AUG.-SEPT.
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THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

That Will Be Fine
by William Faulkner

Judge Priest and the Widow
by Irvin S. Cobb

The Inspiration of Mr. Budd
by Dorothy L. Sayers

Who's the Toughest?
by Arthur "Bugs" Baer

The Hated Woman
by Q. Patrick

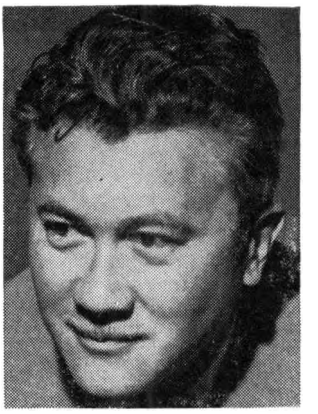
Perishing of the Pendragons
by G. K. Chesterton

THE LATIN TOUCH

A NEW SAINT Story by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



ONLY the other day, it seems, I was remarking on this inside cover that writing an introduction like this for the first issue or two of a magazine was pretty much of a breeze—but I wondered what it would be like as the issues went on and on. So now I am finding out.

We launched ourselves as a modest quarterly, which meant only four issues a year. But your reception, thank you, was so gratifying that already from only the second issue we have gone bi-monthly. Just a little more of this response and, inevitably, we shall be a regular monthly. From which the only reassurance I can take is that I'm reasonably sure we shall not come out weekly—that would be too much.

Meanwhile, amidst the fan mail on our first number, I have received the following encouraging words from a Mr. John W. Cruickshank of Illinois—*The quality of the stories is amazingly good. If the present quality is maintained you're a better man than I think you are. I don't believe that there are that many stories as good as these.*

Well, passing over whatever Mr. Cruickshank's unrevealed reasons for not thinking I'm a good man may be, this is the challenge we accepted with our eyes open when we decided to put out this magazine. Personally I believe there are lots of good stories around. Let's see what we have this time.

JUDGE PRIEST AND THE WIDOW is a short novel by one of America's greatest writers, the late Irvin S. Cobb, starring his famous character, Judge Billy Priest. Next in length, we have a novelet by Q. Patrick, THE HATED WOMAN. How's William Faulkner for a distinguished writer? We have his great short story, THAT WILL BE FINE. THE INSPIRATION OF MR. BUDD by Dorothy L. Sayers, who certainly needs no introduction, is one that she herself has chosen as her best detective story—so who wants to argue? And there is a "first" which I am particularly proud to have discovered—THREE MURDERS FOR OSCO by Leonard J. Guardino, a brand-new writer with a brand-new touch.

Also, among the other stuff, there is another brand-new story of the Saint by yours truly, entitled THE LATIN TOUCH, in which he goes to Rome and finds that a classical education can still pay dividends. Modesty forbids me to claim greatness for this one—though I'd like to. But I have no hesitation in claiming greatness for the rest of the issue.

Still want convincing, Mr. Cruickshank? Stick around, pal—stick around!

Leslie Charteris

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THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, VOL. 1, NO. 3, published bi-monthly by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC., H. L. HERBERT, President, at 4600 Diversey Avenue, Chicago 39, Illinois. Executive and editorial offices 471 Park Ave., N. Y. 22, N. Y. Subscriptions 6 issues $2.50, single copies 50c; Canadian and foreign postage extra. Application for second-class entry pending at post office, Chicago, Illinois.

the latin touch

by . . . Leslie Charteris

The Brighter Buccaneer meets a very lovely lady in the Colosseum—and discovers that there are still tyrants in the city of Nero whose every whim is law.

THE CITY OF ROME, according to legend, is built upon the spot where the twin sons of Mars, Romulus and Remus (out of a Vestal who must have been somewhat less than virgin) were suckled by a maternally-minded she-wolf. And there were bitter men in the police departments of many countries who would have said that that made it a very appropriate city for Simon Templar to gravitate into, even today.

But they would have been thinking of him as a wolf in terms of his predatory reputation, rather than in the more innocuous modern connotation of an eye for a pretty girl. He had both, it is true—but it was as a lone wolf in the wastelands of crime that his rather sensational publicity had mostly featured him.

Simon Templar himself would have said with an impish twinkle that his affinity for Rome would be better attributed to the traditional association of the place as a holy city—for who could more aptly visit there than one who was best known by the nickname of "The Saint?"

It troubled him not at all that the incongruity of that sobriquet was a perpetual irritant to the officers of the Law who from time to time had been called upon to try and cope with his forays. To revert to the wolf simile it was enough for him

THE SAINT SEEKS FRESH ADVENTURE IN ANCIENT ROME AND FLIRTS WITH DEATH IN A MAD DANCE OF THE SEVEN HILLS.

that even his worst enemies had to concede that the sheep who had felt his fangs had always been black sheep.

But that morning, as he stood on the entirely modern sidewalk outside the ancient Colosseum, his interests were only those of the most ordinary sightseer. Any vulpine instinct he may have had were of the entirely modern kind just referred to—the kind which produces formalized whistles at the sight of a modern Vestal, virtuous or not.

The Saint was too well-mannered for such crude compliments but the girl he was watching could have been no stranger to them. From the top of her close-cropped curly golden head, down through her slim shapely figure and long slender legs to her thoroughbred ankles, she was fresh clean young America incarnate, the new type of goddess that can swim and ride and play tennis and laugh like a boy, to the horror of the conservatives on old Olympus.

Also, as happens all too seldom in real life, she was most providentially in trouble. Providentially from the point of view of any healthy footloose cavalier, that is. She was engaged in a losing argument with the driver of the carriage from which she had just alighted, a beetle-browed individual with all the assurance of a jovial brigand.

"But I made the same trip yesterday," she was protesting indignantly, "and it was only two hundred lire!"

"One t'ousand lire," insisted the driver. "You give-a me one t'ousand lire, please, *signora.* Dat-a da right-a fare."

It was all the opening that Simon could have asked.

He strolled up beside the girl.

"Where did you take him from?" he asked.

A pair of level gray eyes sized him up and accepted him gratefully.

"From the Excelsior."

Simon turned to the driver.

"*Scusami,*" he said pleasantly, "*ma lei scherza?* The fare cannot be one thousand lire."

"*Mille lire,*" said the driver obdurately. "It is the legal fare." He waved his whip in the direction of three or four other unemployed *carrozze* parked expectantly in the shade of the Arch of Constantine. "Ask any other driver," he suggested boldly.

"I prefer a more impartial witness," said the Saint with imperturbable good humor.

He reached out for the blanket that was neatly draped over the seat beside the driver and flipped it back with a slight flourish. It disclosed a conventional taxi-meter which would have been in plain sight of the passenger seat if the blanket had not been so carefully arranged to hide it. Simon's pointing finger drew the girl's eyes to the figures on it.

"One hundred and ninety lire," he said. "I'd give him exactly that and forget the tip. It may teach him a lesson—although I doubt it."

The coachman's unblushing expostulations, accompanied by some scandalous reflections on their an-

cestry and probable relationship, followed them as the Saint drew her tactfully through the arches and out of earshot.

"All the carriages in Rome have meters, just like a taxi," he explained easily. "But there isn't one of them that doesn't have a blanket artistically draped over it, so that you'd never think it was there unless you knew about it. The driver can't lose and with the average tourist he usually wins. It's brought the country almost as many dollars as the Marshall Plan."

"I'm the original innocent," she said ruefully. "This is my first trip abroad. Do you live here? You speak Italian as if you did."

"No, but I've been around."

A seedy-looking character wearing the typical emblem of his fraternity, a two-day growth of beard, sidled up to them.

"You want a guide?" he suggested. "I tell you all about the Colosseum. This is where they had the circus. Lions and Christians."

"I know all about it," said the Saint. "In a previous incarnation I was Nero's favorite clown. My name was Emmetus Kellius. Everybody used to laugh themselves sick when the lions bit me. So did I. I was smeared all over with hot mustard. Unfortunately, though, I was colorblind. One day, just for a laugh, Poppaea changed the mustard in my make-up pot for ketchup. Everyone said I gave the funniest performance of my life. It even killed me. However . . ."

The would-be guide stared at him disgustedly and went away.

The girl tried to stop giggling.

"Do you really know anything about it?" she asked. "It makes me wish I'd paid more attention to Latin when I was in school. But I never got much beyond *Omnia Gallia in tres partes divisa est.*"

"'De Gaulle is divided in three parties,'" he translated brightly. "I wonder if our State Department knows about that."

She shot him a sudden sharp glance which he did not understand at the time. It made him think that he was overdoing the flippancy and he didn't want to spoil such a Heaven-sent beginning.

He said, gazing across the arena, "I don't care about knowing a lot of dull statistics. I just try to imagine it as it was before it began to fall apart. Those tiers with nothing but seats like rows of steps, right up to the top. The bleachers, full of excited bloodthirsty people. The arena baking in the same sun that's on it now."

"It's so much smaller than I thought it would be."

"It's bigger than it looks. You could put a football field in the middle and have plenty of room to run around."

"But the bottom—it's all cut up into sort of dungeons."

"They probably were. Locker rooms for the gladiators, cells for the Christians, dens for the wild beasts. They must have been roofed over with planks that rotted away long ago—which made the floor of the arena, with a layer of sand on

top for easy cleaning. I expect you could hear everything that went on —from underneath. Until your turn was called. I wonder how many people have come up blinking into this same sunlight that we're seeing —and these stones were the last thing they ever saw?"

She shuddered.

"You make it seem much too real."

But there were no holiday crowds filling the amphitheatre then. Just a handful of wandering tourists, a few self-appointed guides loafing in hopes of a generous audience, a few peddlers with trays of mass-produced cameos. Simon Templar was hardly aware of any of them. He was wholly enjoying the company of the refreshingly lovely girl a buccaneer's luck had thrown into his life.

That is why he was completely astounded to realize, in the split second of pain and coruscating lights before unconsciousness rolled over him, that someone had come up behind and hit him on the head.

II

He had to repeat the steps of realization laboriously as the blackness slowly dissolved again. His first impression was that he had simply passed out and he thought hazily of sunstroke. But he couldn't believe that a little sun could do that to him. Then, as a focal point in his skull began to assert itself with painful throbbing, that last instant of awareness came back to him in a flash. He struggled up and opened his eyes.

He was not on the ground but on a wooden bunk that was almost as hard. There was stone around him —but not the moldering stones of the Colosseum. These were modern blocks, trimly mortised. A door made of iron bars. And the only evidence of sun was a little light that came through a barred window high above his head.

He could not recall exactly when he had last looked at his Gruen, but it told him that at least two hours must have passed since he was talking to a delightful young blonde whose name he had not even learned. If he needed anything more than the ache in his head to attest the efficacy of the blow he had taken the measurement was there on the dial.

He felt his pockets, thinking stupidly of robbery. They were empty. Robbery might have had something to do with it but it would not account for the stone walls and the bars.

He was in jail. He began to wonder what for.

He dragged himself to his feet, mastering a desire to vomit, and stumbled to the door. Holding on to the bars, he called out, *"Hey!* Hullo there!"

It reminded him idiotically of an arty play he had once seen.

Ponderous footsteps clumped deliberately along the passage, and a turnkey came in sight. The uniform clinched any lingering doubt about the jail.

"What am I doing here?" Simon demanded in Italian.

The man surveyed him unfeelingly.

"*Aspette,*" he said and went away again.

Simon sat down on the hard cot and held his head in his hands, fighting to clear the cobwebs out of it.

Presently there were footsteps again, brisker and more numerous. Simon looked up and found the jailer unlocking the door.

It opened to admit a small delegation. First, in a kind of inverted order of precedence, came a burly police sergeant in uniform. After him came a superior officer in plain clothes, who was slight and rather dapper, but just as obvious a police type in European terms. Those two the Saint might have expected, if he had thought about it, no matter why he was where he was. But it was the third man, for whom they made way only after they had apparently satisfied themselves that the Saint's attitude was not violent, who was the stopper.

He was a tall iron-gray man with a scholarly stoop, most formally dressed in swallow-tail coat and striped trousers, even carrying white gloves and a silk hat; and Simon recognized him at once. Several million other people would have made the same startled recognition, for Mr. Hudson Inverest was not exactly an international nonentity.

"Well," said the Saint somewhat incredulously, "this is certainly a new high in service. I know the Secretary of State is technically responsible for people who get themselves in trouble abroad but I didn't expect you to bail me out in person."

"You know who I am?" Inverest said matter-of-factly.

The Saint smiled.

"I've seen you in enough news pictures, caricatures—and television. Now I remember reading about you being here on an official visit. It's really very thoughtful of you to be around just at this moment."

The Secretary stared at him grimly over the top of his glasses.

"Mr. Templar, what do you know about my daughter?"

Simon Templar's eyebrows rose a little and drew together.

"Your daughter? I didn't even know you had one."

The uniformed sergeant started a threatening gesture but the plain-clothesman checked it with an almost imperceptible movement of his hand.

"My daughter, Sue," Inverest said.

"A willowy blonde?" Simon said slowly. "With short curly hair and gray eyes?"

"You were with her at the Colosseum—just before she was kidnapped."

It all clicked in the Saint's recuperating mind with a blind and devastating simplicity—even to a reaction of hers which had puzzled him at the time.

"I was talking to a girl like that," he said. "I'd just made some silly crack about the State Department and I noticed she took it in a rather funny way. But I hadn't the faintest idea who she was. And then I got slugged over the head myself. If

there were any witnesses they must have seen that."

"That was seen," said the plainclothesman. "But it did not explain your presence there."

"I was unable to leave," said the Saint. "I was knocked cold, remember? Do you always arrest any innocent bystander who gets hurt at the scene of a crime?"

"When your pockets were searched for identification," said the plainclothesman suavely, "it was found out at once who you are. Therefore you were brought here. I am sure that being arrested is not such a new experience for you."

Simon turned to the Secretary.

"Mr. Inverest, I never saw your daughter before in my life. I didn't have the faintest idea who she was. I just happened to meet her outside the Colosseum. She was having an argument with a cab driver who was trying to overcharge her. I helped her out and we went into the place together. We went on talking, naturally. And then I was conked on the head. That's all I know."

"There were two others," said the superior policeman impartially. "After they knocked out Mr. Templar, they grabbed Miss Inverest and rushed her out to a car which was waiting outside. I think, your Excellency, that if you give us a little time alone with Mr. Templar, we may persuade him to tell us who they were and how he arranged to—as you say—put the finger on your daughter."

Inverest waved him down impatiently.

"Mr. Templar is to be released at once."

"Your Excellency must be joking."

"I demand it in the name of the Government of the United States. There is no reasonable charge that can be brought against him."

"But a man of his reputation . . ."

Inverest's level gray eyes, oddly reminiscent of his daughter's, searched the Saint's face over his spectacle rims with the same detached appraisal that the girl had given it.

"Inspector Buono," he said, "Mr. Templar is rumored to have considerable disregard for the law but there are no actual charges of lawbreaking pending against him in my country. His notoriety, as I understand it, comes from his reprehensible habit of taking the law into his own hands. But it is well known that he is a relentless enemy of criminals. I cannot think of anyone who would be less likely to have any part of such a crime as this. *O si sic omnes!*"

It was a quaintly professorial and almost pedantic speech, even to the Latin quotation at the end, of the type that frequently made Mr. Inverest an easy butt for the more ribald type of political heckling but his handling of it gave it an austere dignity.

Inspector Buono shrugged helplessly.

They went into an office. The Saint's personal belongings were re-

turned and a paper was drawn up.

"Your Excellency will have to sign this," Buono said, with ill-concealed disapproval. "I have to protect myself. And I hope your Excellency knows what he is doing."

"I accept full responsibility," Inverest said, taking out his pen.

Simon watched the signature with the feeling of being at an international conference.

"You're a really big man, sir," he said with a sincere respect which came strangely from him. "Not many people would be capable of giving a ready-made devil like me his due in a situation like this. Certainly not the average small-time cop."

Buono scowled.

"*Damnant quod non intelligunt.*" Inverest said wryly. "It's part of my job to be some sort of judge of human nature. Besides, I have access to special information. I checked on your record in Washington by telephone while we were waiting for you to come to. I talked to the man who was in charge of the OSS section you worked for during the last war."

"Hamilton?"

"He gave you quite a remarkable reference."

Simon lighted a cigarette. He had almost forgotten the throbbing in his head and his brain was starting to feel normal again.

"I wish I could be of some use to you now," he said sympathetically. "I liked your daughter a lot—if I'd only had the least idea who she was I might have been a little on guard. But there wasn't any reason for me to be suspicious of anyone who came near us. How come she was running around on her own like that, without any kind of protection? Or does that question embarrass Inspector Buono?"

"A special escort was provided for Miss Inverest," Buono said coldly. "But she gave them the slip. Deliberately, I am told."

"There was a young fellow detailed by the Embassy to take her around, too," Inverest said, "and she stood him up. Sue's always been like that. She hates the VIP treatment. Getting away from Secret Service men and all that sort of thing is just like playing hookey from school to her. She says she just wants to get around on her own and see things like any ordinary girl. I can't really blame her. I couldn't be telling her all the time what special danger she might be in."

"Do you have some idea what the special danger might be right now?" Simon asked.

"Unfortunately I do."

Inverest took off his spectacles and rubbed his eyes. That mechanical movement was the first break in his Spartan self control, the first outward betrayal of the desperate anxiety that must have been eating his insides.

"Does the name Mick Unciello mean anything to you?"

"I read all the crime news," said the Saint with a slight smile. "He was the official executioner of the Midwestern crime syndicate. The FBI finally got the goods on him and

he was sentenced to the chair some time ago."

"His final appeal to the Supreme Court was rejected last week."

"The Supreme Court can collect a bouquet from me."

"Now, do you remember the name Tony Unciello?"

"Yes. He was the vice lord in the same syndicate. The FBI didn't do so well with him but they were able to get him deported—I think that was in nineteen forty-eight."

"Mick Unciello, of course, is the younger brother of Tony. And Tony is here in Italy."

"It begins to figure," said the Saint quietly.

"Nothing can save Mick Unciello's life now except the personal intervention of the President," Inverest said in his dry schoolmasterish voice. "That, of course, is unthinkable. But it may be quite another matter to convince Tony that my influence would not bring it about."

"Is this something more than a fast guess on your part?"

"Oh, yes," said the Secretary wearily. "I've already had a telephone call from a person claiming to be Tony Unciello, and I have no reason to doubt its authenticity. He said that unless Mick Unciello was reprieved, Sue would die too—but more slowly."

Simon Templar drew at his cigarette, holding it with fingers that were almost self consciously steady. The naturally devil-may-care lines of his strong reckless face might never have known laughter. He faced the set-up in all its naked ugliness. A memory of Sue Inverest's gay clean-limbed confident youth slid across his mind, and his stomach curled again momentarily.

Then his eyes went to the sleek Inspector.

"But if it's as open as all that," he said, "why haven't you picked up Tony Unciello?"

"It is not so easy," Buono said stonily. "Unciello has dropped out of sight since several days. You understand, there was nothing against him here, so he is not watched all the time. Now, he cannot be found. We look for him, of course, but it is not a simple matter of going to his apartment. He is hiding."

"And you haven't any idea where to look."

"It is not made easy for us."

"What Inspector Buono isn't saying," Inverest put in, "is that the Unciellos are both members of the Mafia. Tony himself is reputed to be one of the very top men. Perhaps you don't know what a stranglehold that terroristic secret society has on this country.

"Nobody knows how many members there are, but at least three-quarters of the population are scared to death of them. If a man of Unciello's class wants to disappear, there are thousands who would help to hide him, literally millions who wouldn't betray him if they knew where he was."

The Saint took another long drag at his cigarette. He tilted his head back and exhaled the smoke in a trickle of seemingly inexhaustible

duration, watching it with rapt lazy-lidded blue eyes.

"Just the same," he said, "I think I know how to find him."

III

It was as if he had hit them with a paralysis ray out of some science-fiction story. Hudson Inverest stiffened where he sat. Inspector Buono made one sharp jerky movement and then froze.

"Do you mean you know more about this than you've told us?" Inverest said.

Simon nodded.

"Funny things happen when you're knocked out," he said. "I was hit on the head, and I went down like a wet rag. But I didn't black out all at once. My eyes must have gone on working for several seconds, like a camera with the shutter left open, before I passed out completely.

"And then, when I first recovered consciousness, I'd forgotten all about what I saw. Now it's suddenly all come back—as if the film had been developed. I know I can find Tony Unciello."

"What did you see?" Buono demanded.

Simon looked him in the eyes.

"I can't tell you."

"I do not understand you, *signor!*"

"What I saw happens to be something that wouldn't be any use at all to anyone else. I'm the only man in the world who could use it. So I shall keep it to myself—until I've found Tony. I don't think it'll take very long."

"That is absurd!" Buono insisted waspishly. "I insist that you tell us how you propose to do this."

The Saint turned to Inverest.

"I will tell you, sir, in private, and let you be the judge. But I'm quite sure you'll agree with me. You see, what I know has some really shocking political complications. If it leaked out, the international repercussions would be bigger than an atom bomb. If you knew what I know, you'd be the first to order me to keep my mouth shut."

Inspector Buono bounced to his feet.

"It is against the law to conceal information about a crime from the police," he said furiously. "This alters everything. I shall refuse to release you!"

Inverest gazed at the Saint intently from under lowered brows.

"He has already been released," he pointed out at length. "Furthermore, as regards anything that has transpired since then I must inform you that Mr. Templar has just been appointed a special attaché to the American Embassy, and therefore claims diplomatic immunity." He stood up. "I shall communicate with you later, Inspector, if I decide that Mr. Templar's information should be disclosed. Come, Mr. Templar."

He gestured with his shiny top hat towards the door, and Simon went and opened it.

The Secretary of State stalked out without a backward glance but Simon Templar could not resist turning to give the baffled Inspector a mocking bow before he followed.

Uniformed guards outside saluted

them into a waiting black limousine with CD plates and the Stars & Stripes fluttering from a little mast on the hood. It was the finest exit the Saint had made from any police station and he would treasure the remembrance for the rest of his life—however long that might be.

"The driver is an Italian," Inverest said. "Better wait until we're alone."

Simon nodded, and said nothing more until the door had closed behind them in the office at the Embassy which had been placed at the Secretary's disposal.

"Well, Mr. Templar," Inverest said, dropping his hat and gloves on the desk, "you've placed me in a most peculiar position. Unless you have something extraordinary up your sleeve I might well deserve to be impeached. All that talk of yours about international complications, of course, was arrant nonsense."

"You realized that, did you?"

"I'm not completely naïve."

"After what you said about the Mafia," Simon explained, "I couldn't take any chances. Not even in police headquarters. It would only take one tiny leak to blow the whole works. And that would mean goodbye to Sue."

"That's understood," Inverest said brusquely. "I took the risk of backing you up. But what is it that you know?"

Simon took out a cigarette and placed it between his lips. Then he took out his lighter and held it poised.

"Nothing."

He lighted the cigarette.

Hudson Inverest's features seemed to crumple from inside as if he had received a physical blow. He sank slowly into a chair.

"Good God, man," he cried shakily. "What are you saying?"

