes anything but journalese.

Gebhardt called to us while he was still some distance away.

"Did you let 'em go? Did you turn 'em loose?" He came up breathing from his hurry and his excitement.

I wondered whom he meant. I looked at Poggioli and was not sure he knew. However, he said, "Yes, yes, I thought it was best to get it over with."

"I'm sure it was," nodded the reporter in a disturbed manner. "It was such a corny trick we could hardly have done it a second time. I told the board when they planned it, it would be entirely up to you whether you would let it go through or not."

At this point a suspicion dawned in my head. "Gebhardt," I said, "do you happen to be talking about that marijuana somebody dumped on that foreign yacht?"

"That's right. Elderson did it. He was trying to sequester the boat and its cargo to keep a great load of sugar stock and a bunch of proxies being voted at the stockholders' meeting."

"What earthly interest," I cried, "did Captain Guiterrez have in the South Eastern Sugar Growers Association?"

"Dr. Poggioli knows all about that," said Gebhardt, brushing me off.

"He may do it," I said, "but I don't."

"It's simple enough," said the reporter. "Guiterrez himself is a poor man, a naval officer in charge of the presidential yacht. The shares and proxies were placed in his name so he could vote to change the South Eastern Sugar Growers Association into the South Eastern Tung Growers Association."

I was utterly bewildered. "Who wanted it changed?"

"The president of the republic . . . and the republic itself."

"How did anybody know such a question would come up?"

"It's been on the agenda for this meeting for the last six months. Some of the stockholders were just about to go crazy over it. Nobody knew whether tung oil would make money or not. But they did know it would not cash in for at least six years to come."

My head seemed to spin. Nothing seemed to make sense.

"Why did the president of a foreign country buy up stock and proxies in an American sugar growing company, and why shift it to tung oil?"

Gebhardt made a hopeless gesture.

"Because his country raises sugar and it doesn't raise tung oil. If Guiterrez pulls this, it will raise the international price of sugar some fractional part of a cent. This isn't a big company, but some of the stockholders have their entire fortunes in it."

Did Poggioli know all this from the time he first glimpsed the man under the banyans? I don't know.

"Who thought up the package smuggling aboard the yacht?" I asked, wondering if it were possible to work such a quiet undramatic move into a salable mystery story.

"Bill Elderson, the President of the company himself. Bill always lands on his feet somehow, but he hadn't counted in Dr. Poggioli here. I knew the doctor would see right through President Elderson's grammar school scheme and break it up if he thought best."

I did not then and do not now believe that Poggioli understood all this from the moment he saw the Sugar Association's man with a package under the banyan trees. However, the criminologist said nothing but simply sat in the motionless taxi batting his eyes and nodding faint assent to everything.

"Well," I said, "since he's got the Sugar Association in such a mess as this, how's he going to get 'em out?"

"I imagine he has decided to sacrifice this company so Congress will make proper laws about the voting of stock in American corporations. Our labor is protected from foreign competition. Our manufacturers are guarded by tariffs. But the poor devils of millionaire stockholders can see their businesses snatched up and shunted into some new and untried path in the twinkling of a stockholders' meeting by foreign financial competition. That is what Dr. Poggioli had in mind to correct by allowing Guiterrez and his gang to walk off their boat with the stock and proxy certificates."

All this was completely out of my line; no murders, no robberies, no beautiful women raving in the asylum; anything a man can make a mystery out of. I said to my friend:

"Well, what about it, Poggioli? Are you going to let these men lose every million they've got between them and starvation just so you can make a national example out of them?"

My blunt question aroused the criminologist from what seemed to be a coma.

"I have it," he said, "I have the solution. I will save these millionaires. Listen, Captain Guiterrez pretended he was a dope addict trying to free the stock and proxies for the service of his country?"

This seemed to be a sort of question and both Gebhardt and I agreed it was true.

"So there is an idealistic phase to this man," went on Poggioli.

Again we agreed.

"Very well; let us approach this on two levels, a lower individualic level and an international plane."

This was a new Poggioli to me, a synthetic, a constructive moulder of society and no longer the cold impersonal analyst of crime.

"What is—or what are your plans?" asked Gebhardt.

"This; the stockholders of this company have devoted their lives and fortunes to building up this Sugar Association; is it ethical for a foreign nation to wipe out their labors through a corner of their stock in open market?"

Gebhardt said he didn't believe that would work.