"I don't know a thing. I haven't a clue. I was knocked cold on the spot and that was the end of it. But," Simon went on quickly, "nobody knows that except you and me."

Inverest clasped his hands together as if to steady them.

"Go on."

"If there's a leak in the police department," said the Saint, "so much the better. It'll make the story that much more convincing when it gets to Tony. But we're not going to gamble on that chance alone. I want you to call in your public relations boys and tell them to see that every newspaper in Rome gets the story. Let 'em be as mysterious as they like, but sell it big.

"Then we'll know for sure that Tony Unciello will hear it. His men already know that they slugged a guy who was with Sue, but they didn't know who it was. My name'll hit them with a big bang. I think it'll make 'em believe almost anything."

"But if they do believe it," Inverest said, "what good will it do? They'll just shoot you down in the street."

Simon shrugged.

"That's a possibility. But I'm betting on the angle of curiosity. I don't think a man like Unciello could bear never to know what this

one thing was that I had on him. So I think he'll want me taken alive."

"Even so," Inverest protested, "if they catch you and take you to him—what would you be able to do?"

"I'll try to think of that when the time comes." Simon stood over the older man, very lean and straight, and something like the strength of a sword invested him. "But it's the only chance we've got of finding your daughter. You've got to let me try it."

The statesman blinked up at him, trying to dispel a ridiculous illusion that a musketeer's feather tossed above that impossibly handsome face.

"It might still cost you your life," he said.

"For a gal like Sue," said the Saint lightly, "I wouldn't call that expensive."

Simon Templar came out of the front gates of the Embassy and stood on the sidewalk for a while, gazing idly up and down the Via Vittorio Veneto, like a man trying to make up his mind where to go. What he wanted was to be sure that anyone who might already be watching for him outside would not be left flatfooted by too sudden a departure.

Presently he walked a few steps to the entrance of the Hotel Excelsior, which was only next door. He paused inside to give the lobby a leisurely survey and at the same time to give the population of the lobby plenty of time to survey him. Then he crossed to the desk.

"Do you have any messages for me?" He added, very clearly. "The name is Templar—Simon Templar."

"Your room number, sir?"

"Six-seventeen."

The porter examined his pigeonholes.

"No, Mr. Templar."

"Thank you. Where is the cocktail bar?"

"On the left, sir, down the stairs."

That ought to take care of anyone who might be waiting to pick him up at the hotel.

He went down the stairs. The room was filling up, the hour being what it was, but he found a place at the bar and ordered a Dry Sack. He was aware of other people filtering in after him—at least two couples, and a single man who sat at the far end of the bar and started reading a newspaper.

But Simon paid none of them any direct attention. He watched more carefully to see the bottle taken off the shelf and his drink poured without any legerdemain. After all, he reflected, the Borgias were Italians and any bartender would be a likely candidate for the Mafia.

The general level of conversation, he was pleased to note, was pitched discreetly low.

He said to the bartender, just loudly enough for anyone who cared to overhear, "Tell me, I hear there are two restaurants claiming to be the original Alfredo's—the place that's famous for *fettucini.* Which is the real one?"

The bartender grinned.

"Ah, yes, they make much progaganda against each other. But the real one, the old one, is in the Via della Scrofa."

"Then I must have been taken to the imitation last night. Tonight I'll have to try the old original."

"You will have a good dinner."

And that, he thought, should be plenty of help to anyone who picked up the trail late or who wanted to make plans ahead . . .

But nothing was likely to happen in the Excelsior cocktail lounge, which was obviously not adapted to tidy abductions, and the Saint was too impatient to wait there for long. The laughing face of Sue Inverest kept materializing in front of him, turning into a mask of pitiful terror, dissolving into imagined scenes of unspeakable vileness.

He knew the mentality of men like Tony Unciello too well to be complacent about the inevitable passing of time. He wanted something to happen fast. He wanted to leave nothing undone that would help it to happen.

He finished his sherry, paid for it and went out into the street again.

A glance at his watch only reasserted the fact that it was still early to go to dinner. He strolled up towards the Borghese Park, making a conscious effort to slow down a stride that wanted to hurry but had no place to hurry to.

The crowded tables of a sidewalk cafe were suddenly on both sides of him. Perhaps there Unciello's men might see an opportunity.

He spotted a vacant table at the edge of the sidewalk, next to the street, where it would be as easy as possible for them. He sat down.

A waiter took his order. A boy came by with an armful of newspapers, and Simon bought one. The kidnapping of Sue Inverest qualified for the biggest headline on the front page, and early in the story he found himself referred to as a friend of the girl, who had been "beaten and left for dead" on the scene; with a fine disregard for obvious probabilities, which was no more inconsistent than the facts, he was later reported being held by the police for investigation of his possible complicity in the crime.

His drink came, and he paid for it but did not touch it. He extracted a grim kind of satisfaction out of realizing that the chances of any food or drink offered to him being poisoned must be increasing with every minute. He could cope with that danger easily enough, at least for awhile. It was less easy to become accustomed to the crawly feeling that at any instant a knife from nowhere might strike him between the shoulderblades, or a fusillade of shots from a passing car smash him down into bloody oblivion.

But that was what he had asked for—and he was beginning to sympathize with the emotions of a goat that had not merely been staked out to attract a tiger but was cooperating with every resource of capric coquetry to coax the tiger to the bait. And all he could do was hope he was not mistaken in his

estimate of Tony Unciello's vein of curiosity.

He read on, looking for a reference to the mysterious secret clue he was supposed to have.

And then he had company.

There were two of them and because he had studiously avoided watching for them they might have sprung up out of the ground. They stood one on each side of him, crowding him, at the same time practically blocking him from the sight of the other patrons of the cafe. They were men of perfectly average size and build, dressed in perfectly commonplace dark suits, with perfectly unmemorable faces distinguished only by the perfect expressionlessness of their prototypes in any gangster movie. It was just like home.

The street was behind Simon—but that opening was closed, with admirable timing, by a car which simultaneously slid in to the curb and stopped at his back.

One of the men leaned on Simon's shoulder with a hand that was buried in his coat pocket. But what the Saint felt was harder than a hand and he knew that the muzzle of a gun was no more than an inch from his ear.

"Let's go, sport," the man said.

Simon tried to look up with the right combination of fear, surprise and bluster.

"What are you talking about?"

"You, sport," said the spokesman laconically. "Get in the car."

Simon flicked his cigarette into the gutter, where it was immediately the center of a scramble of vulture-eyed urchins, and stood up. It was the only stir caused by his departure.

In the car the two men sat one on each side of him in the back seat. Each of them kept a hand in the pocket of his coat on the side nearest the Saint, one in the right, one in the left. Their two guns pressed with equal firmness against the neighborhood of the Saint's kidneys. Neither of them offered any conversation. The driver of the car said nothing. He drove in competent silence, like a man who already had his instructions.

There were no shades inside the car, no suggestion of blindfolding the Saint, no attempt to stop him observing the route they took. The implication that nothing he saw would ever be any use to him was too obvious to be missed, but that gave him nothing unforeseen to worry about. He could still hope that the project was to take him to Tony Unciello before the only possible intended end of the ride.

They drove down to the Tiber, crossed over the Ponte Cavour, turned by the Palace of Justice. The great white dome of St. Peter's loomed ahead against the darkening sky and lights played on the fountains in the vast circular piazza in front of the cathedral.

But they left it on their right and skimmed around the walls of the Vatican City to plunge into the maze of mean streets which lies incongruously between it and the pleasant park slopes of Monte

Gianicolo. A few zigzags through narrow ill-lit alleys and the car stopped outside a small *pizzeria* and bar with strings of salami tastefully displayed in the dingy and fly-specked window.

"Get out, sport," said the talking man.

His partner got out first and waited for the Saint. The two of them closed in behind Simon and prodded him towards the door of the *pizzeria.* They kept him moving briskly through the odorous interior but it was only to get their job done, not because they cared about anyone in the place.

The drinkers at the bar just inside the entrance, the shirtsleeved bartender wiping glasses on a filthy rag, the few diners at the stained tables in the back, the slatternly woman who looked out of the open door of the kitchen in the rear, all stared at the Saint silently as he passed—but the stares were as emotionless and impersonal as the stares of zombies.

Next to the kitchen door there was a curtained archway—beyond it a steep flight of stairs. They climbed to a narrow landing with two doors. The man who never spoke opened one of them and pushed the Saint through.

He found himself in a small untidy bedroom, but he hardly had time to glance over it before the same man was doing something to the big oldfashioned wardrobe that caused it to roll noiselessly aside like a huge sliding door.

"Keep moving, sport," said the talkative one and the Saint was shoved on through the opening.

As he stepped into the brightness beyond, as if on to a stage set, he know that he had at least won the first leg of the double, even before he saw the man who waited for him.

"Hello, Tony," he said.

IV

It was the contrast of the room in which he found himself after the squalor that he had been hustled through which was theatrical. It was spacious and high-ceilinged, exquisitely decorated and furnished, like a room in a set designer's conception of a ducal palace. The Saint's gaze traveled leisurely around it in frank fascination.

From his impression of the street outside he realized that the interiors of several ramshackle old buildings must have been torn out to provide a shell for that luxurious hideaway —a project that only a vast secret society could have undertaken and kept secret. Even the absence of windows was almost unnoticeable, for the indirect lighting was beautifully engineered and the air was fresh and cool.

"Quite a layout you have for such a modest address," Simon remarked approvingly. "And with air-conditioning, yet."

"Sure, it's plenty comfortable," said Tony Unciello.

He sat in an immense brocaded chair, looking like a great gross frog. The resemblance held true for his sloping hairless head, his swarthy skin and heavy-lidded

reptilian eyes, his broad stomach and thin splayed legs. In fact, almost the only un-froglike things about him were his clothes, the diamond rings on his fingers, and the cigar clamped in his thick-lipped mouth.

"So you're the Saint," Unciello said. "Sit down."

Instantly Simon was pushed forward, the seat of an upright chair hit him behind the knees, two hands on his shoulders pushed him forcefully down upon it. His two escorts stood behind him like sentries on guard duty.

The Saint straightened his coat.

"Really, Tony," he murmured, "when you get hospitable, it's just like being caught in a reaper."

The gangster took the cigar out of one side of his mouth and put it back in the other.

"I heard a lot about you, Saint."

"I know. And you just couldn't wait to meet me."

"I could of waited forever to meet you. But now it's different. All on account of this place." Unciello took the cigar out again to wave it comprehensively at the surroundings. "It's quite a layout, like you said. And comfortable, like I said. You ain't seen a half of it.

"I could hole up here for years, and live just like the Ritz. Only there's nobody supposed to know about it who don't belong to me, body and soul. And then you come along, and you don't belong to me, but it gives out that you know how to find me."

"Why, what gave you that idea?"

"That's what you said in the paper."

"I'd bought a newspaper just before your reception committee picked me up," Simon remarked thoughtfully, "but it didn't have that story. How did you hear it so quickly? Direct from the police, maybe?"

"You catch on fast," Unciello said. "Sure, Inspector Buono's one of my boys. He should of kept you locked up when he had you, and saved me this trouble."

Simon nodded. He was not greatly surprised.

"I figured him for a stinker," he said. "But it's nice to have you confirm it."

"Buono's a good boy," Unciello said. "He knows where I am. That's okay. But with you it's different." He leaned forward a little. His manner was very patient and earnest. "I like this place. Spent a lot of dough fixing it up. I'd hate that to be all wasted. But when a fellow like you says he could find it, it bothers me. I gotta know how you got it figured. So if maybe somebody slipped up somewhere, it can be taken care of—see what I mean?"

"You couldn't be more lucid, Tony," Simon reassured him. "And what do you think this information would be worth?"

Unciello chuckled, a soundless quaking of his wide belly.

"Why, to you it's worth plenty. You tell me all about it, and everything's nice and friendly. But you don't tell me and the boys have to go to work on you. They do a mean job. You hold out for an hour, a day, two days—depending how

tough you are. But in the end you talk just the same, only you been hurt plenty first. To a fellow with your brains that don't make sense. So you tell me now and we don't have no nastiness."

Simon appeared to consider this briefly, but the conclusion was obvious.

"You make everything delightfully simple," he said. "So I'll try to do the same. I said I could find you and this proves it. I'm here now."

"Only because my boys brought you here."

"Which I figured you'd have them do as soon as you heard I was claiming to know how to find you."

Unciello's eyes did not blink so much as deliberately close and open again, like the eyes of a lizard.

"You're a smart fellow. Now you're here. What's your angle?"

"Will one of these goons behind me start shooting if I go for a cigarette?"

"Not if it's just a cigarette."

Simon took one from the pack in his breast pocket, moving slowly and carefully to avoid causing any alarm. In the same way he took out his lighter and kindled it.

"I'm acting as Mr. Inverest's strictly unofficial representative," he said. "As you very well know he can't officially make any deal with you. In fact, for public consumption he's got to say loudly that nobody can blackmail him, even with his daughter's life—or else he'd probably be out of a job and have no influence at all. But as a man, of course, you've got him over a barrel. He's ready to trade."

"He's a smart fellow too."

"It'll have to be very discreetly handled, so that it looks kosher. They'll have to arrange to dig up some startling new evidence to give grounds for a re-trial and an acquittal later."

"That's his worry. I don't care how he does it, just so Mick gets out."

"But before he starts to work he's got to be sure that you've really got his daughter and that she hasn't been harmed."

"The gal's okay."

Simon looked at him steadily.

"I have to see her myself. Then I'll write him a note, which you can have delivered. I'll tell you right now that it'll have a code word in it, which is to prove that I really wrote it and that nobody was twisting my arm to make me say the right things."

Unciella contemplated him with the immobility of a Buddha. Then his eyes switched to a point over the Saint's head.

"Mena la giovane," he said.

The hoodlum who never spoke came around from behind the Saint's chair and crossed the big room to disappear through one of the doors at the other end. Unciello smoked his cigar impassively. There was no idle conversation. Presently the man who had left came back, and with him he brought Sue Inverest.

She was so exactly as Simon had seen her last and as he remembered her that for a moment it felt as if

they were back in the Colosseum. Only in a strange dislocation of time they now seemed to belong rather with the expendables who had once stood on the floor of the arena, while a modern but no less vicious Nero squatted like a toad on his brocaded throne and held their lives in his hands. But the girl still carried her curly fair head high and Simon smiled into her shocked gray eyes.

"Your father sent me to see if you were all right, Sue," he said gently. "Have they hurt you?"

She shook her head.

"No, not yet. Are they going to let me go?"

"Quite soon, I hope."

"Write that letter," Unciello said.

The taciturn thug brought a pad and pencil from a side table and thrust them at the Saint.

Simon balanced the pad on his knee and wrote, taking his time—

Dear Mr. Inverest:

I've seen Sue, and she's still as good as new. So you'd better hurry up and meet Tony's terms, even if it isn't exactly "for the public good." Perhaps that would sound better to you in Latin, but it all comes to the homo sequendum. Will report again as arranged.

Simon Templer

He held out the pad. The man who had brought it carried it across to Unciello.

Unciello read it through slowly, and looked up again at the Saint.

"What's that *homo sequendum* deal?" he demanded.

"*Homo* means 'same,' as in 'homosexual,'" Simon explained patiently. "*Sequendum* is the same root as our words 'sequel' or 'consequences.' It just means 'the same result.' Inverest goes for that Latin stuff."

Unciello's eyes swiveled up to the girl.

"That's right," she said in a low voice. "He does."

"Guys like you with your education give me a pain," Unciello said. His cold stare was on the Saint again. "And what's that about reporting again?"

"I'm not stupid enough to expect you to turn me loose now," Simon said. "And anyhow, Inverest is going to want another report on Sue —authenticated with our password —from me, before they finally let your brother go."

The gang chieftain held out the pad towards his errand-boy.

"Have somebody downstairs send it," he ordered.

He continued to study the Saint emotionlessly, but with deep curiosity.

"You're a real smart fellow," he said. "But you're taking a lot of chances. What's in it for you?"

Simon raised his eyebrows a fraction of an inch.

"Hudson Inverest is a rich man in his own right," he said. "He's offered a reward of a hundred thousand dollars to anyone who helps get his daughter back. Didn't your pal Buono tell you that? Even he looked interested!"

The messenger returned and resumed his position behind the

Saint's chair but Unciella did not even appear to notice him for several seconds. He remained sunk in an implacable and frightening immobility of meditation. And then at last his saurian eyes flicked up.

"Tell Mario to serve dinner," he said. "We'll all eat together. And send word to Buono I want to see him—*subito.*"

V

They ate in a palatial dining room that was almost overpoweringly ornate with gilt and frescos, Sue and the Saint on either side of Tony Unciello at the head of a long table. One of the guards stood behind each of the involuntary guests like an attendant footman, but their function was not to serve. They kept their hands in the side pockets of their coats and their eyes on every movement that was made, particularly by the Saint.

The meal, in spite of the lavish surroundings, was only spaghetti though with an excellent sauce. Apparently that was what Unciello liked, for he tackled a huge plate of it with a practically uninterrupted series of engulfing motions, almost inhaling it in a continuous stream. Sue Inverest could only toy with hers but the Saint ate with reasonable appetite, although the grotesque silence, broken only by the clink of silverware and the voracious slurping of the host, would have unnerved most other men.

"Tony doesn't like small talk at meals." Simon tried to encourage her. "But don't let him put you off your feed. You've got to keep in good shape to go home."

Unciello stuffed the last remnants from his plate into his mouth until his cheeks bulged, then washed them down with a draught of Chianti from a Venetian goblet. He wiped his face with the napkin tucked under his chin.

"Now I got it," he announced and the Saint looked at him inquiringly.

Unciello said, "I get that *homo sequendum* business. That's gotta be the password you fixed up with Inverest. It's the only phony-sounding thing in your letter. So now I don't need you any more. I got boys who can copy any handwriting. And with that password, now *they* can write letters to Inverest and tell him his daughter's okay."

"You mean I can go, Tony?" Simon asked hopefully.

"Yeah—to the morgue. You never was going anywhere else because you know too much about this place—like I told you. But now I don't have to keep you around until they let Mick go. I guess you ain't so smart after all."

Simon Templar had no argument. It would have done no good to point out that this was one occasion when he had not figured himself particularly smart so far as his own personal survival was concerned. He felt lucky to have achieved as much as he had. Even if he were not to live to see the finish he could still hope that the gamble had not been altogether lost. As for himself it had to come some day and this way was as worth-while as any.

He smiled at the girl's comprehending horror and his eyes were very gay and blue.

"Don't worry, Sue," he said. "Don't think about it, ever. I just hope everything works out all right for you."

"I'll take care of her myself, personally," Unciella said—and only then, for the first time, Simon felt ice in his heart.

The door from the living-room opened abruptly and Inspector Buono came in.

He looked very cool and elegant and if he had any nervousness it might have been found only in his eyes. They merely glanced at the girl and Simon, went quickly back to Unciella.

"Eccomi arrivato," he said obsequiously. *"Cosa desidera?"*

"Talk English," Unciello growled. "The Saint wants to know what's going on. It's his funeral we're talking about. I sent for you because you're just the boy to take charge of it. You got the perfect set-up. You make it look like he was shot resisting arrest. You do it yourself and maybe you can get yourself a medal."

"But—"

"I'm sending a couple of the boys along to watch you." Unciello poured another glass of wine and his broad face was malevolently bland. "I hear some of our people are worried that one of these days you might get too interested in a reward if it was big enough. Now, if they see you do something like this, so they can feel they've got something on you, it'll give 'em a lot more confidence."

"Si, signor," Buono said whitely.

Then the door behind him burst open again and the room suddenly filled with armed police.

Through their midst stepped a large elderly perspiring man with a superb black handlebar moustache, who surveyed the scene with somewhat pompous satisfaction.

"Everyone here," he said, not without a trace of awe, "is under arrest."

The stooped scholarly figure of the Secretary of State followed him in and Sue Inverest flung herself into her father's arms.

Simon Templar prudently reached for the Chianti bottle and refilled his glass.

Most of what Sue Inverest did not know had been told her while the official limousine was still on its way to the Embassy.

"But I still don't know how you got there," she said, "like—like the posse coming over the hill in the last reel of a Western."

"My dear," Mr. Inverest said mildly, "surely even you learned enough Latin in school to know that *homo sequendum* means 'man who must be followed'?"

She gave a shaky half-laugh.

"I might have thought of that, but the Saint was so convincing with his translation . . . And anyway, how did you know *who* to follow?"

"Whom," said Mr. Inverest.

"You remember that tag about

'for the public good'?" Simon said. "I told your father he'd like it better in Latin. That's *pro bono publico.* I could only hope he'd be fast enough to turn the *bono* into *Buono.*"

"Fortunately I'm not quite the imbecile that I'm sometimes called," Inverest said. "Once I had that clue, I went straight to the top. That was the Minister of the Interior himself who was in charge of the raid."

"And you remember," Simon added, "how I threw in that bit about Buono's unseemly interest in a reward which he hadn't reported —for the simple reason that it was never offered. I was banking on that to bother Tony enough so that he'd send for Buono, which would lead the posse straight to the right place."

The girl cuddled her father's arm, but her gray eyes were on the Saint. "I know you're not really rich, Daddy," she said, "but he ought to have some reward after all, he risked his life for me."

Simon grinned. "I'll settle for the privilege of buying you a real dinner. And then maybe dancing with you till dawn. And then if there's anything still owing, I'd better leave it on deposit. I'm liable to end it one of these days."

who's the toughest?

by . . . Arthur "Bugs" Baer

A couple of hard-boiled cops vie with an out-of-town mob boss in a strange contest of strength—only to lose to a surprise entry.

I KNOW you will wonder how I got in on all the angles of this thing, for I'm not Eddie Miller, I'm not the Dolly Sisters or Eddie's ma or one of the Out-of-Town Mob. The answer is I'm a newspaperman and like a baker's thumb I get into a lot of things. When a screwball thing happens the only thing about it that surprises a newspaperman is that it didn't happen sooner. He is an optimist like the old lady that didn't care what happened so long as it didn't happen to her.

A newspaperman is something like a duck. No matter how deep the ocean is it only comes up to his hips. That's a lot of preamble for no constitution so let's start.

This thing was actually an elimination contest to see who was the toughest. The Out-of-Town Mob ran second to the Dolly Sisters, who turned the loving cup over to Eddie's ma. I got into the middle of it because I like to plaster a small bet on baseball. And my share of the story starts in the middle and works both ways like a fellov getting paid on Wednesday.

It had been going on some time before I heard of it. I was sitting in the old Friars Club with Ring Lardner, Willie Collier, Harrison

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You can call "Bugs" Baer a number of things. For instance, columnist, story teller, after-dinner orator, important cog in big-time charity organizations. But perhaps because essentially he is that hardest-of-all to pin down—humorist—*it is difficult to put the essence of the man into words. Especially since he does this so much better himself. Incidentally "Bugs" vows this story has a hard core of truth.*

Fisher, Damon Runyon and other old-timers when the page boy whispered to me that Eddie Miller was in the reception room.

"Boys," I said, getting up, "the gravy train is at the depot. Eddie just got around with the golden cabbage."

Ten of us had each sunk two hundred and fifty in a pool against another twenty-five hundred smackers of Arnold Rothstein's. We bet on the last game and we won. That was five hundred for each of us and that ain't hay. At least I never saw it sticking out of barns.

The series had been over ten days now and no Eddie, no money and no nothing. We figured that Eddie couldn't stand the strain and had bought himself a pair of new shoes. I didn't think that Eddie would lam with my dough. But, after all, trusting a betting agent with that kind of coconuts is something like sending a cabbage leaf by a rabbit. But now that Eddie was here everything was all right. That's what I thought. It wasn't the first time I'd been wrong.

Well, Eddie was in the reception room and he didn't have any new shoes, for he was in his bare feet. That was a little extra even for the old Friars Club, where they would tickle a raisin until it walked out of the rice pudding. Our motto in the old days was anything for a laugh, but Eddie was two stops past that stage. Even when he was feeling good he had the pasty look of a paperhanger's brush. But this time he looked as if he had been held over for an autopsy. I pointed to his bare dogs and he fainted.

It's the third week in October so I know his feet aren't sunburned. They are plenty red and have a dozen blisters on the bottoms. They're those big water blisters. I don't know where Eddie was eating the last ten days but the waiters were very careless because I see three or four hunks of toothpicks under his big-toe nails.

Now, I can put two and two together without cement. Eddie's been snatched. He has been bundled by a new mob that I have heard rumors of for some time. They're foot doctors and when they give you the full treatment you don't walk for weeks. While I'm having Eddie carried up to my room he comes to, says, "Tell my mother I'm in Hollywood," and faints again.

When he comes to the bat again about sixteen hours later he has an antiseptic turban of medical gauze on his head for some bumps and cuts I hadn't noticed. But the doctor who worked on him found bruises all over and he says between the feet and the head Eddie will be in bad shape for two weeks. The first thing he does is to call his ma and say it is long distance from California. Then he says he will be home about the first of November.

Then he hangs up, turns to me and says, "I was snatched."

"That's what the Dolly Sisters figured," I said.

Well, Eddie turns a double white this time like a tube of toothpaste coming out both ends.

"You wouldn't do that to me, would you?" he wants to know.

"Do what?" I asked. "It's already been done to you."

"I mean my mother," Eddie whispered. "They say if I turn on the phonograph they will grab her."

"How about our money, Eddie?" I ask.

"You'll have to wait until I get another stake. They took that five grand, eighteen grand more of mine and my note for twenty-seven grand more."

"What?" I yelled. "A snatch mob taking notes?"

"They're the toughest mob I ever saw." Eddie shivered all over like an old Model T on a hill. "They took the five grand I was holding, found my bank books for the eighteen and marched me in the General Trust in broad daylight in my bare feet. They made me close out the account. Say, the teller could have looked over and seen my bare feet but he never tumbled. Then they ask where I want to be set down and I say here because I know you know Little Nocky."

"Little Nocky has been looking for this mob himself," I said, "because they upset the status quo and put the heat on the home-town boys. So they grab Little Nocky's brother and hold him for one hundred grand and settle for half. All Little Nocky knows is it's an out-of-town mob. Too tough for him."

"So you told the Dolly Sisters?" said Eddie. "That mob's too tough for them. If I don't get twenty-seven grand on the line in two weeks, what's going to happen to my mother?"

"Nothing's going to happen to her, Eddie," I told him, "but you're going to be snatched again. By the Dolly Sisters. They've had a blind date with somebody with sore feet for some time and you're nominated, seconded and elected."

The Dolly Sisters aren't ladies. They're not gentlemen either. They're Boyle and Eggers, known to the underworld as the Hard-boiled Eggers.

The name Dolly Sisters was originally tagged on the two stylish stout uniformed officers you see driving around in a squad car marked plainly *Police* so nobody will take them by mistake in the dark. But the title gradually narrowed down to the partners, Boyle and Eggers, after their terrific work in the Cathedral bombing case when Boyle scrubbed the Cathedral steps dressed as a washwoman and Eggers helped the blackmailers to make bombs in a cellar over in Newark.

That jumped them from punks to first-grade detectives, the Dolly Sisters, going anywhere they wanted, doing anything they desired and reporting to nobody but the commissioner. Naturally they wore no uniforms and drove no fingered car. Sometimes they would be in a town car with Boyle at the wheel, sometimes they would be in a taxi hacked by Eggers and sometimes they drove up on foot.

When they used their siren they were on a curiosity call or showing a stranger the town. When they used

the double siren they were going after the world's best chocolate malted on Ninth Avenue. When they tore along silently they were out on business.

And I know they thought a lot of each other. "Boyle," said Eggers, "reminds me that some men are like acorns. They start as a little nut and develop into a mighty monarch of the woods with spreading arms, shade for the tired, firewood for the cold and lumber for the homeless. Except that Boyle reversed the process. He started as a mighty oak and became a nut. The only lumber he's got is inside his skull."

"Eggers," said Boyle, "who was last year's honor man, will soon have the biggest wrists in the service from trying doorknobs in the suburbs. He would rather hang that left hook of his on his sweetheart's chin than wrap it around her waist where it belongs. He thinks there isn't a question in the world that can't be settled with a left hook and that includes lunch-wagon coffee. I know he stands pretty good now but Eggers and lightning bugs both look brightest when they are going away."

Although Boyle was the diplomat of the pair he had a pretty good overland right when he knocked out Eggers in the police-games welterweight finals in 1930. The next year Eggers' left hook evened things up in the middleweights when it knocked his partner colder than a well-digger's lunch. And, believe Ripley or the marching Chinese, it was a double kayo when they fought in the light heavyweights a year later. The hook and the swing crossed each other, there was a pop, pop, like bubble gum, and, as Eggers said, "We each got a loving cup for hating one another."

When I went down to the big store to get in touch with the Dolly Sisters the first one I bump into is Eggers in the gym, where he is boxing with his shadow and trying to uppercut it. That's never been done. When I ask for Boyle he knows I have something hotter than third base in the Texas League.

I never tell Eggers anything because Boyle will listen to reason long enough to enable you to beat the women and children to the lifeboats. When Eggers cocked that left hand he believed the customer was always ripe. The only way to talk with him was in an Army overcoat with the collar turned up.

I locate Boyle in a side room where he is setting Oscar up with a left jab and banging him with a looping right. As Oscar is a sandbag he can take it like a burglar with a license to steal. I tell him that I have a line on the Out-of-Town Mob, and he bangs Oscar about waist high with a right. It was the first time I ever heard a sandbag say "Ouch."

I tell Boyle all I know from Eddie Miller and how the mob has scared him about his mother. Boyle calls in Eggers and they both shove me into their car and we're off for the Friars Club. Eggers is doing seventy miles per up Fifth Avenue, driving with his right hand, wiping off the

windshield with a left hook and yelling:

"If I catch up to those mugs I'll stop 'em quicker than a bricklayer in a thundershower."

The Dolly Sisters get a look at Eddie while he's still out like a hung jury. "He's the man we want," said Boyle, "he's going to talk if I have to vaccinate him with a phonograph needle."

"That mob has him plenty scared," I said. "They promised him they would give it to his mother in spades. If there is anything on earth that Eddie loves it's his mother. He has to lay twenty-seven thousand on the line in two weeks or they will snatch her."

"He pays nothing," said Boyle, "and his mother is going to be as safe as a single over second. If there is any mob tougher than Boyle and Eggers, then we resign and start life all over again as bouncers in an orphan asylum."

"Eddie will take some convincing," I said.

"Here's the convincer," Eggers remarked as he whistled a left hook at my chops.

If I hadn't ducked he would have knocked me colder than a popsicle in dry ice.

"We're leaving," said Boyle. "Call us when he is strong enough to dial a radio with both hands. He's got a date to keep with the Out-of-Town Mob."

Well, two weeks later Eddie kept a date with the Out-of-Town Mob and the Dolly Sisters grabbed the contact man. It was Little Nocky's brother, which meant that one snatch was a fake, staged to take the heat off the local boys. It also meant the Out-of-Town Mob had local contacts on tap.

By the time Little Nocky's brother had an audition with the Dolly Sisters he stopped more punches than the gong in Madison Square Garden. And he sang like a road company of Madame Butterfly. The Out-of-Town Mob was from Chicago and hotter than flannel underwear.

Boyle and Eggers went out and grabbed them all and lumped them up like a sack of potatoes. But they missed Little Nocky, who had a sixth sense without the other five.

Everything was setting as neat as a nurse's cap with the Dolly Sisters congratulating themselves that they would send the Out-of-Town Mob away for so long a stretch that when they got out they would be frightened by an umbrella.

Their star witness is Eddie. And then Eddie dummies up. He has got a telephone call from Little Nocky, who tells him he will snatch Eddie's ma and give her the hotfoot with an acetylene torch.

Well, the Dolly Sisters are madder than a porcupine with ingrown quills. They take Eddie into executive session and Boyle asks:

"Why are you scared of the Out-of-Town Mob when they're jugged like cider in October?"

Eddie says Little Nocky is looser than a busted axle and he is awful tough. "Is he tougher than me?" Boyle wants to know as Eggers clips

Eddie with a left hook. To their surprise Eddie takes it standing up. A fellow who has been worked over by the Out-of-Town Mob can take it like a post-office blotter. Then Boyle wings over that right load of dynamite and down goes Eddie but he isn't out.

"Who's the toughest?" yells Eggers. "Me or Little Nocky?" as he gives Eddie the leather right in the ribs.

"Do you mean to say you're more scared of the Out-of-Town Mob than you are of me?" Boyle hollered as he picks Eddie up with his left hand and smears him with a right.

And by the time Eddie is ready to talk he can't. His lips are swelled like a busted sofa and his eyes are ace-deuce. He must have been awful scared of the Out-of-Town Mob, for it's two hours later that he nods his head when Eggers yells:

"Who's the toughest?"

It was a question of professional pride with the Dolly Sisters. They had given Eddie a course in applied muscular psychology. They believed in fighting fire with fire insurance.

And a little later Eddie is in the reception room of the Friars Club, this time with shoes but more lumps. I call up his ma and say that Eddie has left for Hollywood and will be gone two weeks. He was up and walking in ten days with his ribs taped in from left to right and he goes over to see his ma. The rest has done him good and he's as dapper as a new-laid egg.

But his ma says somebody has called her on the telephone and threatened her life. That sets Eddie right back on his goal line again, and the Dolly Sisters are only human. The beating they gave Eddie was more in sorrow than in anger. But they had to prove who was the toughest and they invite Eddie down to the big store.

This time they take him down to the Goldfish Room. Some people will tell you there's no such thing as the Goldfish Room but I can describe it. The chairs, tables and rugs can be taken out of the room, which leaves the floor of white tile. So are the walls. The Goldfish Room can be washed up with a hose. Then they put the furniture back carefully.

Eddie is sitting in the room with his back to the door talking to Boyle when there's a scuffling sound out in the corridor and he can hear somebody yelling, "Giddap, you!"

Eddie rounds and there is a fellow crawling into the room with Eggers standing on his back. The man doing the crawling is the Lump Man for the Out-of-Town Mob. He's the fellow who put the heat to Eddie's feet and stuck the toothpicks under his toenails. The fellow looks pretty scared.

Everything he does to Eddie they do to him. There's four in the Out-of-Town Mob not including the local contact, Little Nocky, who is still loose. Eggers goes out and rides them in one by one until they are all stretched out flatter than wet leaves on a slate walk.

While Eddie looks on, Boyle pours office mucilage on the floor

and makes them rub their noses in it. "Who's the toughest?" he asks and they all say, "You are."

Eggers yells, "Louder" and they start singing pretty loud for hoodlums. And when they crawl up one by one and lick mustard off Eddie's shoes, Eddie realizes they aren't so tough.

And he says he will go through with his testimony provided somebody guards his mother because Little Nocky is still loose.

"You can have your choice of us," says Boyle. "Take your pick. She won't be alone a minute until these birds are in the shade. And Little Nocky will be with them. Which one do you want?"

"I'll take you," Eddie said to Boyle; and Eggers screamed, "What, is he tougher than me?" He cocked that left hand and Boyle primed his right, but Eddie squared it by saying, "No, he's no tougher than you, but ma likes to go to night clubs and he's the best dancer."

The first night out ma and her bodyguard made the Barn Club, the Village Flea Bag, the Dipsy-Doo, the Barrel of Laughs and Heinie Kabboobles. Boyle saw her safely home at dawn and turned over the bodyguard job to the copper on the beat. Then he staggered up to my room at the club to get some sleep.

The second night ma starts in with a dinner dance at seven at the Starlight Room in the Waldorf, she swings and sways with Benny Mays at the Commodore, bobs and dips with Jimmy Bipps at the La Palomba and winds up in Hamburger Paradise whirling poor Boyle to the internal rumblings of a juke box.

At seven the next morning he totters into the Friars Club with his shoes in his hand. Sitting on the edge of my bed, he says, "Look at those blisters on my feet. She's giving me the hotfoot to music. I can't stand it. She's too tough for me."

Boyle threatens to resign, but Eddie says it's no dice with Little Nocky still on the loose. And while the hunt goes on for the short lamster, Boyle continues to dance around the clock with Eddie's ma.

She is having the time of her life, not knowing that Boyle is protecting her from Little Nocky. All she knows is that Eddie has very nice friends who escort her in the evenings when Eddie is busy. It gets too much for one man and Boyle asks for a relief. Eddie's ma won't think of going out with anybody but Boyle so they give him another handsome young detective to spell him.

Ma takes the two in her syncopated stride and by three in the morning they have been to Maison Blottz, the Gypsy Trail, Joe's Roach Ranch, La Toot Tavern, the Hashienda and three other circulating libraries where they read by the subdued glow of an electric light in a bass drum.

All the dancing and the attentions of two handsome young men is making Eddie's ma younger, slimmer and prettier. But it is wrecking Boyle, who is busy sending out for reinforcements. The only chance he

has is that Eggers rounds up Little Nocky so that Ma's Eddie will not lose his nerve and have to get another working over.

For by this time Boyle is about as tender-hearted as he is tender-footed. Eggers has a line on Little Nocky that takes him around the night-club circuit and one night he bumps into Eddie's ma and Boyle, coincidental like.

It's the old Villa Maxie's, which is now closed. It is the sixth stop for Boyle that night and by now he knows the spots better than a milk-man's horse. In a month he has bought his overcoat twice. Once for cash and once in installments to hat-check girls. Well, Boyle is sure glad to see Eggers and an hour later Ma has danced them both down until their hip pockets are dipping sand.

It's three in the morning then and ma has no more intention of going home than she has of going over Niagara Falls in a telephone booth. Finally, Eggers can't take it any more. With Boyle pleading with tears in his big brown eyes, Eggers forces his way to the coat room for his autumn flogger.

He hands in his check and then says to the girl, "That's a pretty nice benny over there," pointing to a terrific raccoon benjamin that seems a bit early in the season.

"A Dartmouth boy," the girl smiled, "went overboard last week celebrating and left it. He says he will be in next week and bail it out."

"That's strange," said Eggers, "there must be Dartmouth boys in hock all over town. That's the third raccoon flogger I've seen tonight and they're all for big men. Why, it reaches from the hook to the floor. Do you mind if I look at that one?"

Eggers shoved his way past the girl and ran his hand over the fur. Then he hooked it about belt line with his left.

The overcoat said, "Ouch!"

Not to be outdone in Oriental courtesy Boyle reached over and slugged the raccoon about the third button with his overland right. This time the overcoat was silent but Little Nocky fell out.

"Well," said Eggers to the girl, "wives are checking their husbands these days."

Then he picks up Little Nocky and says, "A rat in a raccoon's clothing."

He's about to pop Little Nocky again when Boyle stops him. "Just a minute, we'll give him a touch of high life."

They take him in the men's room, wash his face, comb his hair and bring him out as dapper as ever. Then they take him over to their table and say, "Mrs. Miller, I want you to meet one of Eddie's best friends, Mr. Tattistrat from Porter-off. He's the best dancer in the country."

Naturally, Eddie's ma doesn't know about double talk but she thinks Mr. Tattistrat is a very nice fellow even if he doesn't seem to know the exact location of Porteroff. In the Villa Maxie's they use the double-band system so the music never stops. Neither does Eddie's

ma and in about thirty or forty minutes Mr. Tattistrat from Porteroff is commencing to wilt.

Eddie's ma is certain that Boyle knows the nicest kind of people. She isn't hep that the gorilla she's dancing with has gouged twenty-three thousand out of Eddie and is after twenty-seven more. She doesn't know that Mr. Pattistrat from Porteroff stuck toothpicks under her boy's toenails.

And she doesn't know that Mr. Tattistrat from Porteroff would cut her throat for a wooden nickel just for the pleasure of throwing the nickel off a bridge and watching it float. Eddie's ma doesn't know a lot of things. But she does know she is having a wonderful evening.

She also doesn't know that dancing is the worst punishment you could give a gorilla because they all have crapshooter's feet. Their toes curl up from bending over and shooting dice on the floor. That hamstrings them after a year or so. In a few more minutes Mr. Tattistrat glides by Boyle and Eggers and says cater-cornered, "What do you want from me?" But they pay no attention.

The next time around Mr. Tattistrat sideswipes, "How about the full treatment in the Goldfish Room?" But they make him keep going until Eddie's ma is willing to go home.

That's something Eddie's ma has no intention of doing. And, finally Mr. Tattistrat from Porteroff cries tantivy. With tears running down his face he pleads with the Dolly Sisters, "Boys, take me to the Goldfish Room. She's too tough for me."

"Have they got dancing there?" asked Eddie's ma.

"Yes, they have," said Boyle, "but it's sort of one-sided."

Well, the three of them see Eddie's ma home as usual in the dawn's useless light, and she thanks them all for a wonderful evening. Especially Mr. Tattistrat from Porteroff.

Then the Dolly Sisters escort Little Nocky to his new apartment down at the big store. About an hour later I get a phone call that Eggers is downstairs in the reception room and when he comes up he has a shiner that looks like an elephant's ear on a mouse. It seems that before stashing Little Nocky in his form-fitting cell they have an argument over their pet punches and decide that Little Nocky will catch and referee.

Boyle wins first serve and while Eggers holds Nocky from the back Boyle lets go. They don't realize that Little Nocky is now a dual personality. Anyway, Mr. Tattistrat from Porteroff ducks and Boyle's overland right smacks Eggers right where the expression joins the face and knocks him colder than a screen door facing north.

So Eggers used my room in the Friars Club for a couple of weeks.

judge priest and the widow

by . . . Irvin S. Cobb

The criminal had a genius for felony. But Judge Priest could be fiendishly clever himself when a woman was facing murder.

REELFOOT LAKE is the largest fresh-water lake south of the Ohio River. It is the weirdest and the strangest, the most mysterious and the most sinister. Also, it's the newest. It was created by the great earthquakes of 1811.

There was one shock that shifted the course of the Mississippi River, and that must have been some shift. There came a second which practically made over the Madrid Bend country of west Tennessee and southwestern Kentucky. Then there was a third which crumpled down and depressed an area roughly sixty-five miles in length and of an average width of about seventy miles.

The same shock split a fissure through to the Mississippi, so that for three days the Mississippi ran north through the funnel, to fill up that gaping hollow and overflow the sunken lands bordering it.

In Reelfoot there are stretches where on still, cloudless days a man in a boat, peering downward into the saffron depths, can see the slime-festooned upper boughs of drowned trees still standing and stanch after a century and a quarter of being baptized.

There are other places, deeper

In two decades that have seen American mystery fiction move all the way from the staid S. S. Van Dyne to the hemoglobinous Mickey Spillane, the shrewd, ever-human, extremely likable and always fascinating Judge Billy Priest stories of Irvin S. Cobb have acquired the patina of fine old meerschaum. It is a pleasure to reveal in this short novel by one of America's greatest story tellers that, like fine old meerschaum, Judge Priest and his Western Kentucky neighbors improve with age.

still, and by local belief these spots mark the mouths of subterranean tunnels and passages by which the great carrion-loving gars and catfish may go out to the river and back again, regardless of water levels above.

Before now, bloody things and tragic things have come to pass here, and it was here, a few years back, that there came to pass a tragedy which is the cause and the excuse for this story's being written, the story, in fine, of a certain elderly Kentuckian's first appearance as an amateur detective. Considerably more than a decade later he would take on the same calling, temporarily, but this prior business signalized his dedicatory performance in the role.

Properly, the story begins, not by the pumpkin-colored waters of Reelfoot nor upon its reedy margins, but somewhat farther north of that grim theater, under the roof of the ancient courthouse in the ancient town, where for so long Circuit Judge William Pitman Priest reigned as a benevolent despot over a generally satisfied constituency.

It was one of those flawless, cool-warm days of early October when the Southern summer is putting on flaunting colors. The busy sweet gum, which reared almost against the north wall of the old courthouse, was shaking a cosmetic bough, all purple and scarlet and weathered green, in at the nearmost raised window, as Judge Priest came and stood on the threshold of his private chamber opening off the courtroom proper.

Here was where, for going on forty years now, he had presided over Circuit Court. But this afternoon County Court was in session. County Judge Dyke being ill, Major Randolf Pitman was sitting in his stead by temporary appointment. Major Pitman was one of the younger members of the home bar, a veteran of the World's War, one stiffened arm attesting that his had been active service. He likewise was Judge Priest's nephew, in whom the old man was well pleased.

Perhaps a desire to see how his kinsman would acquit himself in the judicial capacity had drawn the uncle to the doorway flanking the bench. Certainly it could not have been any deep regard for the barrister in the case that had brought him hither. Of all the lawyers in town, the Honorable Horace Maydew, former state senator, was the only one not on friendly terms with Judge Priest.

This ambitious gentleman was seated between his two clients, one a pretty, slender girl in her latter teens, and the other a plumpish woman who, you would have said offhand, was in the early forties; and both of them were dressed in all-black. The right hand of the woman was clumped in surgical bandages. Mr. Maydew stood up now and cleared his throat. He had a fine sonorous voice to match his majestic presence.

"May it please Your Honor," he said, "under ordinary conditions

this proceeding would mean merely the presenting of an uncontested will for probate. But, because of certain prior history in connection with it, I have felt it my bounden duty, as the legal representative of these heirs-at-law, to crave the indulgence of this court whilst I rehearse briefly the admitted facts and file certain sworn and attested statements pertaining to same. I shall endeavor to be brief."

But he didn't in the least suggest a man who intended to be brief. He went on: "As is known to all within the sound of my voice, the Carmichaels at one time formed a large and influential connection in this county; but of late years there remained but one resident member of that sturdy stock, namely, Elijah Carmichael, living at the family homestead three miles from this city on the Concord turnpike.

"Almost two months ago, on August twenty-first, he peacefully expired at the age of seventy-four. The estate, under the law, descended in equal parts to his surviving next of kin, of whom there proved to be but two—namely, his much younger half-brother, Caleb Carmichael, Esquire, and his niece, Miss Juliet Blair, the only child of decedent's deceased half-sister.

"No difficulty was experienced in finding the junior heir. She is here today." With a sweeping gesture he indicated the girl in his shadow. "But some days passed before the executors succeeded in discovering the whereabouts of the other legal legatee of this estate."