"I don't, either," nodded the psychologist intently, "but we will put that proposition to him first. With that as a background we will then propose this; Captain Guiterrez' country now owns the controlling shares of our Sugar Association. Why could it not consider the South Eastern Sugar Growers Association an extension of its own national domain, that is economically. That would give it a wider grasp on a world sugar monopoly than it has now. It could refuse to sell America sugar grown in America's own territory. If it then switches the land to tung oil that pressure will be lost. We will appeal to him from an idealistic and a realistic angle."

Both Gebhardt and I were impressed but not hopefully. The trouble was Poggioli went out on the limb too far in both directions. Gebhardt expressed this view to the great psychologist.

I must say I have never been so jittery over anything which had no relation to me whatsoever. There was no mysterious murder to this. I couldn't possibly sell it to the mystery magazines and as for the price of

sugar, I don't even use it in my coffee.

As we taxied over I beat my brain for some less theoretic approach to Captain Guiterrez, but none came. At the club entrance we jabbed a bill at the taxi driver, left the change to his keeping and hurried inside. Gebhardt said to the girl at the desk,

"Listen, honey, try to get President Enderson down from that stockholders' meeting at once. Tell him I've got Dr. Poggioli in the lobby and he has a plan!"

The girl herself waved at the elevator boy then brought her mind around to our business and telephoned upstairs.

I went over and sat down on a couch and got up again. I was afraid the stock vote had already been taken and all this was too late.

At long nervous last the elevator descended again with slow yacht club dignity and President Elderson stepped out. The three of us hurried to receive him. To my astonishment he was the man we had seen under the banyan and who, on the deck of the yacht had attempted to hire Poggioli in his service. Gebhardt stammered and began explaining Poggioli's plan to use a kind of double action proposition on Captain Guiterrez; so if one didn't get him the other would

President Elderson smoothed the matter over with a genial gesture. "I am delighted at the interest you gentlemen show in a matter quite impersonal to yourself, but the voting is over and the policy of the company is arranged for the coming year."

"Will . . . will your company raise . . . uh . . . tung trees?" I asked with a dry mouth.

"No, sugar as usual. When we showed Guiterrez," he used the name without a title in the expansive friendliness of a millionaire, "when we showed Guiterrez the great financial advantage of growing sugar already planted over growing tung trees not yet planted, he gave over at once and threw all his stock and proxies on my side. He made it unanimous."

I almost sank to the floor. This simple plan of making it a business proposition had never occured either to me or Poggioli or to the police reporter, because our thoughts were fixed on crime. Gebhardt began congratulating President Elderson but he turned it off as nothing.

"By the way," he added, "I want to give you a note for the financial section of your paper. Take this down:

At the recent annual stockholders' meeting of the South Eastern Sugar Growers Association, Captain Carlos Guiterrez was elected President of the company.

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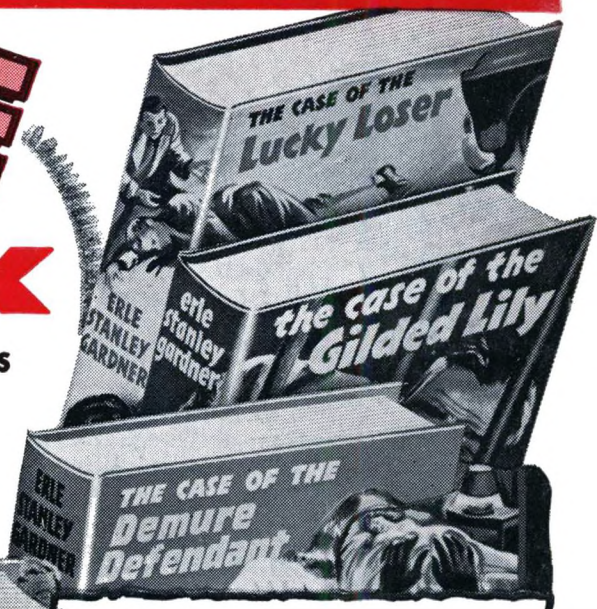

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Perry Mason has an ace up his sleeve — a surprise witness he's counting on to save his client from the chair. But she turns up at the trial—as the star witness *for the D.A.*

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Sybil Harlen is on trial for murder. The D.A. produces one witness after another. And all Mason offers in defense is — a wheelbarrow filled with rusty scrap iron!

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