"He left here with his parents at the age of eleven years and never once thereafter returned. We trace his career intermittently. We know that as a very young man he studied surgery at a medical college in the city of Philadelphia, but—ahem—never completed his professional education.

"Thereafter we hear of him under his stage name of Carey Carr, as connected with carnivals, with vaudeville entertainment, with other forms of amusement—in short, a strolling player. It would also appear that some twelve years ago he contracted a matrimonial alliance with a Miss Martha Swopes, originally of Keokuk, Iowa.

"Being at length traced to the city of Houston, Texas, he was informed of the demise of his half-brother and of his own good fortune. Immediately, as he wrote, he made plans for returning here. In that same letter he announced that he would be accompanied by his wife. Needless to add, I refer to this lady who sits at my right hand.

"Four weeks ago the couple started on their trip hither in their own car. Shortly after leaving Memphis, Tennessee, the husband recalled that their route would take them almost past Reelfoot Lake. Accordingly, he suggested they detour a short distance in order that he might show his wife the scene of his joyous boyhood experiences. His spouse acquiescing, they left the main highway and followed a side road until they reached a gloomy depth known as the Big Hole, a location you all know.

"Our travelers had halted their car upon the low bluff immediately adjacent to this spot and, by the testimony of the survivor, were standing side by side upon the edge contemplating the somber prospect, when, without warning, the husband staggered, presumably from a cerebral stroke or sudden spasm of faintness, and in the same breath fell forward and was precipitated headfirst into the murky waters below.

"For some time—just how long a time she herself does not recall—his desolated companion remained upon the scene vainly hoping against hope for signs of him. At length, filled with grief and horror, she quit that grim vista, seeking help.

"In the natural distress of such a moment she accidentally slammed the car door, badly mangling her right thumb, but she drove as best she could to the nearest human habitation some miles away and there gave the alarm. Being assured that days or even weeks must elapse before the remains were borne to the surface, she hurried on to this city.

"At once then it developed that on the eve of their simple wedding twelve years previously, Caleb Carmichael and the then Martha Swopes had entered into certain prenuptial arrangements. Two life insurance policies were taken out, whereby either party was insured for the sum of five thousand dollars in favor of the other. Likewise each wrote a will identical in its provisions, under the terms of which, in the event of the signer's death, the survivor would become the sole possessor of whatsoever property the decedent might possess at date of death.

"The baring of these facts created new and unexpected factors. Instead of arriving here as a prospective future resident, this lady now appears as her late husband's chosen inheritor and beneficiary, and therefore entitled to that one-half interest in an estate which, had he lived a few days longer, would have been awarded him as a co-heir of his half-brother, Elijah."

Here, for a short but dramatic space, Mr. Maydew paused. Before resuming, he glanced downward at the funereal shape at his side. The widow's somewhat narrow face, with its rather wide but shapely mouth, its deep-set eyes, its firm yet not angular chin, remained a serious, almost austere mask. Only by a fumbling at the button fastenings of the light, crepelike coat which she wore over a black silk blouse did she betray any suggestion of inner stress.

From his post at the doorway where he fronted the room, Judge Priest gave an involuntary start which no one there heeded—and, behind his glasses, his faded blue eyes began squinting hard at something, some motion, some shape, which for him all of a sudden had become overwhelmingly absorbing.

"Meanwhile," resumed the orator, "watch was being maintained at the place of Mr. Caleb Carmichael's untimely taking-off. Eleven days elapsed after that sad event before the body was—ahem—by natural

forces projected from its watery entombment. Because of the elements and the inevitable processes of decay and—hum, ahem—other causes, the remains had undergone changes melancholy to contemplate.

"Fortunately, however, for our purposes a proper and complete identity was readily established. Not only did the body correspond in general size to the living form of the deceased; not only did the garments still adhering to it answer to the description given by disinterested witnesses at various points as being those worn on his journey northward; but absolutely indisputable proof was found—a removable plate or bridge intended for wear in the lower rear jaw and consisting mainly of three false teeth, which was immediately recognized by its original designer, Dr. P. J. Hooks, of Vicksburg, Mississippi, as being the same which some years ago he made for Caleb Carmichael.

"On such an array of incontrovertible evidence, a coroner's jury returned a verdict in accordance with the obvious facts; and, furthermore, the representative of the insurance company, here present, promptly waived any further investigation, and so reported to his home office, with the result that only this morning the widow received a certified check for the full amount of the policy in force on her husband's life at the time of his demise.

"Without further ado, then, the corpse was brought to our fair city and reverently interred in the family vault of the Carmichael family at Elm Grove Cemetery.

"My narrative being practically at an end, I therefore would move the court as follows: First, that the last will and testament of the late Caleb Carmichael be admitted to probate. Second, that the public administrator be instructed to take the necessary steps for a prompt and equitable distribution of the estate of the late Elijah Carmichael to my clients, Mrs. Martha Swopes Carmichael and Miss Juliet Blair. Third, since the junior heir still lacks some three months of attaining her majority, and being in the eyes of the law yet an infant, I move that for the brief space of the interim a guardian for her shall be appointed by this honorable court.

"As a preliminary to such recommendation I now offer for the official transcript sundry documents."

He fumbled in a leather manuscript case and produced quite a sheaf of folded, official-looking papers, together with some cardboard oblongs.

"Among other things, I have here," he said, "a true copy of the birth certificate of Martha Swopes, born at Denver, Colorado, June eighteen, eighteen eighty-four, together with an attested copy of the marriage license issued to the said Martha Swopes and Caleb Carmichael. I also have here an affidavit recently given by Dr. P. J. Hooks, the previously mentioned dentist of Vicksburg, Mississippi, and with it a transcript of the proceedings of the coroner's jury lately sitting at

the nearby city of Fulvin in this state.

"And finally, I have here the original of the aforesaid will of the late Caleb Carmichael, a will done in the testator's handwriting and without the signatures of witnesses, but admissible to probate under our Kentucky statutes, since the body of the text and the signature have been identified as his handwriting by the widow, and likewise by comparison with these several accompanying manuscripts—notes, memoranda, etc.—done in longhand by him, which were found among his personal effects."

Making the items into a compact bundle, Mr. Maydew handed them to the county clerk, who in turn deposited them on the desk before the acting county judge.

"Counsel would appear to have been diligent in behalf of his clients," stated His Honor. "There remains, I take it, only the detail of naming for Miss Juliet Blair, here present, a suitable guardian to protect and conserve her interests, and I therefore—"

The sentence was never finished. From his immediate left there came a choked, gurgling outcry. Major Pitman swung about in his chair.

Judge Priest was swaying in the doorway, his face swollen and convulsed. As half a dozen men sprang toward him, he collapsed face downward on the floor.

II

They carried him back into his private quarters and laid him on a sofa, and County Court adjourned with the business before it unfinished. Meanwhile the sufferer had recovered his senses. Somebody naturally had suggested running for a physician. At that the invalid seemed to rally, and in a faint, piping voice spoke out:

"Git Lew Lake," he wheezed. "He looked after me a while back when I had one of these here swoundin' spells." In a lower tone he whispered to his nephew, "And say, son, have somebody telephone out to my house fur Jeff Poindexter, and shoo everybody out of here."

His lids drooped wearily and he lay like one sorely spent as presently Dr. Lake entered, hiding his worriment beneath a manner that was gruff.

"He just went down as though lightning had struck him," began Major Pitman. "It's the first I knew of it, but he says you attended him once before when he had a similar attack."

"He's a liar, then," snorted the old physician. "Billy Priest," he demanded, "what are you up to now, scaring everybody around here half to death?"

Behind him, Major Pitman goggled in astonishment. The invalid was favoring both of them with a slow, crafty wink.

"Uncle Billy, are you all right?" he cried.

"No, I ain't," answered his uncle. "In addition to bein' somewhut shook up, I got an awful hard crack on my elbow ag'inst that hard floor." He lifted his head, then

dropped it again. "Air you shore that door is closed? Well, lock it, and pull down both winder curtains yonder. I'm about to set up."

His famous temper bursting out through all his visible pores, Dr. Lake glowered down at his friend. "You fraud, what's the meaning of this infernal play-acting?"

"Lew," confessed the malingerer, "I couldn't think of ary-other way of breakin' off the proceedin's without creatin' apprehension in certain quarters." He turned his look upon Major Pitman. "About one more minute, son, and you'd have admitted that there will to probate, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, of course—but why—?"

"Well, ez it is, we've got an excuse fur a few days' delay, and ef it should turn out I'm wrong, then the order kin be signed and there's no damage done."

"But what was it you saw or heard that nobody else there could see or hear?" asked the major.

"I ain't absolutely shore I did see anything. You'll have to put your trust in me and lend me some aid, both of you."

"We'll help. But what is it you think you sensed? Fraud—collusion?"

"I ain't mentioned nary one of those harsh terms. I'll give you a hint: Don't it seem likely to you that possibly too much's been took for granted in this here matter?"

"But the insurance investigator looked into everything, remember, and he professes to be entirely satisfied."

"Even so, ef nobody objects, I'll keep broodin', off and on. . . . Listen, son, did it ever occur to you that nobody ain't seen fit to probe very deep into the widow's standin'? Whut I'm tryin' to git at is that the only existin' identification of her is the one which she herself offers. I'd like more proof."

"How about the certified copy of her birth certificate? Surely you don't think that could be a forgery?"

"I do not. I take it that it's the genuwine article, even though it mout 'a' passed into the hands of, let's say, an impostor. But it dates back forty-odd years."

"Well, then, the marriage license and the two wills—hers and his?"

"Both twelve years old. Whut about sence then?"

"Why, the two photographs."

"Whut two photographs?"

"The two in the file that Maydew tendered a few minutes ago."

"Oh! Fetch 'em in, then, and let's have a look. Better fetch the whole batch in whilst you're about it—will and all."

The old man carefully studied the cabinet-sized prints which Major Pitman handed him. He turned them, reading printed inscriptions on the backs. His scrutiny over, Judge Priest grunted: "Humph! These air indubitably likenesses of the widow. Kinder dressy, not to say stylish in former days, wuzn't she? Plenty of long hair, too, judgin' by the way it's piled up."

"Plenty of long hair yet, unless it's a wig she wears."

"I hardly think it's a wig. I studied

her right close't, today. I'd guess offhand that all that there mess of hair is growin' out of her own scalp. . . . Say, son, how did these pictures come to be offered, anyway?"

"I might make a few inquiries, but, whether she did or not, Maydew approved of it. He said the girl, Juliet Blair, received them in a letter from her aunt-in-law right after word had reached the Caleb Carmichaels down in Texas that Caleb's half-brother was dead and had left him a pile."

"So the girl got them before the drowndin' and not afterwards?"

"Weeks before! The lady said in the letter she looked forward to meeting her little niece by marriage, and in advance wanted to have her see how she looked. So that would seem to dispose of any doubt as to her being what she says she is."

"Seems so. Son, by any chance is that there letter also in Maydew's handy little budget?"

As Major Pitman searched, his senior absent-mindedly slid the two photographs into a breast pocket of his coat.

"I don't find it," said Pitman. "Well, Uncle Billy, are you satisfied that this thing was a false alarm on your part?"

"On the contrary, son, the possible complicatedness of it 'pears to me to be pilin' up thicker'n ever."

"Well, suh, in that case I'm agreeable to doing whatever you want done."

"Here's what I want both of you to do: Randy, I want you to put all these here papers in a secure safe place of keepin' and leave 'em there whilst you're away."

"Away? Where? And why?"

"Away lookin' after your pore old stricken uncle. And right there is where you come into the picture, Lew Lake. It'll be your job to give it out that owin' to my sudden illness, you've ordered me to leave fur a few days' complete rest at Hot Springs, Arkansaw."

"Ah, indeed!" His old comrade's note was sarcastic. "So I'm to perjure myself—"

"You air! Better fix it fur tomorrow mornin' early—the southbound Cannonball out of here. Because tonight at my house I aim to have a confab with little Julie Blair. I'm lookin' to you, boy, to see to it that she gits in and out of my place without anybody bein' the wiser."

"I'll try. How long will we be gone?"

"Not very long, I hope. We'll start off like we wuz headin' fur Hot Springs, but I reckon neither one of us won't actually ever git there."

"But won't Hod Maydew raise Cain about my going away without acting on his application to probate?"

"Let him sweat. Kin he hold it ag'inst you that in the hurry of gittin' off with your venerable and infirm relative you plumb forgot to pass on this motion?"

"But suppose he goes to Judge Dyke out at his house and asks for an order?"

"Poor old Dyke ain't in shape to do any supersedin'. Word I got today is he's out of his head and sinkin'

fast. Besides, even ef he did rally, how could they probate a will that's locked up in that old wall-safe of mine yonder, and me the only man who knows the combination?"

"Oh, I see."

"Glad you're beginnin' to— Who's that hammerin' at the door? Must be Jeff. Let him in, but not anybody else. Oh, Randy"—his tone was casual—"how long after them there Germans winged you did it take you to git used to bein' left-handed?"

"I'm not used to it yet. I'm still awkward when it comes to wrestling with things like shirtstuds." The major glanced down at his permanently skewed arm.

"Ah, hah. . . . Well, I s'pose it would take time." He addressed Dr. Lake: "Say, Lew, how air you on autopsies?"

"I've performed plenty of them in my time, if that's what you mean."

"And whut about little jobs of secret grave-robbin'?"

From the old physician the hot words popped like popcorn: "First, by gum, you ask me to risk my professional reputation by lying. And now you suggest that I begin flirting with the penitentiary—"

"Wait a minute." It was the youngest man breaking in now: "Uncle Billy, what's to hinder you from giving an order for the exhumation of that body?"

"And if I wuz wrong, would Hod Maydew ever git through snickerin'? Think I'd want to be the laughin' stock of the whole district because I'd went off half-cocked?" Judge Priest stood up. "Randy, you better support me on one side and, Jeff, you git on the other. And don't furgit, anybody, that you-all air easin' along a mouty feebled-up wreck of a human shell."

His feet dragging, his hands fumbling weakly, and his head lolling, the invalid traveled down the courthouse steps and on to the rusty car awaiting him at the curbstone. Spectators scattered to spread the latest bulletin: Judge Priest must be awful bad off. He certainly looked it.

He still looked it that evening as he sat, all bundled up, in the front room of his old house out on Clay Street, for his interview with the girl, Juliet Blair. Now here, Judge Priest decided, was a girl not especially bright but sweet and biddable . . . if anything, just a little bit too biddable.

"Was there—is there anything wrong, suh?" she was saying.

"Whut ever made you think that, honey?" he countered.

"Well, Major Pitman slipping me in by the back way. And both of you telling me not to say anything to anybody."

"Oh, that! Well, I'll tell you about that. Your lawyer, Horace Maydew, Esquire, ain't so very friendly towards me. You see, child, I knowed your folks frum who laid the rail. I reckin it wuz largely my fault I didn't keep better track of you after most of your family died off."

"Thank you, suh." She had gracious, simple manners. "Well, you

couldn't blame yourself. You see, I haven't lived here since I was a little girl."

"So I gethered. Whut've you been doin' with yourself?"

"I grew up at Farmdale, out in Bland County, and after Mamma died I managed to finish high school, and then I started clerking in a general store there. I quit when my uncle died and left me this money. I hardly knew him, even."

"Hardly anybody knew him much, without it wuz those two decrepit old darkies out on the home place, and one of them deef and dumb besides. You ain't stayin' out there, by any chance?"

"Oh, no, suh! I'm at Mrs. Broderick's boardinghouse down on Franklin Street."

"Tell me, have you seen very much of this aunt-in-law sence she arrived?"

"Not so very much. She's sort of —sort of standoffish. She never offers to kiss me—just shakes hands. She's not very warm."

"I'd gamble there's somebody else would hanker to kiss a purty little trick like you?"

She flushed, and he knew the shot had registered. She hastened to get back on a less intimate track: "She's nice, though. She wrote me an awfully friendly letter before she started for here on the trip that turned out so terribly."

"Is that so? I s'pose you've still got it?"

"No, suh. Almost as soon as we'd met she asked me to give it back to her, along with two pictures of her that she'd sent me at the same time. She said something about it maybe being needed for evidence—something like that. And only yesterday she told me she must have mislaid the letter or lost it, or something."

"Remember anything particular about the writin'?"

"Well, I do remember the letters didn't slant the regular way. You know—tilted to the right."

"Sort of backhanded, eh?"

"No, not leaning, exactly—just more straight-up-and-down."

"Well, nearly all of us have our own special little tricks when it comes to takin' pen in hand. And so you're gettin' along fust-rate with this new relative of yours?"

"Just fine, what little I see of her. She stays to herself a lot. But she's mighty considerate—generous, too. Why, Judge Priest, almost the first thing she said to me was that just as soon as this estate was settled up she wanted to take me around the world with her."

"Travel's a great thing . . . But look here, whut's that sweetheart of yours goin' to say to your traipsin' off like that?"

"Oh, you mean Tom Ackers? I guess I'll know how to handle him."

"I reckin you will. I seem to recall frum my own youth that most good-lookin' young girls 'pear to come by the gift naturally. Say, look here, honey, want to do me a favor?"

"If I can."

"Well, then, promise you won't make any plans about goin' away anywheres until we've had a chance

to thresh it all out together. I'm leavin' here early in the mornin', but I don't aim to be gone very long, so, till I git back, after that, the bargain stands, eh?"

"Yes, suh, and thank you for your interest. I hope you come back feeling ever so much better."

"Honey," he said with sincerity, "I've got a premonition that practically ez soon ez I git away, I'm goin' to start feelin' and actin' a heap stronger. Jest seein' you has holpen me a lot."

Judge Priest proved himself a true prophet. For, while he still swayed like a dizzy pachyderm as Major Pitman and Jeff Poindexter eased him aboard the southbound flier in the before-sunup gloom of that next morning, he regained a measure of his customary spryness almost immediately after he got off two hours later at a junction town which straddled the state line. Major Pitman stayed aboard. He went on to New Orleans and changed cars there for Houston.

Since the judge was known to people nearly everywhere in that end of the state, he made himself shrinking and inconspicuous in the shadow of a freight shed until Jeff, having gone up the street, presently came back with a hired livery rig.

For most of the forenoon the convalescent and Jeff jogged through the gloriously tinted woods. Before noon, they stopped at a double log cabin, where the old man was immediately in confab with a bewhiskered lowlander. This person's tongue was as nimble as his bodily movements were slow.

"Yas, suh," he stated. "That day of the drowndin', I seen this here couple lumber past here. I wuz settin' yonder, and I noticed they wuz totin' a terrible big load of plunder with 'em."

"About whut time of day wuz that?"

"I kin fix it mighty nigh to the minute. Uncle Gippy Saunders, that drives the free delivery route, wuz jest comin' in sight, and, rain or shine, he's due past here at two-twelve. . . . Well, I jest set here, and about four-fifteen their car came humpin' back."

"Whut makes you sure it wuz around four o'clock?"

"I got you ag'in there, suh. My chillen wuz jest climbin' over the yard fence, comin' from school; and school lets out at four and it takes 'em a skimpy quarter of an hour to git home, cuttin' acrost lots. . . . So the car come along—jest the woman in it now—and she stopped right about where you air now, and yelled out kind of shrill. One end of one thumb wuz mashed mighty nigh to a pulp, seemed like. She says she's lookin' fur help on account of her husband gittin' hisse'f drownded in the Big Hole."

"Jest a second: How fur is the lake frum here?"

"Not more'n two long miles—mebbe a quarter further on to the Big Hole."

"About how long would it take the average car to drive frum here to there and back ag'in to here?"

"Thirty minutes at the very outside."

"Did she mention how soon it wuz after they got to the lake before the drownin' took place?"

"Right away, she said. So right off I ast her whut she'd been doin' all the meantime, and she said she wuz so upset and excited she couldn't rightly say. Well, she'd cammed down considerable by the time she got back here with the sorry news. I'll say that fur the lady."

"Quite so. And whut did you do?"

"Well, fust off I set my biggest boy and my least one on mules and sent 'em to git fellers started draggin' the Big Hole. And then I climbed in 'longside her and showed her the way to old Doc Townsend's. And I left her there, and when I got back it wuz comin' on dark."

"So you didn't see her after that?"

"Not a minute frum that hour to this." To the languid speaker came an idea: "Say, mister, whut-all interest have you got in this here matter?"

"I'm a lawyer by profession," explained Judge Priest.

"I see. I heard tell there wuz a heap of money involved. Say, that there pair shore traveled with a big store of bag and baggin', ez the feller sez. Besides bundles and gripsacks and two kinds of little squeezed-in trunks, hitched on the runnin' boards, the whole back end of that kivered car wuz loaded halfway to the roof. I remember a couple of these here leather boxes like you'd carry brass-band horns in, and cramped in down at the bottom-like wuz about the biggest one of these here bull-fiddle cases ever I seen in my life."

"You didn't handle this bass-fiddle case—shiftin' the load, say?"

"No, suh. Why, all lamed up like she wuz and all bloody, and her havin' jest lost a husband, she even stopped long enough to lock up that there car before we went into Doc Townsend's."

"It's been long years since I wuz down at that Big Hole of yours," Judge Priest said, making his tone casual. "But, ez I recall, the ridge makes out to a kind of edge and then drops off steep and there's heavy undergrowth except just below the bluff? I don't suppose anybody studied the tracks at the spot where it happened—tire marks and footprints and sich?"

"Why would they? The whole place wuz all trompled down by the time I got there next mornin'."

Dr. Townsend wore on his vest lapel the little button of the United Confederate Veterans. Judge Priest owned such a button, too, and took occasion so to state, introducing himself. Yes, Dr. Townsend had dressed the widow's wound. The bone was not seriously injured. Some flesh and a lot of skin missing. "It ought to be healed up by now," he went on, "unless there was infection or the patient's blood was in poor shape."

"Well, much obliged and I reckin I'd better be on my way," said Judge Priest.

Back again late that night at the

railroad, Judge Priest did some telephoning to Major Pitman, en route, and to Dr. Lake at the latter's residence. Here he parted from Jeff. He caught one train and was on his way farther south, and Jeff caught another going in the opposite direction. Next morning the home town was excited to hear that after years of intimate association as master and man, Judge Priest and Jeff had severed relationship.

"Naw, suhs, they wuzn't to say no hard feelin's," Jeff explained to white friends making inquiry. "In fact, jest before we severed ourselves frum one 'nuther, the old Boss Man gimme a note of utmost recommendation to Mister Attorney Floyd Fairleigh, an' I'm done already gone to work fur him at his country residence out here on the Lone Oak Road. . . . Naw, suhs, no complaint on neither side. I reckins you mout say both of us at once't jest seemed to lose our taste fur one nurr."

III

At Vicksburg on the following forenoon Judge Priest called upon that Dr. Hooks who once upon a time had made a removable bridge for the lower right jaw of one Caleb Carmichael. He had a drawing in his files of the bridgework.

The Judge's next stop was across the big river over at the thriving Louisiana city of Monroe. Here he visited the establishment of a photographer named Newton who, it seemed, had succeeded another photographer named Hunt, now deceased. It was the facsimile signature of this defunct Mr. Hunt that was printed on these two photographs which Judge Priest had pilfered from the budget of exhibits tendered in evidence.

"Naturally I wouldn't recall this female," said Mr. Newton. "I didn't take over the shop until after Hunt died. But this is his work; I'd recognize it anywhere. Let me look through Hunt's old accounts.

"Here you are," he said at length. "The books show sittings on June 11th, eleven years back, and delivery of three dozen printed pictures four days later, billed at theatrical rates. They were billed to Carey Carr, care of the Lily DeWitt Carnival Company. Oh, yes, and here's records of two reorders mailed to other points —one to Spokane, Washington, and the other to Gallipolis, Ohio. Who was this Carey Carr?"

"His stage name wuz Carr. His right name wuz Caleb Carmichael," explained Judge Priest.

He reclaimed the photographs and went away. Still mulling things over, Judge Priest strolled aimlessly, and presently he came to, standing on the shore of the Ouachita River, which runs through Monroe, and he looked down and saw a large craft, part barge and part steamer, which, with floating flags and brilliant lettering on its flanks, proclaimed itself as the Rice & Pease Aquatic Palace.

"Now, by gum, why didn't I think of that before!" exclaimed Judge Priest.

With a sort of ponderous alacrity, he labored down the bank and

entered the gay marquee which arched a hospitable gangplank. Judge Priest picked out a tall, spry person who unmistakably had about him the executive manner, and who proved to be cordial.

"The name is Rice," he stated, speaking past the slant of a tremendous cigar. "Better known amongst friends and well-wishers as Lengthy Bill Rice. How can I serve you?"

"I'm not absolutely sure you can," said Judge Priest, who had thought it expedient to drop the vernacular which ordinarily he employed. "I just wanted to ask you a few leading questions. I take it, then, that you are widely acquainted in this field —that is, with individuals?"

"Listen, old-timer, there are more guys in this racket owing me borrowed money than the census enumerator ever meets. Come on in inside and set down."

The pair of them spent half an hour together, very pleasantly, and, on the older man's side, not entirely without profit. At any rate, he decided progress had been made along a previously undeveloped ore-streak.

That night he wired an advertisement to a weekly magazine published in Cincinnati and devoted to amusement in all its branches, for insertion in its next issue. Then, feeling better content with prospects than he had since arriving in Monroe, he overflowed a berth on a railroad train bound for New Orleans.

In his new job, and right from the outset, Jeff Poindexter appeared to have an abundance of leisure. His very first afternoon of service under Mr. Floyd Fairleigh he went rabbit hunting. His route took him across the fields stretching from the Fairleigh place towards a road half a mile or so to the southward.

Perhaps an hour later he halted at a party line of barbed wire which marked a neighboring ownership. Two dead bunnies swung by their tethered hind legs from a convenient trouser button. He had emerged from the heavy covert almost directly behind the gaunt old homestead where the late Elijah Carmichael had lived out his solitary days and where now his half-brother's widow was domiciled.

Somewhat nearer to him were the dependencies—an old but stout brick smokehouse, a springhouse, obviously abandoned; a mule barn, a stable, a cowshed, now serving as a garage; and, back of the inner yard fence, one log cabin, the lone survivor of what, once upon an ante bellum time, had been a whole row of slave quarters.

From the shelter of a clump of sassafras bushes Jeff studied what lay before him. The "big house" was tightly shuttered. Just beyond the cabin a very old, very feeble black man was slashing at a log of firewood. A large, tawny dog was lying at the edge of the chopping place.

Quite slowly, Jeff slipped between two of the rusted strands. Instantly the dog was up and coming at him.

Jeff neither retreated nor threatened. He stood in his tracks, making

small soothing, clucking sounds. Puzzled by these tactics, the dog hesitated, slowed down. Moving very deliberately, Jeff produced from a vest pocket a bit of paring from a horse's hoof. He dropped this odorous offering by his foot and the dog mouthed at it, licked the morsel enthusiastically.

Next Jeff sat down on a handy stump, got out his knife, and deliberately skinned and beheaded one of his rabbits, then dismembered the cadaver and fed the gobbets of hot meat to the dog. He took his time about it. When the last delectable chunk had vanished, the dog was nuzzling Jeff's hand, making low rumblings in his chest, getting the smell of Jeff's garments in his nostrils.

The dog trailing at his heels, Jeff dawdled across the lot. When at length the ancient darky saw him, Jeff smiled and by signs made clear his intent. He took the ax from those uncertain hands and made the chips fly, the dog looking on approvingly. Presently a Negro woman came forth from the kitchen wing. At sight of Jeff she stopped abruptly.

"Whut you doin' yere, boy?" she demanded. Her tone was hostile.

"Mizz Hester Morgan, ain't it?" asked Jeff, removing his cap.

"Ef 'tis, den whut?"

"Wellum, I works at Mist' Fairleigh's on the next place adjoinin'. So I jest dropped by to say howdy."

"Huh! We ain't havin' no truck wid neighbors."

"Yessum, but I'm same ez home folks. Many's the time I heared my ole mammy mention you—Libby Poindexter, she wuz."

"I knowed Sist' Poindexter. Dat any reason why I got to know you?"

"No'm, not widout you'd keer to, ven'able lady. But I wuz jist thinkin' to myself 'at mebbe you-all might accept this yere molly har' w'ich I kilt it few minutes ago, ez a free-will offerin', sort of."

"Lemme look." Her practiced fingers dug into the yielding tissues. "Feel lak he all kidney-fatted, don't he?" she said. Her tone was mollified.

"Lemme clean him fur you, Aunt Hester. Fust, tho', lemme git a few mo' sticks of stove-wood laid by."

"That ain't a bad idea, neither," she said. "Suttin'ly is a heap of logs needed 'round yere someway . . . Well, Br'er Poindexter, when you gits th'ough, better come on in our house an' set a spell."

It was good and dark when Jeff went home across lots. He had asked no definite questions; had been most casual, had betrayed no unseemly curiosity. Yet he knew more about the ways of that house under its present regime and about the new mistress of it than a white investigator could have gleaned in a month of Sundays.

He knew what went on in and about the old Carmichael place by day. He didn't know—yet—what went on in and about it by night, because it would appear that when Aunt Hester and the deaf mute retired they retired for keeps and for sleeping purposes.

Best of all, Jeff knew that thereafter he could invade these premises

at any hour and be assured of a hospitable reception by Aunt Hester's dog, now eating out of his hand.

There was a nipping edge on the October air and the young moon that rode in the pale sky looked cold and crumbly. It was getting on towards midnight, moreover—the dread hour when graveyards are, on the best authority, said to yawn.

Jeff Poindexter shivered and bit hard with his underjaw to keep his teeth from chattering. He was stretched out, face downward, on the sloped roof of a latticed side porch at one corner of the old Carmichael homestead. He was looking into the bedroom of the solitary tenant of that house, a room at the eastern end of the building on the second floor. Through the slats of a wooden blind he watched the figure within. Dressed in a house wrapper, it sat at a dressing table not ten feet from him.

While he watched, the occupant stripped from her wounded hand the bandages which encased it, revealing to him a wound which looked very raw and angry. From a medicinal-looking tube she squeezed a little wormlike ribbon of some pasty material and anointed the injured thumb, then rewrapped it with a new strip of gauze and slipped on a rubber thumb guard.

This done, she combed out her hair, strand by strand, until it hung in a thick, dark mane upon her shoulders, and then doused it from a tall, slender bottle which to Jeff suggested barber-shop tonics.

At length she was done with these purely personal services. She gathered together the articles she had been using and restored them to a leather toilet case. Then she fastened the toilet kit, using a small key.

Now she got up and passed out of Jeff's limited range of vision. Almost immediately, though, she came back into sight. Carrying an old-fashioned lantern, unlit, she passed through a door.

Instantly Jeff was back-scuffling over the eaves of that porch. His toes found purchase in the latticework and very quickly he was on the earth, so quickly, in fact, that when the woman's form emerged from a rear doorway, downstairs, Jeff was already crouched behind a log in the kitchen wall not twenty feet distant.

She crossed the dooryard. At the woodpile she gathered up an armload of fireplace lengths, and then she went directly into the squat old smokehouse. Jeff, harkening, heard a dimmed wooden clatter which he took to mean the smokehouse had been barred from within.

At once, through the customary draft vents up under the overhang of the gabled roof, there showed dimmed patches of light, to prove that the occupant had set the wick of her lantern to burning, and then wisps of smoke began oozing out of those chinks.

Stealthily, step by step, Jeff executed a flanking advance upon that smokehouse. At the back of it a second-growth oak tree almost touched it. Jeff silently hoisted himself until he was poised in the main

crotch. At that elevation, a line of orifices, like so many minute portholes, were only slightly above the level of his eyes. Since he could not turn his gaze downward, there would be nothing to see except blackened rafters. But, by craning his neck and standing tiptoe, he could sniff in. This he did, drawing his head back before the escaping smoke rifts choked him or made him cough.

With watering eyes and a gasping throat he repeated the motion. Already those inquisitive nostrils of his had recorded the first smell to gush forth—the honest smell of dry hickory ablaze. But presently with it was mingled an acrid, varnishy taint which stung his nose membranes. He softly snorted out this evil fume and, with his face turned aside, waited until the volume of it had lessened.

Well, one thing was certain. This white lady must be fairly suffocated by now. Any minute now she would have to come out for breath. But before he departed out of this venue Jeff took one more whiff through his distended nostrils.

He turned cold and rigid, and the flesh crawled on the nape of his neck. Was an overcharged imagination playing tricks on him or did he catch a different and an identifiable reek? . . . It wasn't imagination. The new odor grew heavier, more definite, more unmistakably what it was.

Jeff slid down to solid, friendly ground and streaked away from there as fast as he could run.

IV

Uncle and nephew sat over Creole coffee in a restaurant on the French side of Canal Street.

"Well, that's that, Uncle Billy. By all accounts, the pair of them kept closely under cover all the four months they were in Houston —lived behind closed doors in a rented bungalow on a back street. I couldn't find anybody in the vicinity who'd so much as seen Carmichael. A few neighbors did catch semi-occasional glimpses of the wife—vaguely described as being rather tall for a woman, not too stout, not too thin, quietly dressed, and with no particularly distinguishing marks.

"But, as I was just telling you, I think I found out why they were lying so low—or, rather, why he was. About a month after these two landed in town, the police department out at Seattle asked the police department of Houston to locate, if possible, one Caleb Carmichael, better known as Carey Carr, and sometimes known, it would seem, as Dr. Cicero Carter, which is an alias we never knew about before, am I right?"

"So I had a discreet talk with the Houston chief of detectives, mighty fine, intelligent fellow. He said he notified Seattle he had the party in question spotted, and what about it? The answer back was that in case of certain contingencies Seattle might want an arrest made, but that until further notice nothing was to be done at the Texas end, except to keep a weather eye on the man. The next thing the Houston authorities

knew the couple had pulled out, bag and baggage."

"And also with at least two tootin' horns and seemin'ly about the most majestic bull-fiddle case on record," supplemented Judge Priest, toying with the handle of his cup.

"Well, anyway," went on Major Pitman, "inside of a week later, or some such matter, the local papers printed a press dispatch saying that Caleb Carmichael, while on his way to his former home in Kentucky, had been accidentally drowned.

"Just to be on the safe side and show they weren't overlooking any bets, the Houston force wired Seattle, and in reply promptly received word that the police out there had also read the same dispatch and, the person being dead, that the incident was closed. I took down the name of the Seattle chief in case you'd care to communicate with him."

"I think, son, I've got a better notion than that. That time I wuz out in Denver, Colorado, attendin' the Bar Association meetin', I met up with a powerfully clever lawyer from Seattle—he stands high out there. I'll send him one of these here night lettergrams, askin' him to make a few inquiries in the proper quarter and lemme know the results ez soon ez possible."

"Well, suh, what's the next move?"

"Well, you better go ahead and light a shuck fur God's country. Ef Hod Maydew should git impatient to have that there will probated, you can't do nothin' because your absent-minded old uncle went away sick, leavin' the will locked up in his safe, and nobody except him knows the combination.

"That'll give us a leeway of ez many days ez we'll probably need—and mebbe we won't need many more unless I should have to take a quick trip in the general direction of the South Atlantic seaboard."

At that Major Pitman's eyebrows rose so high they almost merged with his scalp line.

Judge Priest chuckled and drained his cup.

"Sort of jolted you, didn't I, boy? Well, detective work seems to call fur more travelin' than I figgered on. But I'll say one thing fur it: You come in contact with some mighty prominent and influential people. F'instance, now, I bet you never knew anything a-tall about the career and achievements of Mr. Lengthy Bill Rice, a mighty genteel gentleman, even ef he does talk a curious kind of lingo.

"And I'll bet you further that ontil now the lifework of Mr. A. A. Slupsky, better known to countless thousands as Appetite Albert, has been to you like a sealed book. I wuz entertained by the first-named celebrity up at Monroe in this state, and am indebted to him fur several helpful suggestions."

"Helpful in connection with what?" demanded the amazed major.

"Why, helpful in connection with findin' the present earthly whereabouts, ef any sich there be, of the venerable and almost equally distinguished Mr. Appetite Albert.

Here's the way I'm fixin' to go about it."

From a capacious side pocket he extracted a folded copy of a bulky periodical.

"This," he expounded, "is called the *Three-Sheet.* They call it the trouper's Bible. Well, the grand special souvenir fall-openings edition, due to be on all newsstands everywhere tomorrow, will contain an advertisement requesting that if same comes to the attention of Mr. Appetite Albert or anybody else who might know his present earthly habitation, ef any, a great favor will be conferred by telegraphin' collect to Lemuel K. Jones, care Room eight hundred and seventy-four, Hotel Beauregard, this city."

"But who in thunder is Lemuel K. Jones?"

"Oh, that'll be me. I always did think Lemuel wuz a stylish name."

"Quite so!" said the nephew with irony. "You make everything just as clear as mud. And when you find Mr. Appetite Albert, what then?"

"Why, then I'll either crave leave to call on him or, in case he's passed away, git permission to examine his amassed collection of rare printed matter. He wuz the outstandin' pitchman of his day, specializin' mainly in slum and physic. But he wuz equally eminent in two other departments. He could swallow anything he fancied in any given quantity, and his other hold on immortal fame wuz based on certain proud but truthful boasts of his.

"First, that durin' half a century and more he had met everybody that had ever figgered in the entertainment world; and furthermore it seemed that, havin' once met sich parties or even heard of 'em, he rarely ever forgot the facts; but, ef he did, could refresh his memory frum a monumental assortment of showbills, pictures, press notices, clippin's, obituary notices, programs, et cetera, et cetera, which he gethered up ez he went along and sorted away in a sort of filin' system of his own."

"At last I begin to get a little gleam," said Major Pitman. "Through this notable personage you hope to trace the professional life of somebody, presumably Caleb Carmichael and his wife, Martha Swopes Carmichael—is that it?"

"Purcisely that. So you see why I've got to hang around here long enough fur Lemuel K. Jones to git some results from his advertisin' campaign. Say, Ranny, you've jest about got time to ketch the flier fur home, ef you hurry."

Those times, long-distance telephoning was more of an undertaking than afterwards it became, but, once Major Pitman was on the right trail, he very promptly succeeded in getting through to his truant kinsman.

From the city of Richmond, Va., no less, there came over the wire a familiar treble saying: "Well, son, how's tricks?"

"Not so good. Hod Maydew kept pestering me about that will business. Day before yesterday, to prove how helpless I was, I took him into

your chambers over at the courthouse and showed him that old iron safe of yours. He gave the knobs a turn and she opened out like a split watermelon. Uncle Billy, it had been standing there unlocked all this time!"

"I had a fretful feelin' that I furgot something," lamented the old man. "Well, that's too bad. But it mout be wuss."

"It is worse, a whole lot worse. You know what he did?"

"Whut?"

"Did just what you'd expect a resourceful chap like Maydew would do: Put out for County Judge Dyke's house; he'd rallied a little and was semiconscious. And the poor old dying chap signed the necessary orders, admitting that will to probate and, on top of that, named the widow as the guardian of the girl."

"Whew! When did you say all this happened?"

"I didn't say. But it was Monday afternoon."

"And this is Wednesday. Why—?"

"I've been trying to locate you, but you left a twisting trail—and no reforwarding addresses to speak of. Anyhow, they're moving fast, that outfit. I understand the estate is practically divided up. And only a little while ago I heard that the homestead, which belongs to the two of them jointly, has been put on the market for a quick sale."

"Well, I hate to leave here right this minute, but I'd better finish up my recuperatin' at home. I can't hardly git there, though, before early day after tomorrow mornin'. You git aholt of Lew Lake right away and tell him to go ahead with a certain clandestine undertakin'—tonight, ef it ain't too late, or anyhow not later than tomorrow night. And say, son, has any answer come yit to that wire of mine to Seattle?"

"A fat envelope arrived this evening—Special Delivery and marked 'Special and urgent.' Do you want me to open it?"

"No, hold it till I git there."

"How have you fared with your hunt for—what's his name?—the gentleman with the appetite and the scrapbooks?"

"Jest so-so. He's gone to a better world than Virginia, even. I'm goin' through his cluttered and unindexed earthly assets at the place where he passed on frum. It's no easy task. Any private communications frum Jeff?"

"Not a breath. I'm in touch with him, but even if he had anything to tell he wouldn't tell it to anybody except you."

"I reckin that's true. Well, I better be seein' about train connections at Louieville, dadgum it!"

On that second morning thereafter Major Pitman got up before the stars blinked out to greet his errant uncle.

At the station Jeff Poindexter was lurking discreetly in some dark shadows. He revealed himself, handed his former employer a smallish parcel, and in the shelter of the major's car made a whispered brief report,

then expeditiously vanished across the tracks. Major Pitman had with him the letter postmarked Seattle. For the moment the old man pocketed it.

"What's the latest tidin's?" Judge Priest demanded as they headed for Clay Street.

"Well, Dr. Lake pulled off that surreptitious job of grave-robbing late last night—early this morning, rather. Sheriff Birdsong co-operated, just as you arranged for before you left here. Dr. Lake telephoned that he'd be at your house at eight o'clock to let you know the results."

"That ain't so long to wait. And gives us time to git some needed nourishment down inside ourselves."

"How about the Richmond business?"

"Havin' to pull out so sudden left things kind of snarled up. I found some scattered bits of fairly informative printed matter. But there's one break in the chain, and that's whut I'm still hopin' may turn up. Ef it should come to light I'm to expect a wire right off, givin' full purticulars, regardless of expense."

V

The pair were still at the table when Dr. Lake stumped in. "Anybody liable to hear us?" he asked.

"Excusin' us, there's nobody on the place exceptin' Aunt Dilsey, and she's out in the kitchen," stated his host.

"All right, then, pour me a cup of coffee, Major. . . . Well, there was no need for anything resembling a regular autopsy. I did what there was to be done right there in the vault by flashlight, and then we resealed the box and came away."

"Well?" Judge Priest's voice was higher-pitched than usual.

"Billy Priest," went on Dr. Lake, "I don't know whose body is in that coffin, but I'll swear it's not the body of the party whose name is engraved on the coffin plate."

Major Pitman uttered a low whistle.

Dr. Lake said, "The face was mauled up past recognition, and the hands are mutilated, too, and the scalp. But that wasn't due to decomposition while the body was under water. It must have been done beforehand—done deliberately, I'd say."

"How about the teeth?"

"Just coming to that. While there was a gap in the lower jaw where three teeth had been drawn, I'm dead sure those teeth were drawn after death. In short, gentlemen, I'm ready to risk my professional reputation that this body cannot be the body of Caleb Carmichael for the simple reason that it's a substituted body which had been subjected to chemical preservatives long before it was dumped in that lake. Well, what's next?"

Judge Priest got ponderously up. "The next thing," he said, "is fur you two gentlemen to give me your best opinions on a few little bits of physical evidence."

In the living-room the old judge first invited the attention of his colleagues to certain time-yellowed clippings, including in his budget

a creased play-program and some rumpled lithographs.

"Kind of keep track of the dates on the margins of these," he said, passing them out, one by one. "They're s'posed to run consecutively, up to the p'int where the record breaks off."

When this had been done, he said, "Next we've got this here very illuminatin' communication frum my friend, Judge Frobisher out in Seattle. I'll read it aloud."

His reading was punctuated by appreciative grunts from Dr. Lake and once from Major Pitman an exclamation.

"And now, boys, we come to the contributions of a most competent individual and one that I'm shorely proud of," continued Judge Priest portentously.

He removed the loosened wrappings on the parcel which Jeff Poindexter had bestowed upon him at the station. His blunt fingers plucked forth a partly unreeled length of ordinary surgical gauze. It was slightly stained with some greasy substance and by its spiraling betrayed that it had lately served as a bandage.

"Lew," he said, "look at this, please, and take a few sniffs, and then give us your expert opinion ez to its character and the uses to which it's been put?"

"One sniff is ample," stated Dr. Lake, "and one glance is sufficient. The way it's still kinked up shows it was recently snugly wrapped around some small member—a finger or possibly a big toe."

"How about a thumb?" prompted Judge Priest.

"Or a thumb!" agreed Dr. Lake, and slapped his knee understandingly.

"And the stuff that was smeared on it—would that be good to cure up a sore thumb?"

"I should say not! That's phenolate; it would delay the normal healing processes. But why—?"

"Never mind the whys and wherefores. Let's pass along to exhibit B."

Gently he fished out and passed to his crony a tiny wisp of hairs, curling a little at their lower tips and of an average length of about eighteen inches.

"That's easy," said Dr. Lake. "What we've got here is a few combings from a human scalp. The length would indicate they grew on a woman's head. They're lighter at the roots than anywhere else. That shows dye had been used to turn a naturally sandy color into a very dark brown. I can guess where they came from, too."

"And your fust guess will be the right one," assented Judge Priest. "Out of the head of the Widder Carmichael."

"Then why all this pother about a strand of topknot? It may be foolish—and vain—for a woman to dye her hair, but I never heard it was any crime."

"No crime, but mebbe it wuzn't so foolish, neither. And here's some little souvenirs fur you to scrutinize at yo' pleasure."

For their inspection he tendered three minute and irregular splinters

of thin wood. In turn his companions fingered these fragments, rubbed them, bent them, smelled them; then, after conferring briefly, nodded to each other.

"We're agreed here, Uncle Billy." The major was spokesman. "It's fairly simple. These are scraps of a very light but strong wood, possibly used as a casing of some sort, possibly as a veneer that was stretched over a heavier framework. Originally they were painted black and shellacked. Recently an effort was made to destroy them by burning, or else they were burned accidentally."

"Checks with my diagnosis," confirmed Dr. Lake. "There's traces of the polish still adhering to this one. And here's a crumb of glue, old glue, at that. All of which being conceded, what about it?"

"Hold your hosses!" said Judge Priest. "Before we git through I think that even without a chemical analysis it kin be demonstrated that these here specimens air overlooked salvage frum an article which fust wuz busted into scrap and then the wreckage burnt up piecemeal—in short, a bull-fiddle case of augmented purportions."

"But look here, Uncle Billy," protested Major Pitman, "aren't these bass-fiddle cases usually made of some light, stout composition, to save weight and all?"

"Nowadays, yes. But former years they made 'em of wood."

"Where'd these specimens come from? Or is that one of your secrets, too, Uncle Billy?"

"You'd have to know to understand some other disclosures that'll follow. They came off the earthen floor of the smokehouse out on the Carmichael place. To git 'em Jeff Poindexter had to pick a padlock. Once't he wuz inside, he gathered up a lot of fresh wood ashes and dead embers and some old dirt, and sifted it all out keerfully and got these here results."

Judge Priest lowered himself into a rustic rocker and, with maddening deliberation, relit his corncob pipe.

"Now, then," he said between puffs; "let's go back to beginnin's. Lew, you'll bear me out when I say that, jedgin' by whut word trickled back here frum time to time, after he'd left here ez a youngster, Caleb Carmichael must've been a bad egg all along. At Philadelphia, where he studied medicine, he got mixed up in some kind of funny business and left there without ever gittin' his degree.

"Well, after bein' kicked out of college he takes up play-actin' and music and sich. Then there comes a kind of gap in his theatrical record. Shortly after, though ez we kin figger by that letter from our informant, Judge Frobisher, out in Seattle, he branched out to include fortune-tellin' and spiritualism; and, under the name of 'Doctor' Cicero Carter, also doin' a little malpractice on the side.

"In the course of his ramblin's he marries Martha Swopes, of Keokuk, Ioway. But he don't settle down.

"Now, we begin to git definite track of him ag'in. Four months ago, at Seattle, he branched out frum his other dubious callin's fur long enough to perform an illegal operation on a young girl. She dies under his hands on the operatin' table. Because the girl's folks want to protect her good name, the thing's hushed up, someway. But he skips out and heads fur Texas.

"I reckin he's more or less disguised, but, to be on the safe side, he goes to usin' his right name once more. Well, back in Seattle, talk starts. So the police there trace Carmichael. They locate him in his snug little retreat at Houston and, ez a precaution, ask the Houston authorities to sort of keep an eye on him.

"Then all of a sudden he gits word that his half-brother, Elijah, has passed on up here in this county and left him a right sizable chunk of ready cash and some other odds and ends of property. With money in his possession, that Seattle family air liable, not only to tie up his share of the estate and sue him fur causin' their child's death but likewise press a criminal charge and have him extradited out there fur trial.

"Well, there he is! Whut good is all that legacy goin' to do him ef he loses it in a damage suit and, on top of that, gits stuck into prison in the State of Washington fur mebbe a long term? There's one way out, though. There's that there will he wrote years and years before, leavin' everything he owned to his wife. Ef he's declared legally dead the money is still on tap, because his wife gits it.

"So he gits busy. Whilst he's pretendin' to be settlin' up his affairs in Houston, he's really stirrin' his stumps to set a clever scheme in motion. Frum somebody he buys the preserved body of some poor pauper answerin' roughly to his own gin'ral plans and specifications. So he smuggles that body into his house.

"And he pries the jaws open and he pulls three teeth out of the lower jaw on the righthand side, and he slips into the gap his own bridgework. Lackin' all else, and with only a superficial examination of the mouth, which is whut he's countin' on, he's provided about the best identification that anybody could ast fur. Leastwise that they's likely to.

"Here's where the bull-fiddle case comes into the picture. Let's say it's a memento of his old barnstormin' days that he's hung on to fur all these years. He gits rid of the fiddle that's in it, and into that case, by main strength, he jams that friendless unknown body. And he loads it into his car, and him and his wife start out drivin' through the fair state of Kintucky.

"So they come skyhootin' acrost country with that cased-up corpse ridin' behind 'em. Just after they cross the state line from Tennessee into this state they turn off the main road, and he drops over to the most lonesome corner in that lonesome upper tip of Reelfoot; to the Big

Hole, where all them curious eddies air.

"Well, no sooner do they git there than things start happenin'. He drags the body out of the fiddle case. He messes up the face so it'll be unrecognizable. He dresses it up in the clothes he's been wearin' apurpose all durin' the trip, clothes that hotel clerks and camp-ground people and service-station people along the line have seen him wearin'. He's mighty cute.

"He dumps the camouflaged body into the Big Hole, where he's reasonably shore those strange underwater currents will hold it fur a few days anyhow before it comes to the surface. He dresses himself up in clothes that, with any kind of luck, will keep him frum bein' recognized ez the individual he really is. And, right then and there, Caleb Carmichael, alias Carey Carr, alias Dr. Cicero Carter, vanishes out of the scene.

"Now let's take up the widder's end of it. Him havin' faded frum mortal view, she takes the center of the stage. With her mashed thumb bleedin' all over her, she comes bustin' out of those bottums, spreadin' the alarm. She gits her wound patched up and then drives on through here alone, to take possession of the old home place. Ez a bereft woman, she stays in seclusion there till the dissectin'-room body is recovered and identified ez her late husband's remains, and then she sets out to prove up her right to inherit his sheer in the estate."

"Well, I'll be darned!" exclaimed Dr. Lake fervently. "The next step's clearly enough indicated, eh?"

"I don't know about that," said Judge Priest.

"Then what are you going to do?" demanded his friend.

"Jest set a spell, and mebbe in the meantime try to gether up a few little odds and ends that seem to be flappin' loose."

"But, man alive, if your sequence of theories will stand the test—and I can't see a flaw in it anywhere—there has been deliberate collusion to bolster up a crooked conspiracy."

"Concedin' you're right, whut would you advise doing?" asked Judge Priest.

"What is there to do except grab the woman forthwith? Stick her in jail. Keep her there till she's ready to confess where her husband's hidden away. Then indict 'em both. Send 'em both to the penitentiary. Good riddance to bad rubbish!"

"Jest a minute, Lew. Admittin' there's been a heap of provable and self-evident skulduggery practiced in this here affair, even so, that's a perfectly good will that wuz offered fur probate—and probated—by the bereft lady's lawyer, wuzn't it? Ef he's alive he's still entitled to his fifty per cent in his half-brother's estate, ain't he?

"I'd trust Hod Maydew to git him and her both out of sich a mess with nothin' lost exceptin' a couple of reputations and mebbe a few tail-feathers fur attorney's fees. Ef, on the other hand, a human bein' has been deliberately made away with—" He shrugged.

"But you just now said—!" Dr. Lake straightened himself with a sudden jerk. "By heavens, Billy Priest, are you intimating there's been foul play?"

"Don't go jumpin' at hasty conclusions. For the moment let's all remain ca'm, cool and collected."

"But if you think what you seem to be thinking, if you've got suspicions of a killing at the back of your mind, there certainly are steps to be taken."

"There certainly air. I kin think of three steps already. The first step is fur you to put a tight clamp on them waggin' jaws of yours and go start your mornin' round amongst your patients, ef any such survivin' unfortunates there be.

"And the second step is fur you, Ranny, to pick your time fur it some time today and find little Juliet Blair and toll her here, unbeknown to anybody else, fur a little chat. And the third step is fur me to set right where I am and hope and pray I'll be hearin' frum Richmond betwixt now and dark. It'll be word frum there that ought to be the key to unlock the darkest closet yit."

It was getting on toward one-thirty o'clock in the afternoon when Major Pitman, a deepening concern on his face, burst in on Judge Priest, who, seeing that look, sat up abruptly.

"Where's the girl?" he demanded sharply.

"She's gone, and the woman with her!"

"Where in blazes have they gone?"

"That's what I'm not dead sure of yet. But, wherever it is, they're both well on their way."

Judge Priest was on his feet now, mopping at his slick forehead. "While we sat here clackin' away like three old guinea hens!" he shrilled. "Go on, go on!" he ordered. "Tell me whut-all you know."

"I should have gone to Mrs. Broderick's boardinghouse as soon as I left here this morning, but you said there was no rush, so I put in a few licks at my office first. About an hour ago my secretary came back from having a snack and told me that over at the soda fountain she'd just heard a curious rumor from her sister, who works at the bank—something that had to do with Juliet Blair and Mrs. Carmichael.

"Inside of three minutes I was in the private office at the bank, giving Walter Ricketts a quick third degree. He said that about two-forty-five o'clock day before yesterday afternoon, the two of them came in there together, and the woman withdrew her share of the money on deposit to her account, and then, in her capacity as guardian, authorized the withdrawal of the girl's half of the funds—roughly, a total of eighteen thousand and two hundred dollars and some odd cents.

"Well, he tried to tell them how risky it was for two females to be carrying around that much money in cash, especially as they'd already told him they expected to leave almost immediately on an extensive sea voyage. He argued, but she stood

firm. He had to scrape his vaults pretty scarce of big bills to make up a sum of that size. But he did it, and they left, after instructing him to say nothing outside the bank about the transaction."

"Wuz Hod Maydew in on this monkey business?"

"No. He left last Monday night for Louieville and he's not back yet. Well, the next thing I did was to try to reach you by telephone, and I couldn't get this number. Uncle Billy, did you call anybody, say, about three quarters of an hour ago?" he demanded accusingly.

"Yep; I had an exchange of words with the sheriff's office. Got something fur the sheriff to do—mebbe!"

"And you left the receiver off the hook. Look yonder." Major Pitman pointed toward his uncle's cluttered flat-topped desk.

"I git more furgitful every day I live," confessed the culprit, shaking his head.

"Since I couldn't raise you, I dusted right on out Franklin Street to Mrs. Broderick's. About noon day before yesterday the girl came to her, so excited she could hardly speak, and told her she's been up in her room packing and was going to go. At first she wouldn't say where she was going, said she'd pledged herself to tell nobody of the plan. But Mrs. Broderick managed to worm it out of her that she and her aunt-in-law had suddenly decided to start on a voyage around the world.

"They were slipping away now unexpectedly because there was somebody temporarily out of town who knew about the plan and might, if they delayed their departure until that somebody got back, try to put obstacles in the girl's path. Do you think that could be Hod Maydew?"

"I happen to be the party referred to," stated Judge Priest. "Go ahead."

"There's not much more. Before she pulled out, still fluttering like an egg beater, the little chucklehead told Mrs. Broderick, as a dead secret, that they were going to drive in a hired car to Wycksberg that evening and catch the Chicago-New Orleans southbound flyer as it passed through there at seven-ten o'clock at night; and that some time yesterday, out of New Orleans, they would sail for South American ports.

"Well, they caught the train all right. I confirmed that at Farrell Brothers' garage on my way out here, saw the darky who drove 'em down. As they got aboard, the woman slipped him five dollars as a bribe to keep quiet. . . . Oh, yes, the girl told Mrs. Broderick the name of the ship—the *Southland Star*."

"So!" Judge Priest's wheezy drawl was quite gone. He spoke snappily: "Ef the train wuz on time, they got to New Orleans considerably more'n twenty-four hours ago, givin' them better'n a full day's start on us, dog-gone it! Jump to that telephone, son, and make central raise New Orleans."

Already Major Pitman was jogging the black rubber horn on

its hook. "Who'll I get—the police?" He flung the question over his humped shoulder.

"Yes! No—I've got it!" The Judge began snatching a litter of contents out of his pockets. "Got it here somewhere—name of one of the fellers I shot snipes with last week at that there Delta Club. Collector of the port there, or somethin'. Here 'tis."

Judge Priest was thrusting a rumpled calling card into his nephew's hand. "Tell him I say to locate a ship called the *Southland Star.* Ef by one chance't in a hundred she ain't sailed or ain't out of the mouth of the river yit, ast him to detain her somehow, someway. Ef she has got away let him find out her fust port of call and how many passengers she carried—there's bound to be records—and, ef possible, the gineral descriptions of those passengers. Do what you kin.

"Oh, yes—and whether the ship's got radio aboard? Tell him to report right back to us here. Tell that telephone girl to keep the line open. Wait, wait"—these next words seemed to be pumped out of him almost against his will—"Tell him *—and tell her too—it mout even be a matter of life and death!"*

He lumbered to and fro, rather like a caged hippo in a pet of impatience, then, with remarkable agility, spun about as the telephone bell rang.

"If it's the man we're after, that's what I'd call service," said Major Pitman and glued his ear to the receiver. "Hello, hello there . . ."

It was the man he was after.

VI

There passed forty of the longest minutes in the records of the present Christian era. For the major there was nothing to do except wait, and hold the wire and let the tolls mount up. When the other end of the wire came to life again he jumped as though he had been bee-stung. Next thing, Major Pitman was listening and answering back, and, in between, flinging over his shoulder to the palpitant Judge Priest condensed snatches of the news coming through—that went something like this:

"Southland Star, independently owned, Captain Nicholson, master. Carries mostly cargo but has accommodations for a few passengers. . . . Cleared for Rio in Brazil at noon yesterday. . . . Reliable information is that she carried only two passengers, a woman and a girl. . . . No wireless equipment. . . . The collector says only a few minutes before casting off the skipper had his papers altered for a stop at Galveston to pick up a special freight consignment. . . . Ship ought to be there some time tomorrow, probably in the forenoon. . . . New Orleans officers glad to co-operate through the port authorities there. . . . Well, Uncle Billy, how about it?"

"Tell him I'm sending a thousand thanks and my best regards, and I'll be seein' him inside of a day or two, proba'ly. Tell him he needn't pester about Galveston, though. Tell him I aim to be there in the

mornin' myself and handle the thing pussonally."

Having relayed the final message, Major Pitman turned a bewildered countenance upon his elder. "But, Uncle Billy, the trains can't possibly git anybody from here to Galveston by tomorrow morning."

"There's sich things ez aeroplanes, ain't there?"

"But who's going to fly us?"

"How about that there old army friend of yours, that Cap'n Duke Cubeman, that dropped out of the skies not three weeks ago to see you and give you a spin in that big, new amphibian machine that he's pilotin' all over this southern country fur the oil people up in Louieville? Git back on that long-distance line."

The younger man told central who it was that he wanted to reach this time. An afterthought came to him. "Uncle Billy, Duke's got room for four in that big machine, besides him and his partner, Spence. You could take the sheriff along with us. We'll need him."

"Tell your friend there'll be jest the two of us. Whilst we're gone the sheriff's goin' to be burglarizin' an occupied house and a locked-up smokehouse, and, on top of that, doin' about the most thorough job of rummagin' and diggin' and probin' and soundin' that he ever tackled yit. . . . Lawsy! I do wisht we could hear frum Richmond before we git away. They shore are takin' their sweet time."

The words trailed off as he lumbered out the hall door and made for the front porch, to peer into the afternoon sunshine that gilded the empty reaches of Clay Street. Then, on cue, as theatrically as a belated entrance in a scene in a melodrama, a messenger boy pedaled up that golden path on a bicycle and bounced off at the gate and came trotting toward him.

Halfway down the walk Judge Priest met him, and fairly tore an envelope out of the lad's hand, shucked it open, glanced hurriedly at the two pages of typewritten flimsy it had contained, and lunged for indoors.

Judge Priest shot into the living-room as Major Pitman straightened up from the desk with a hand cupped across the transmitter disk and said: "Duke's on the wire. He can be here in less than two hours. But he thinks he should give those oil people some reason for taking the plane."

Judge Priest's squeaky voice clarioned like notes from a cracked bugle: "Tell him there's been one cold-blooded murder. Tell him we ain't so much concerned with the murder that's been committed ez with the other that's bein' contemplated right this very minute. Then ring off, and look at this here. It's mighty int'restin'."

The major told his friend, and rang off, and jumped up and snatched at the typed pages and read them through.

"Gosh!" he said, almost whispering it. "Your missing clue at last—the thing that unravels everything." Major Pitman was still speaking in that stricken half-whisper. "Uncle

Billy, are you sure we'll get there in time?"

"Reasonably shore—that's all. I'm bankin' that common prudence will stay those deadly hands till we kin lock a set of handcuffs on 'em. But it's goin' to be mighty close."

Trim-looking and smart for a tramp steamer, the *Southland Star* came inching up toward the harbor, and a tiny tug chugged down Galveston Bay to meet her before she landed. The tug carried a government flag. At a tooted signal, the steamer slowed down, until she barely held headway.

As the smaller craft drew nearer, Judge Priest, balanced on spraddling legs in the tug's bow, murmured under his breath, "Thank the Good Lawd!"

He handed to Major Pitman, who stood alongside him, the pair of borrowed glasses to which his squinted eyes had been glued almost ever since they left shore. "Take a look," he bade him. "The girl's at the stern yonder—jest came up on the top deck."

As they edged under her flank, the ship, drifting gently now, let down a landing ladder with broad rungs. Despite age and bulk, Judge Priest was the first to go up the side, Major Pitman following him, and then the Galveston chief of detectives and one of his men.

As Judge Priest's red face showed above the guardrail, the girl's eyes widened. Giving a little smothered cry, she ran forward, and threw herself against the old man's broad and panting breast.

"Oh, Judge, I'm so glad to see you!" she cried.

"Young woman," he wheezed sternly, "you went and broke your solemn promise to me."

"I know I did. But—but she nagged me into it. Oh, Judge Priest, there's something wrong—I can feel it. And I'm frightened almost out of my wits."

"Jest where is this here tourin' companion of yours?" he asked.

"Downstairs—I mean, down below, in the cabin, right next to mine."

"And the money you took with you?"

"She has it—hers and mine, too. We were going to get—what do you call 'em?—letters of credit at New Orleans, but she said there wasn't time to stop—"

"You better wait right here, honey, with my nephew," he told her. "Me and these here two gentlemen have got some business with your—your travelin' mate."

The captain of the *Southland Star* had been in conference meanwhile with the officers. His face set gravely at what they told him, but he said nothing until they were done.

"This way," he said, leading the way.

The port officer stayed behind. The remaining four went down a companionway. They came to a metal door and the master of the vessel tapped on it with his knuckles.

"Who is it?" asked a voice from within.

"Captain Nicholson," he said.

"I'm not dressed for company; I'm doing my hair."

"Sorry," he called back, "but I must ask you to let me in."

"Come in, then," came the reluctantly given permission.

The occupant of the roomy but plainly furnished cabin was sitting before a small dresser at the foot of the bunk. Electric bulbs furnished illumination. The figure was black-clad; the heavy dark hair was loosened and flowing down about the shoulders. A heavy coating of white powder was upon the anxious face. At sight of strangers shouldering in behind the skipper, the form stiffened.

"What do you want?" The demand was sent past the captain to those other two in sight.

It was the chief of detectives who answered. "We want you," he said. "You're under arrest."

"What for?" The voice was gulping, choking, shaken, held under partial control by a visible and painful effort.

From the rear, the chief got a smart nudge. He spoke according to rote. "We want you for murder, committed in Hickson County, Kentucky, on the twenty-fourth day of August."

There was a false note of incredulity, a cracked and futile effort at derision, in the words that fell slowly and forcedly from the stiffening, red-painted lips. "Are you actually accusing me of the murder of my husband?"

"No!" The retort came in a shrill piping from an unseen speaker beyond the threshold. "But we air accusin' you, Caleb Carmichael, of the murder of your wife."

In a frenzy of desperation, the trapped killer leaped headlong at them, and went right between the startled captain and the chief, by a twist of the body eluded the clumsy, clutching hands of the second policeman, and would have been through the doorway except for a large bulk thrusting forward to block the flight.

There was a thump of colliding bodies, a grunt from one, a hoarsely shouted oath and a blow from the other, a grappling, with arms flailing and legs threshing, and the pair of them went down. Judge Priest somehow managed to be on top.

He stayed on top, indulging in curious billowing motions of his frame, until the officers could reach in beneath and pin the wrists of the one who was being crushed and lock the steel cuffs on.

Unaided, the old man got on his feet, breathing with little whistling toots. Considering the prisoner, helpless in his shackles and still flat on the floor boards, he said, between gasps:

"I don't believe in hitting a feller when he's down. 'Specially when jest rollin' on him seems to do the trick about ez well."

VII

One of Judge Priest's pudgy hands kept going up gently to caress a knobby bruise on his cheek where the murderer's fist had targeted its single chance blow. With Major Pitman he was speeding by motor

across the coastal plains of southeastern Texas.

That rescued and repentant heiress, Juliet Blair, was already aboard a train bound for her home and her sweetheart. That blood kinsman of hers who had coveted her money and would have done away with her to gain it, lay in the Galveston jail, and would continue to lie there until officers arrived with requisition papers for his return to Kentucky and a prompt trial. The old judge was doing most of the talking:

"When Lew Lake reads the big tidin's in tonight's *Evenin' News,* then he'll know whut it wuz kept confusin' the true path. Think of it, Ranny, 'twuz only yistiddy mornin' when us three sat there in my house speculatin' on this and that, and only yistiddy evenin' when I got that long telegram from Richmond that made the scales drop away frum my bewildered and befuddled old eyes! Considerin' whut's happened sence, it seems like about two weeks must have passed, instid of a space of twenty-odd hours. Boy, have we been movin' fast!"

"So fast and so furiously," said the major, "that for me there are still points needing to be amplified—clarified, rather. Do you mind?"

"Mind doin' a little recapitulatin'? I should say not. When a job's finally done up all shipshape, it's only human nature fur a feller to crave to brag about it.

"F'rinstance now, take that suspiciously long delay at Reelfoot Lake, and the letter to the girl that wuz confiscated and destroyed, and the mashed thumb that wouldn't heal up, and, most of all, the bullfiddle case. Those things alone should 'a' been enough to head me down the main track.

"But no, I kept lettin' that long hair and those false teeth and, biggest puzzle of all, those two photographs—I kept lettin' them steer me off on a blind sidin'. Yit all along I had the feelin' that when we got to the bottom of the matter of those photographs we'd see the whole thing jest unrollin' like a scroll. And the moment we got word of the finding of that obscure paragraph out of that country paper in Louisiana, it certainly did! Just like a movin' picture.

"Here's how I rebuild the sequence: Hardly has he been doin' these female impersonations any time atall, but long enough to have at least two poses photographed in costume, when he gits a rich idea, and he says to himself, whut's the use of his wastin' this here new gift of his fur a cheap salary in a cheap travelin' show, when he kin utilize it where it'll guarantee an easier livin' and real dividends.

"Like at fake spiritualistic séances, when he kin go into a seemin' trance ez a man and five minutes later come slidin' out of the cabinet ez the embodied spirit of some poor dupe's dead mother or wife or daughter. So he leaves his hair long and hides it under a wig, and only sheds the wig when he's materializin' ez a woman.

"So, after all those intervenin' years, there he is, with that long

hair fur his hole-card and a couple of copies of those old photographs ez aces up his sleeve when the word reaches him that he's come in fur a fat windfall.

"Fust, then, he decides ef he's goin' to have liberty and peace to enjoy his inheritance, he's got to disappear altogether and forever more ez Caleb Carmichael and thereafter be somebody else. And—and this is the real crux—ef his wife simultaneously disappears, he kin start bein' her and, ez his own heir, claim the estate and laugh in secret at those damages-hongry folks out in Seattle. All right, then.

"Let's assume that, ez a beginnin' step in his scheme, he induces his wife to write that affectionate letter to Juliet Blair. By the way, I'm pretty sure she wuz left-handed, Mrs. Martha Scopes Carmichael wuz. Suspectin' nothin', the deluded woman writes the letter. She gives it to him, unsealed, to be mailed.

"He takes out of it the authentic pictures of herself that she included and fur them substitutes the two misleadin' photographs of himself in his female make-up. Unbeknownst to her, he's got possession, someway, of a preserved dissectin'-room subject. At the same time, he lays in, fur future reference, a supply of some standard emba'min' fluid."

"Gosh, think of him scheming all those grim details in advance, while he's still living under the roof with his intended victim!"

"My guess would be he actually enjoys doin' it. Well, lemme git on, son. Durin' one of her temporary absences he smuggles this cadaver that he's bought into the house and wedges it into his big fiddle case. And when he's packin' their car fur the trip to Kintucky, he puts the loaded case in the back of the car under a jag of stuff where neither she nor anybody else will have occasion to shift it. He hides the emba'min' fluid somewhere's else in the cargo.

"So off they start. All along he's had the Big Hole at the top of Reelfoot picked ez the spot where she's to die.

"Once't they're in that empty wilderness, he kills her. Workin' fast, he strips her body and strips down himself. He lugs the third passenger—the dead pauper—out of the overgrown fiddle case. He dresses the corpse of the stranger in the clothes he's just took off, and heaves it into the water to be drawed under.

"He dresses himself in the clothes he's stripped off his wife—and he does away with the wig he's been wearin'. He shakes down his long dyed hair, then puts it up on his head in coils, woman-fashion, and there, excusin' the marks left by the intervenin' years, stands the spittin' image of the original of the photographs already sent on to the Blair girl, ez an essential part of the build-up he's creatin'.

"Next thing, the doubled-up body of the dead woman has been jammed into the emptied fiddle case, and the fiddle case is back where it wuz before, underneath a couple of hundredweight of luggage. Even though

he's worked so fast, he's been at this hellish business fur considerable more than an hour. He's got to hurry.

"Then, possibly ez an afterthought—him mebbe jest now rememberin' a slip he made inadvertently, and he can't afford to overlook anything—he sticks the tip of his right thumb in the frame of the car door and mashes it good and hard."

"But why?"

"Ain't you furgettin' what he'd probably forgot himself at the time he wuz doin' it? His own proper signature is on a will that'll have to be examined before bein' probated. But it's his wife's distinctive handwritin' that's in the letter he made her write to the girl. He aims to git that letter back right off—and he does.

"But suppose he don't? It's certain that frum time to time he'll be called on to write his name—or, ruther, hers—on necessary documents. He knows he can't imitate her characteristic left-handed writin' well enough to deceive a keen eye. But now any seemin' discrepancy in any writin' that the seemin' widder does kin be explained away on the ground that with a thumb crippled and a hand swathed in bandages a signature would natchelly differ frum whut it's like, ordinarily.

"So, till everything's settled up, the hurt mustn't be let to heal. That's why, between visits to a doctor, he keeps applyin' that smelly stuff that makes the wound angry, then washin' it off and restorin' the doctor's wrappin's before the next office call—the same stuff that wuz on the gauze Jeff Poindexter pilfered and that Lew Lake identified fur us yistiddy. He had it all set up right clever.

"Well, let's go back to Reelfoot: The 'widder' spreads the word of the drownin' and gits that damaged thumb fixed up temporarily, and drives on through, straight fur the safest refuge in the world—the place where he wuz born and spent his early boyhood, and where he's familiar with every inch, indoors and out. Nobody's there but two old darkies.

"On arrivin' at his birthplace, he drags the fiddle case inside, single-handed. I got it frum Jeff, who got it frum the two servants, that he wouldn't let 'em help with the unloadin'. Let somebody try to lift that varnished box and find how heavy 'twuz and 'twould be enough to set even a couple of country darkies to thinkin'. So, bein' accepted by the pair of 'em fur whut seemin'ly he is, to wit: their newly widdered mistress, he gits busy in that empty house.

"Down in the cellar he dissects the cadaver of his victim and, under cover of night, packs the dismembered fragments outdoors and, piece by piece, burns 'em to ashes. He may 'a' used acids, too—he'd know about acids. Gittin' shet of the bull-fiddle case is a triflin' task in comparison with the main job. It's powerful hard fur a feller to utterly destroy every recognizable trace of an adult human body. Ef our sheriff's bunch find in that cellar or

that smokehouse whut they're probably lookin' fur right this minute, it'll jest about purvide the last piece of evidence that's needed to speed our man to the scaffold.

"I'd say gittin' away so slick with one murder is whut plants the notion of the second one in his receptive brain. Yes, suh, he looks that innocent, onsuspicious child over and he says here's some more easy money jest waitin' to be collected. And on that very instant he sets in motion the plan to toll her away on a ship that he knows about; a ship that carries only a few passengers.

"Here's the completed edifice: Ez soon ez the will's probated and the estate's divided and conditions air auspicious, he'll take that girl off on that sea voyage. Some dark night the girl falls overboard—that'll be his story. And who's to doubt it? Landin' in foreign parts, he tells a plausible enough tale to the authorities and the American consul. Ef there's no fuss raised back home, he waits around fur long enough to collect at long distance the proceeds frum the sale of whutever odds and ends may be left out of the estate of old Elijah.

"Ef a fuss is raised, why, he don't press that p'int; he jest charges it off to profit and loss. Down there in some remote Latin-American country, the Widder Carmichael vanishes and, instead, a strange gent with a new name goes on his way rejoicin' and packin' a gratifyin' small fortune in his jeans.

"I don't know yit why he jumped off so precipitately the way he done. But my guess is he wormed it out of her that she'd been to see me and that I'd tried to discourage the notion of this here round-the-world expedition. That skeers him. So he starts the machinery turnin' quicker'n he otherwise would.

"My guess is little Julie wouldn't 'a' been in any immediate danger, unless she likewise turned suspicious, fur the first few days out frum land. It'll look better ef she don't disappear till they're well on their way to Brazil. Still, I'm jest ez glad we succeeded in overhaulin' him today. . . . Flyin' is kind of fun, ain't it? But you feel kind of let down after it's over."

Judge Priest leaned back and fetched a deep sigh. The strain was gone. Suddenly here was a weary old fat man.

"I judge you're pretty tired, suh," said his junior. "But, Uncle Billy, there's one thing I've absolutely got to know. What was it that day in the courthouse that set you on the scent in the first place?"

"Oh, that? That's simple enough now that we've got all the rest added up fur the doomsday book. Ef you want to know whut fust ketched my eye and started my imagination workin', it wuz the way he handled his hands a couple of times whilst Hod Maydew wuz elocutin'.

"You see, son, he wuz wearin' a woman's mournin' regalia. And whilst he'd doubtless worn sich riggin's plenty of times before in pursuance of his crooked doin's, never-

theless, he'd gone dressed ez a man a thousand hours, say, fur every hour that he'd gone dressed ez a woman. So he'd taken to fumblin' with the woman's jacket he wuz wearin', and that wuz when I dimly sensed somethin' wuz radically wrong with the strange lady settin' there."

"Just what do you mean, suh?" Major Pitman asked.

"Son, your coat laps over frum left to right, don't it?"

"Since you mention it, it does." The major glanced down at his front.

"Well, a woman's clothes button frum right to left. So, when he got nervous and started buttonin' and then unbuttonin' his coat, me standin' there idly watchin' him, he went through the mechanism of tryin' to accomplish these two processes, not by the use of his left hand, which is a woman's way, but with his right hand—the hand a man natchelly would use—even though in this case 'twuz made clumsy and awkward frum bein' all done up in bandages."

"Well, I'll be darned," Major Pitman exploded.

"I'm plenty ashamed, myself, fur bein' so stupid, ef that's whut you mean," said his uncle.

"My guess is the people back in our bailiwick don't share that opinion," declared Major Pitman. "As sure as you're alive, Uncle Billy, by now they're singing your praises all over town. All over the state and the country, too, I expect. You've done a big thing."

"Ef credit is to go where credit is properly due, they'd better save out quite a jag fur Jeff Poindexter," stated the judge. "There's no tellin' how many years it took off of Jeff's life, him prowlin' about, and finally into a house where, frum whut I'd told him, he could figger that, by a remote possibility, a murdered dead body had been carved up."

"I've got a twenty-dollar bill in my pocket that I'm going to slip him," said the major. "I've got a good suit of clothes I'd like to give him, too, if I weren't twice his size."

"Son, don't you worry none on that score. You'll be surprised to note how much better that there suit'll look on Jeff than it ever did on you. The clothes don't have to fit Jeff. Jeff Poindexter jest natchelly fits the clothes."

Murder is a nasty word—but it is even worse when it happens in your own backyard. This was the unanimous opinion of Mr. and Mrs. Murphy, even though, as indirect discoverer of the crime, Mr. Murphy gained a certain amount of neighborhood prestige from the sensitivity of his olfactory organ.

For it was Mr. Murphy's nose that first scented unmistakable evidence of the corpse in the basement behind the areaway. And he was never able to eat pig's knuckles with the same relish afterward. In A MURDER OF NO IMPORTANCE Morris Cooper gives us a vivid picture of major-league crime in a minor-league environment. This is a new story by a new author you will scarcely want to pass up.

that will be fine

by . . . William Faulkner

Georgie liked being in business with Uncle Rodney—until Uncle Rodney failed to pay him. And it was right on Christmastime too.

WE COULD HEAR the water running into the tub. We looked at the presents scattered over the bed where Mamma had wrapped them in the colored paper, with our names on them so Grandpa could tell who they belonged to easy when he would take them off the tree. There was a present for everybody except Grandpa because Mamma said that Grandpa is too old to get presents any more.

"This one is yours," I said.

"Sho now," Rosie said. "You come on and get in that tub like your mamma tell you."

"I know what's in it," I said. "I could tell you if I wanted to."

Rosie looked at her present. "I reckon I kin wait twell hit be handed to me at the right time," she said.

"I'll tell you what's in for a nickel," I said.

Rosie looked at her present. "I ain't got no nickel," she said. "But I will have Christmas morning when Mr. Rodney give me that dime."

"You'll know what's in it, anyway, then and you won't pay me," I said. "Go and ask Mamma to lend you a nickel."

Then Rosie grabbed me by the

Important happenings, when seen through the eyes of a small boy, can take on a highly grotesque perspective indeed. When these happenings include adultery, murder, theft and the fracturing of sundry other Commandments, and are interpreted by an author of Mr. Faulkner's monumental abilities, they move chillingly and implacably from the grotesque to the macabre. We are deeply proud to offer this horrifying account of a Deep-South holiday gone horribly wrong by a writer who, along with Pearl S. Buck and Sinclair Lewis, is numbered among America's three Nobel Prizees.

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arm. "You come on and get in that tub," she said. "You and money! If you ain't rich time you twenty-one, hit will be because the law done abolished money or done abolished you."

So I went and bathed and came back, with the presents all scattered out across Mamma's and Papa's bed and you could almost smell it and tomorrow night they would begin to shoot the fireworks and then you could hear it too.

It would be just tonight, and then tomorrow we would get on the train, except Papa, because he would have to stay at the livery stable until after Christmas Eve, and go to Grandpa's and then tomorrow night and then it would be Christmas and Grandpa would take the presents off the tree and call out our names, and the one from me to Uncle Rodney that I bought with my own dime and so after a while Uncle Rodney would prize open Grandpa's desk and take a dose of Grandpa's tonic and maybe he would give me another quarter for helping him, like he did last Christmas, instead of just a nickel, like he would do last summer while he was visiting Mamma and us and we were doing business with Mrs. Tucker before Uncle Rodney went home and began to work for the Compress Association, and it would be fine. Or maybe even a half dollar and it seemed to me like I just couldn't wait.

"Jesus, I can't hardly wait," I said.

"You which?" Rosie hollered. "Jesus?" she hollered. "Jesus? You let your mamma hear you cussing and I bound you'll wait. You talk to me about a nickel! For a nickel I'd tell her just what you said."

"If you'll pay me a nickel I'll tell her myself," I said.

"Get in that bed!" Rosie hollered. "A seven-year-old boy, cussing!"

"If you will promise not to tell her, I'll tell you what's in your present and you can pay me the nickel Christmas morning," I said.

"Get in that bed!" Rosie hollered. "You and your nickel! I bound if I thought any of you all was fixing to buy even a dime present for your grandpa, I'd put in a nickel of hit myself."

"Grandpa don't want presents," I said. "He's too old."

"Hah," Rosie said. "Too old, is he? Suppose everybody decided you was too young to have nickels: what would you think about that? Hah?"

So Rosie turned out the light and went out. But I could still see the presents by the firelight: the ones for Uncle Rodney and Grandma and Aunt Louisa and Aunt Louisa's husband Uncle Fred, and Cousin Louisa and Cousin Fred and the baby and Grandpa's cook and our cook, that was Rosie, and maybe somebody ought to give Grandpa a present only maybe it ought to be Aunt Louisa because she and Uncle Fred lived with Grandpa, or maybe Uncle Rodney ought to because he lived with Grandpa too.

Uncle Rodney always gave Mamma and Papa a present, but maybe it would be just a waste of

his time and Grandpa's time both for Uncle Rodney to give Grandpa a present, because one time I asked Mamma why Grandpa always looked at the present Uncle Rodney gave her and Papa and got so mad, and Papa began to laugh and Mamma said Papa ought to be ashamed, that it wasn't Uncle Rodney's fault if his generosity was longer than his pocketbook.

And Papa said Yes, it certainly wasn't Uncle Rodney's fault, he never knew a man to try harder to get money than Uncle Rodney did, that Uncle Rodney had tried every known plan to get it except work, and that if Mamma would just think back about two years she would remember one time when Uncle Rodney could have thanked his stars that there was one man in the connection whose generosity, or whatever Mamma wanted to call it, was at least five hundred dollars shorter than his pocketbook.

And Mamma said she defied Papa to say that Uncle Rodney stole the money, that it had been malicious persecution and Papa knew it, and that Papa and most other men were prejudiced against Uncle Rodney, why she didn't know, and that if Papa begrudged having lent Uncle Rodney the five hundred dollars when the family's good name was at stake to say so and Grandpa would raise it somehow and pay Papa back, and then she began to cry and Papa said,

"All right; for God's sake, all right."

Because Mamma and Papa didn't know that Uncle Rodney had been handling his business all the time he was visiting us last summer, any more than the people in Mottstown knew that he was doing business last Christmas when I worked for him the first time and he paid me the quarter. Because he said that if he preferred to do business with ladies instead of men it wasn't anybody's business except his, not even Mr. Tucker's.

He said how I never went around telling people about Papa's business and I said how everybody knew Papa was in the livery-stable business and so I didn't have to tell them, and Uncle Rodney said Well, that was what half of the nickel was for and did I want to keep on making the nickels or did I want him to hire somebody else?

So I would go on ahead and watch through Mr. Tucker's fence until he came out to go to town and I would go along behind the fence to the corner and watch until Mr. Tucker was out of sight and then I would put my hat on top of the fence post and leave it there until I saw Mr. Tucker coming back.

Only he never came back while I was there because Uncle Rodney would always be through before then, and he would come up and we would walk back home and he would tell Mamma how far we had walked that day and Mamma would say how good that was for Uncle Rodney's health. So he just paid me a nickel at home.

It wasn't as much as the quarter when he was in business with the

other lady in Mottstown Christmas, but that was just one time and he visited us all summer and so by that time I had a lot more than a quarter. And besides the other time was Christmas and he took a dose of Grandpa's tonic before he paid me the quarter and so maybe this time it might be even a half a dollar. I couldn't hardly wait.

II

But it got to be daylight at last and I put on my Sunday suit, and I would go to the front door and watch for the hack and then I would go to the kitchen and ask Rosie if it wasn't almost time and she would tell me the train wasn't even due for two hours. Only while she was telling me we heard the hack and so I thought it was time for us to go and get on the train and it would be fine, and then we would go to Grandpa's and then it would be tonight and then tomorrow and maybe it would be a half a dollar this time and Jesus it would be fine.

Then Mamma came running out without even her hat on and she said how it was two hours yet and she wasn't even dressed and John Paul said, "Yessum," but Papa sent him and Papa said for John Paul to tell Mamma that Aunt Louisa was here and for Mamma to hurry. So we put the basket of presents into the hack and I rode on the box with John Paul and Mamma hollering from inside the hack about Aunt Louisa, and John Paul said that Aunt Louisa had come in a hired buggy and Papa took her to the hotel to eat breakfast because she left Mottstown before daylight even. And so maybe Aunt Louisa had come to Jefferson to help Mamma and Papa get a present for Grandpa under the tree.

"Because we have one for everybody else," I said, "I bought one for Uncle Rodney with my own money."

Then John Paul began to laugh and I said, "Why?" and he said it was at the notion of me giving Uncle Rodney anything that he would want to use, and I said, "Why?" and John Paul said because I was shaped like a man, and I said, "Why?" and John Paul said he bet Papa would like to give Uncle Rodney a present without even waiting for Christmas, and I said, "What?" and John Paul said, "A job of work."

And I told John Paul how Uncle Rodney had been working all the time he was visiting us last summer, and John Paul quit laughing and said "Sho," he reckoned anything a man kept at all the time, night and day both, he would call it work no matter how much fun it started out to be, and I said,

"Anyway, Uncle Rodney works now, he works in the office of the Compress Association."

John Paul laughed good then and said it would sholy take a whole association to compress Uncle Rodney.

And then Mamma began to holler to go straight to the hotel, and John Paul said "Nome, Papa said to come

straight to the livery stable and wait for him."

And so we went to the hotel and Aunt Louisa and Papa came out and Papa helped Aunt Louisa into the hack and Aunt Louisa began to cry and Mamma hollering, "Louisa! Louisa! What is it? What has happened?" and Papa saying, "Wait now. Wait. Remember the nigger," and that meant John Paul, and so it must have been a present for Grandpa and it didn't come.

And then we didn't go on the train after all. We went to the stable and they already had the light road hack hitched up and waiting, and Mamma was crying now and saying how Papa never even had his Sunday clothes and Papa cussing now and saying, "Damn the clothes." If we didn't get to Uncle Rodney before the others caught him, Papa would just wear the clothes Uncle Rodney had on now.

So we got into the road hack fast and Papa closed the curtain and then Mamma and Aunt Louisa could cry all right and Papa hollered to John Paul to go home and tell Rosie to pack his Sunday suit and take her to the train but we went fast, with Papa driving and saying Didn't anybody know where he was?

And Aunt Louisa quit crying awhile and said how Uncle Rodney didn't come to supper last night, but right after supper he came in and how Aunt Louisa had a terrible feeling as soon as she heard his step in the hall and how Uncle Rodney wouldn't tell her until they were in his room and the door closed and then he said he must have two thousand dollars and Aunt Louisa said where in the world could she get two thousand dollars?

And Uncle Rodney said, "Ask Fred"—that was Aunt Louisa's husband—"and George"—that was Papa. "Tell them they would have to dig it up," and Aunt Louisa said she had that terrible feeling and she said, "Rodney! Rodney! What"—and Uncle Rodney began to cuss and say, "Dammit, don't start sniveling and crying now."

And Aunt Louisa said, "Rodney, what have you done now?" and then they both heard the knocking at the door and how Aunt Louisa looked at Uncle Rodney and she knew the truth before she even laid eyes on Mr. Pruitt and the sheriff, and how she said, "Don't tell Pa! Keep it from Pa! It will kill him . . ."

"Who?" Papa said. "Mister who?"

"Mr. Pruitt," Aunt Louisa said, crying again. "The president of the Compress Association. They moved to Mottstown last spring. You don't know him."

So she went down to the door and it was Mr. Pruitt and the sheriff. And how Aunt Louisa begged Mr. Pruitt for Grandpa's sake and how she gave Mr. Pruitt her oath that Uncle Rodney would stay right there in the house until Papa could get there, and Mr. Pruitt said how he hated it to happen at Christmas too and so for Grandpa's and Aunt Louisa's sake he would give them until the day

after Christmas if Aunt Louisa would promise him that Uncle Rodney would not try to leave Mottstown.

And how Mr. Pruitt showed her with her own eyes the check with Grandpa's name signed to it and how even Aunt Louisa could see that Grandpa's name had been—and then Mamma said, "Louisa! Louisa! Remember Georgie!" and that was me, and Papa cussed too, hollering, "How in damnation do you expect to keep it from him? By hiding the newspapers?"

And Aunt Louisa cried again and said how everybody was bound to know it, that she didn't expect or hope that any of us could ever hold our heads up again, that all she hoped for was to keep it from Grandpa because it would kill him.

She cried hard then and Papa had to stop at a branch and get down and soak his handkerchief for Mamma to wipe Aunt Louisa's face with it and then Papa took the bottle of tonic out of the dash pocket and put a few drops on the handkerchief, and Aunt Louisa smelled it and then Papa took a dose of the tonic out of the bottle and Mamma said, "George!" and Papa drank some more of the tonic and then made like he was handing the bottle back for Mamma and Aunt Louisa to take a dose too and said,

"I don't blame you. If I was a woman in this family, I'd take to drink too. Now let me get this bond business straight."

"It was those road bonds of Ma's," Aunt Louisa said.

We were going fast again now because the horses had rested while Papa was wetting the handkerchief and taking the dose of tonic, and Papa was saying, "All right, what about the bonds?" when all of a sudden he jerked around in the seat and said, "Road bonds? Do you mean he took that damn screw driver and prized open your mother's desk too?"

Then Mamma said, "George! how can you?" only Aunt Louisa was talking now, quick now, not crying now, not yet, and Papa with his head turned over his shoulder and saying, did Aunt Louisa mean that that five hundred Papa had to pay out two years ago wasn't all of it?

And Aunt Louisa said it was twenty-five hundred, only they didn't want Grandpa to find it out, and so Grandma put up her road bonds for security on the note, and how they said now that Uncle Rodney had redeemed Grandma's note and the road bonds from the bank with some of the Compress Association's bonds out of the safe in the Compress Association office.

Because when Mr. Pruitt found the Compress Association's bonds were missing he looked for them and found them in the bank and when he looked in the Compress Association's safe all he found was the check for two thousand dollars with Grandpa's name signed to it, and how Mr. Pruitt hadn't lived in Mottstown but a year but even he knew that Grandpa never signed that check and besides he looked in the bank again and Grandpa never

had two thousand dollars inside it.

And how Mr. Pruitt said how he would wait until the day after Christmas if Aunt Louisa would give him her sworn oath that Uncle Rodney would not go away, and Aunt Louisa did it and then she went back upstairs to plead with Uncle Rodney to give Mr. Pruitt the bonds and she went into Uncle Rodney's room where she had left him, and the window was open and Uncle Rodney was gone.

"Damn Rodney!" Papa said. "The bonds! You mean, nobody knows where the bonds are?"

Now we were going fast because we were coming down the last hill and into the valley where Mottstown was. Soon we would begin to smell it again; it would be just today and then tonight and then it would be Christmas, and Aunt Louisa sitting there with her face white like a whitewashed fence that has been rained on and Papa said, "Who in hell ever gave him such a job anyway?" and Aunt Louisa said, "Mr. Pruitt," and Papa said how even if Mr. Pruitt had only lived in Mottstown a few months.

And then Aunt Louisa began to cry without even putting her handkerchief to her face this time and Mamma looked at Aunt Louisa and she began to cry too and Papa took out the whip and hit the team a belt with it even if they were going fast and he cussed.

"Damnation to hell," Papa said. "I see. Pruitt's married."

Then we could see it too. There were holly wreaths in the windows like at home in Jefferson, and I said, "They shoot fireworks in Mottstown too like they do in Jefferson."

Aunt Louisa and Mamma were crying good now, and now it was Papa saying, "Here, here; remember Georgie," and that was me, and Aunt Louisa said, "Yes, yes! Painted common thing, traipsing up and down the streets all afternoon alone in a buggy, and the one and only time Mrs. Church called on her, and that was because of Mr. Pruitt's position alone, Mrs. Church found her without corsets on and Mrs. Church told me she smelled liquor on her breath."

And Papa saying "Here, here," and Aunt Louisa crying good and saying how it was Mrs. Pruitt that did it because Uncle Rodney was young and easy led because he never had had opportunities to meet a nice girl and marry her, and Papa was driving fast toward Grandpa's house and he said,

"Marry? Rodney marry? What in hell pleasure would he get out of slipping out of his own house and waiting until after dark and slipping around to the back and climbing up the gutter and into a room where there wasn't anybody in it but his own wife?"

And so Mamma and Aunt Louisa were crying good when we got to Grandpa's.

III

And Uncle Rodney wasn't there. We came in, and Grandma said how Mandy, that was Grandpa's cook, hadn't come to cook breakfast and

when Grandma sent Emmeline, that was Aunt Louisa's baby's nurse, down to Mandy's cabin in the back yard, the door was locked on the inside, but Mandy wouldn't answer and then Grandma went down there herself and Mandy wouldn't answer and so Cousin Fred climbed in the window and Mandy was gone and Uncle Fred had just got back from town then and he and Papa both hollered, "Locked? on the inside? and nobody in it?"

And then Uncle Fred told Papa to go in and keep Grandpa entertained and he would go and then Aunt Louisa grabbed Papa and Uncle Fred and said she would keep Grandpa quiet and for both of them to go and find him, find him, and Papa said, "If only the fool hasn't tried to sell them to somebody," and Uncle Fred said, "Good God, man, don't you know that check was dated ten days ago?"

And so we went in where Grandpa was reared back in his chair and saying how he hadn't expected Papa until tomorrow but, by God, he was glad to see somebody at last because he waked up this morning and his cook had quit and Louisa had chased off somewhat before daylight and now he couldn't even find Uncle Rodney to go down and bring his mail and a cigar or two back and so, thank God, Christmas never came but once a year and so be damned if he wouldn't be glad when it was over, only he was laughing now because when he said that about Christmas before Christmas he always laughed, it wasn't until after Christmas that he didn't laugh when he said that about Christmas.

Then Aunt Louisa got Grandpa's keys out of his pocket herself and opened the desk where Uncle Rodney would prize it open with a screw driver, and took out Grandpa's tonic and then Mamma said for me to go and find Cousin Fred and Cousin Louisa.

So Uncle Rodney wasn't there. Only at first I thought maybe it wouldn't be a quarter even, it wouldn't be nothing this time, so at first all I had to think about was that anyway it would be Christmas and that would be something anyway. Because I went on around the house, and so after a while Papa and Uncle Fred came out, and I could see them through the bushes knocking at Mandy's door and calling, "Rodney, Rodney," like that.

Then I had to get back in the bushes because Uncle Fred had to pass right by me to go to the woodshed to get the axe to open Mandy's door. But they couldn't fool Uncle Rodney. If Mr. Tucker couldn't fool Uncle Rodney in Mr. Tucker's own house, Uncle Fred and Papa ought to have known they couldn't fool him right in his own papa's back yard. So I didn't even need to hear them.

I just waited until after a while Uncle Fred came back out the broken door and came to the woodshed and took the axe and pulled the lock and hasp and steeple off the woodhouse door and went back and then Papa came out of Mandy's house and they nailed the woodhouse

lock onto Mandy's door and locked it and they went around behind Mandy's house, and I could hear Uncle Fred nailing the windows up tight too.

Then they went back to the house. But it didn't matter if Mandy was in the house too and couldn't get out, because the train came from Jefferson with Rosie and Papa's Sunday clothes on it and so Rosie was there to cook for Grandpa and us and so that was all right too.

But they couldn't fool Uncle Rodney. I could have told them that. I could have told them that sometimes Uncle Rodney even wanted to wait until after dark to even begin to do business. And so it was all right even if it was late in the afternoon before I could get away from Cousin Fred and Cousin Louisa.

It was late; soon they would begin to shoot the fireworks downtown, and then we would be hearing it too, so I could just see his face a little between the slats where Papa and Uncle Fred had nailed up the back window; I could see his face where he hadn't shaved, and he was asking me why in hell it took me so long because he had heard the Jefferson train come before dinner, before eleven o'clock, and laughing about how Papa and Uncle Fred had nailed him up in the house to keep him when that was exactly what he wanted, and that I would have to slip out right after supper somehow and did I reckon I could manage it?

And I said how last Christmas it had been a quarter, but I didn't have to slip out of the house that time, and he laughed, saying "Quarter? Quarter?" did I ever see ten quarters all at once? and I never did, and he said for me to be there with the screw driver right after supper and I would see ten quarters, and to remember that even God didn't know where he is and so for me to get the hell away and stay away until I came back after dark with the screw driver.

And they couldn't fool me either. Because I had been watching the man all afternoon, even when he thought I was just playing and maybe because I was from Jefferson instead of Mottstown and so I wouldn't know who he was. But I did, because once when he was walking past the back fence and he stopped and lit his cigar again and I saw the badge under his coat when he struck the match and so I knew he was like Mr. Watts at Jefferson that catches the niggers. So I was playing by the fence and I could hear him stopping and looking at me and I played and he said:

"Howdy, son. Santy Claus coming to see you tomorrow?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"You're Miss Sarah's boy, from up at Jefferson, ain't you?" he said.

"Yes, sir," I said.

"Come to spend Christmas with your Grandpa, eh?" he said. "I wonder if your Uncle Rodney's at home this afternoon."

"No, sir," I said.

"Well, well, that's too bad," he

said. "I wanted to see him a minute. He's downtown, I reckon?"

"No, sir," I said.

"Well, well," he said. "You mean he's gone away on a visit, maybe?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"Well, that was all I wanted to know," he said. "If you happen to mention this to your Aunt Louisa or your Uncle Fred you can tell them that was all I wanted to know."

"Yes, sir," I said. So he went away. And he didn't pass the house any more. I watched for him, but he didn't come back. So he couldn't fool me either.

IV

Then it began to get dark and they started to shoot the fireworks downtown. I could hear them, and soon we would be seeing the Roman candles and skyrockets and I would have the ten quarters then and I thought about the basket full of presents and I thought how maybe I could go on downtown when I got through working for Uncle Rodney and buy a present for Grandpa with a dime out of the ten quarters and give it to him tomorrow and maybe, because nobody else had given him a present, Grandpa might give me a quarter too instead of the dime tomorrow, and that would be fine sure enough.

But I didn't have time to do that. We ate supper, and Rosie had to cook that too, and Mamma and Aunt Louisa with powder on their faces where they had been crying, and Grandpa. It was Papa helping him take a dose of tonic every now and then all afternoon while Uncle Fred was downtown, and Uncle Fred came back and Papa came out in the hall and Uncle Fred said he had looked everywhere, in the bank and in the Compress, and how Mr. Pruitt had helped him but they couldn't find a sign either of them or of the money because Uncle Fred was afraid.

Because one night last week Uncle Rodney hired a rig and went somewhere and Uncle Fred found out Uncle Rodney drove over to the main line at Kingston and caught the fast train to Memphis, and Papa said, "Damnation," and Uncle Fred said, "By God, we will go down there after supper and sweat it out of him, because at least we have got him. I told Pruitt that and he said that if we hold to him, he will hold off and give us a chance."

So Uncle Fred and Papa and Grandpa came in to supper together, with Grandpa between them saying, "Christmas don't come but once a year, thank God, so hooray for it," and Papa and Uncle Fred saying, "Now you are all right, Pa; straight ahead now, Pa," and Grandpa would go straight ahead awhile and then begin to holler, "Where in hell is that damn boy?" and that meant Uncle Rodney, and that Grandpa was a good mind to go downtown himself and haul Uncle Rodney out of that damn poolhall and make him come home.

And so we ate supper and Mamma said she would take the children upstairs and Aunt Louisa

said, "No," Emmeline could put us to bed, and so we went up the back stairs, and Emmeline said how she had done already had to cook breakfast extra today and if folks thought she was going to waste all her Christmas doing extra work they never had the sense she give them credit for and that this looked like to her it was a good house to be away from nohow, and so we went into the room and then after a while I went back down the back stairs and I remembered where to find the screw driver too.

Then I could hear the firecrackers plain from downtown, and the moon was shining now but I could still see the Roman candles and the skyrockets running up the sky. Then Uncle Rodney's hand came out of the crack in the shutter and took the screw driver. I couldn't see his face now and it wasn't laughing exactly, it didn't sound exactly like laughing, it was just the way he breathed behind the shutter. Because they couldn't fool him.

"All right," he said. "Now that's ten quarters. But wait. Are you sure nobody knows where I am?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "I waited by the fence until he came and asked me."

"Which one?" Uncle Rodney said.

"The one that wears the badge," I said.

Then Uncle Rodney cussed. But it wasn't mad cussing. It sounded just like it sounded when he was laughing except the words.

"He said if you were out of town on a visit, and I said, Yes, sir," I said.

"Good," Uncle Rodney said. "By God, some day you will be as good a business man as I am. And I won't make you a liar much longer, either. So now you have got ten quarters, haven't you?"

"No," I said. "I haven't got them yet."

Then he cussed again, and I said, "I will hold my cap up and you can drop them in it and they won't spill then."

Then he cussed hard, only it wasn't loud. "Only I'm not going to give you ten quarters," he said, and I begun to say, "You said—" and Uncle Rodney said, "Because I am going to give you twenty."

And I said, "Yes, sir," and he told me how to find the right house, and what to do when I found it. Only there wasn't any paper to carry this time because Uncle Rodney said how this was a twenty-quarter job, and so it was too important to put on paper and besides I wouldn't need a paper because I would not know them anyhow, and his voice coming hissing down from behind the shutter where I couldn't see him and still sounding like when he cussed while he was saying how Papa and Uncle Fred had done him a favor by nailing up the door and window and they didn't even have sense enough to know it.

"Start at the corner of the house and count three windows. Then throw the handful of gravel against the window. Then when the window opens—never mind who it will be,

you won't know anyway—just say who you are and then say, "He will be at the corner with the buggy in ten minutes. Bring the jewelry." "Now you say it," Uncle Rodney said.

"He will be at the corner with the buggy in ten minutes. Bring the jewelry," I said.

"Say 'Bring all the jewelry,'" Uncle Rodney said.

"Bring all the jewelry," I said.

"Good," Uncle Rodney said. Then he said, "Well? What are you waiting on?"

"For the twenty quarters," I said.

Uncle Rodney cussed again. "Do you expect me to pay you before you have done the work?" he said.

"You said about a buggy," I said. "Maybe you will forget to pay me before you go and you might not get back until after we go back home. And besides, that day last summer when we couldn't do any business with Mrs. Tucker because she was sick and you wouldn't pay me the nickel because you said it wasn't your fault Mrs. Tucker was sick."

Then Uncle Rodney cussed hard and quiet behind the crack and then he said, "Listen. I haven't got the twenty quarters now. I haven't even got one quarter now. And the only way I can get any is to get out of here and finish this business. And I can't finish this business tonight unless you do your work. See? I'll be right behind you. I'll be waiting right there at the corner in the buggy when you come back. Now, go on. Hurry."

V

So I went on across the yard, only the moon was bright now and I walked behind the fence until I got to the street. And I could hear the firecrackers and I could see the Roman candles and skyrockets sliding up the sky, but the fireworks were all downtown, and so all I could see along the street was the candles and wreaths in the windows.

So I came to the lane, went up the lane to the stable, and I could hear the horse in the stable, but I didn't know whether it was the right stable or not; but pretty soon Uncle Rodney kind of jumped around the corner of the stable and said, "Here you are," and he showed me where to stand and listen toward the house and he went back into the stable.

But I couldn't hear anything but Uncle Rodney harnessing the horse, and then he whistled and I went back and he had the horse already hitched to the buggy and I said, "Whose horse and buggy is this; it's a lot skinnier than Grandpa's horse?"

And Uncle Rodney said, "It's my horse now, only damn this moonlight to hell."

Then I went back down the lane to the street and there wasn't anybody coming so I waved my arm in the moonlight, and the buggy came up and I got in and we went fast. The side curtains were up and so I couldn't see the skyrockets and Roman candles from town, but I could hear the firecrackers and I thought maybe we were going through town and maybe Uncle

Rodney would stop and give me some of the twenty quarters and I could buy Grandpa a present for tomorrow, but we didn't; Uncle Rodney just raised the side curtain without stopping and then I could see the house, the two magnolia trees, but we didn't stop until we came to the corner.

"Now," Uncle Rodney said, "when the window opens, say, 'He will be at the corner in ten minutes. Bring *all* the jewelry.' Never mind who it will be. You don't want to know who it is. You want to even forget what house it is. See?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "And then you will pay me the—"

"Yes!" he said, cussing. "Yes! Get out of here and make it on the quick!"

So I got out and the buggy went back up the street. And the house was dark all right except for one light, so it was the right one, besides the two trees. So I went across the yard and counted the three windows and I was just about to throw the gravel when a lady ran out from behind a bush and grabbed me.

She kept on trying to say something, only I couldn't tell what it was, and besides she never had time to say very much anyhow because a man ran out from behind another bush and grabbed us both. Only he grabbed her by the mouth, because I could tell that from the kind of slobbering noise she made while she was fighting to get loose.

"Well, boy?" he said. "What is it? Are you the one?"

"I work for Uncle Rodney," I said.

"Then you're the one," he said. Now the lady was fighting and slobbering sure enough, but he held her by the mouth. "All right. What is it?"

Only I didn't know Uncle Rodney ever did business with men. But maybe after he began to work in the Compress Association he had to. And then he had told me I would not know them anyway, so maybe that was what he meant.

"He says to be at the corner in ten minutes," I said. "And to bring all the jewelry. He said for me to say that twice. Bring all the jewelry."

The lady was slobbering and fighting worse than ever now, so maybe he had to turn me loose so he could hold her with both hands.

"Bring all the jewelry," he said, holding the lady with both hands now. "That's a good idea. That's fine. I don't blame him for telling you to say that twice. All right. Now you go back to the corner and wait and when he comes, tell him this: "She says to come and help carry it." Say that to him twice, too. Understand?"

"Then I'll get my twenty quarters," I said.

"Twenty quarters, hah?" the man said, holding the lady. "That's what you are to get, is it? That's not enough. You tell him this, too: 'She says to give you a piece of the jewelry.' Understand?"

"I just want my twenty quarters," I said.

Then he and the lady went back

behind the bushes again and I went on, too, back toward the corner, and I could see the Roman candles and skyrockets again from toward town and I could hear the firecrackers, and then the buggy came back and Uncle Rodney was hissing again behind the curtain like when he was behind the slats on Mandy's window.

"Well?" he said.

"She said for you to come and help carry it," I said.

"What?" Uncle Rodney said. "She said he's not there?"

"No, sir. She said for you to come and help carry it. For me to say that twice." Then I said, "Where's my twenty quarters?" because he had already jumped out of the buggy and jumped across the walk into the shadow of some bushes. So I went into the bushes too and said, "You said you would give—"

"All right; all right!" Uncle Rodney said. He was kind of squatting along the bushes; I could hear him breathing. "I'll give them to you tomorrow. I'll give you thirty quarters tomorrow. Now you get to hell on home. And if they have been down to Mandy's house, you don't know anything. Run, now. Hurry. And don't get lost."

"I'd rather have the twenty quarters tonight," I said.

He was squatting fast along in the shadow of the bushes, and I was right behind him, because when he whirled around he almost touched me, but I jumped back out of the bushes in time and he stood there cussing at me and then he stooped down and I saw it was a stick in his hand and I turned and ran.

Then he went on, squatting along in the shadow, and then I went back to the buggy, because the day after Christmas we would go back to Jefferson, and so if Uncle Rodney didn't get back before then I would not see him again until next summer and then maybe he would be in business with another lady and my twenty quarters would be like my nickel that time when Mrs. Tucker was sick.

So I waited by the buggy and I could watch the skyrockets and the Roman candles and I could hear the firecrackers from town, only it was late now and so maybe all the stores would be closed and so I couldn't buy Grandpa a present, even when Uncle Rodney came back and gave me my twenty quarters.

So I was listening to the firecrackers and thinking about how maybe I could tell Grandpa that I had wanted to buy him a present and so maybe he might give me fifteen cents instead of a dime anyway, when all of a sudden they started shooting firecrackers back at the house where Uncle Rodney had gone. Only they just shot five of them fast, and when they didn't shoot any more I thought that maybe in a minute they would shoot the skyrockets and Roman candles too. But they didn't.

They just shot the five firecrackers right quick and then stopped, and I stood by the buggy and then folks began to come out of the houses and holler at one another and then

I began to see men running toward the house where Uncle Rodney had gone, and then a man came out of the yard fast and went up the street toward Grandpa's and I thought at first it was Uncle Rodney and that he had forgotten the buggy, until I saw that it wasn't.

But Uncle Rodney never came back and so I went on toward the yard to where the men were, because I could still watch the buggy too and see Uncle Rodney if he came back out of the bushes, and I came to the yard and I saw six men carrying something long and then two other men ran up and stopped me and one of them said, "Hell-fire, it's one of those kids, the one from Jefferson."

And I could see then that what the men were carrying was a window blind with something wrapped in a quilt on it and so I thought at first that they had come to help Uncle Rodney carry the jewelry, only I didn't see Uncle Rodney anywhere, and then one of the men said, "Who? One of the kids? Hell-fire, somebody take him on home."

So the man picked me up, but I said I had to wait on Uncle Rodney, and the man said that Uncle Rodney would be all right, and I said, "But I want to wait for him here," and then one of the men behind us said, "Damn it, get him out of here," and we went on.

I was riding on the man's back and then I could look back and see the six men in the moonlight carrying the blind with the bundle on it, and I said did it belong to Uncle Rodney? and the man said, "No, if it belonged to anybody now it belonged to Grandpa." And so then I knew what it was.

"It's a side of beef," I said. "You are going to take it to Grandpa." Then the other man made a funny sound and the one I was riding on said, "Yes, you might call it a side of beef," and I said, "It's a Christmas present for Grandpa. Who is it going to be from? Is it from Uncle Rodney?"

"No," the man said. "Not from him. Call it from the men of Mottstown. From all the husbands in Mottstown."

VI

Then we came in sight of Grandpa's house. And now the lights were all on, even on the porch, and I could see folks in the hall, I could see ladies with shawls over their heads, and some more of them going up the walk toward the porch, and then I could hear somebody in the house that sounded like singing.

And then Papa came out of the house and came down the walk to the gate and we came up and the man put me down and I saw Rosie waiting at the gate too. Only it didn't sound like singing now because there wasn't any music with it, and so maybe it was Aunt Louisa again and so maybe she didn't like Christmas now any better than Grandpa said he didn't like it.

"It's a present for Grandpa," I said.

"Yes," Papa said. "You go on with Rosie and go to bed. Mamma

will be there soon. But you be a good boy until she comes. You mind Rosie. All right, Rosie. Take him on. Hurry."

"Yo don't need to tell me that," Rosie said. She took my hand. "Come on."

Only we didn't go back into the yard, because Rosie came out the gate and we went up the street. And then I thought maybe we were going around the back to dodge the people and we didn't do that, either. We just went on up the street, and I said, "Where are we going?"

And Rosie said, "We gonter sleep at a lady's house name Mrs. Jordon."

So we went on. I didn't say anything. Because Papa had forgotten to say anything about my slipping out of the house yet and so maybe if I went on to bed and stayed quiet he would forget about it until tomorrow too. And besides, the main thing was to get a holt of Uncle Rodney and get my twenty quarters before we went back home, and so maybe that would be all right tomorrow too.

So we went on and Rosie said, "Yonder's the house," and we went in the yard and then all of a sudden Rosie saw the possum. It was in a persimmon tree in Mrs. Jordon's yard and I could see it against the moonlight too, and I hollered, "Run! Run and get Mrs. Jordon's ladder!"

And Rosie said, "Ladder my foot! You going to bed!"

But I didn't wait. I began to run toward the house, with Rosie running behind me and hollering, "You, Georgie! You come back here!" But I didn't stop. We could get the ladder and get the possum and give it to Grandpa along with the side of meat and it wouldn't cost even a dime and then maybe Grandpa might even give me a quarter too, and then when I got the twenty quarters from Uncle Rodney I would have twenty-one quarters and that will be fine.

Truly, a policeman's lot can be at times far from a happy one. But routine unpleasantnesses of law enforcement pale before the plight of Herbie Delehanty, First-Grade Detective, who raided a burlesque show to trap a killer's moll and found his own girl-friend cavorting amid the curvaceous coryphees. For more about Herbie read A CHAIR FOR A LADY by William Fay in our next issue.

the detective and the senator

by . . . August Derleth

The detective was a machine, the Senator was a flannelmouth—and their battle rocked the nation.

"EVERY TIME I READ about a Congressional investigation I'm reminded of Farrar," said Harrigan from behind his newspaper. "It's high time they put the lid on these investigations. Anyway, I'm all for one to determine the qualifications of the investigating gentry—at least seven out of ten couldn't pass an ordinary intelligence test."

"Who's Farrar?" I asked.

"Even you must have heard of Sherlock, Jr.," said Harrigan, lowering his paper.

"There are scores of imitations of Sherlock Holmes," I said. "I can't be expected to know all of them."

"Sherlock, Jr. was a machine," said Tex Harrigan coldly.

"What a name for a machine!"

"Fact. An electronic brain. The world's first scientific detective. Farrar created it."

"Now that you mention it, I do seem to remember something of the sort. I was in Africa then, I think."

"I was on the *Post* at that time. Part of the time I was doing political reporting but for the most part I was on routine assignments. Clark knew something of my off-trail stories and sent me to get an interview with Farrar as soon as the story about Sherlock, Jr. broke.

Despite their contributions to our life machines are seldom lovable. And when it comes to thinking-machines, those utterly emotionless cybernetic monsters, lack of lovability can be safely doubled in spades. But in Sherlock, Jr. Mr. Derleth has come up with probably the most lovable machine as well as the most efficient detective around. A lot of you will miss Junior when you finish this new story.

"Farrar lived out in Bethesda. He was a prim, almost cold little ex-professor. He'd done some work at Harvard with electronic brains and he claimed that his invention—a smaller one than most but evidently more complicated—was the first electronic detective. Hence the name, Sherlock, Jr. It looked like most of them—a pretty big affair, with all kinds of controls, including the newest wrinkle in those days—a device enabling the machine to recognize spoken words and type them out in a part of its complex anatomy."

"What made it a scientific detective?" I put in, beginning to be definitely interested.

"Farrar explained it was designed to be one. It had an almost human allergy to any kind of dishonesty. He had tried it with all kinds of crimes. Just fed in the facts and the machine came up with the answer. Amazing! For instance, according to Sherlock, Jr., Dorothy Arnold was not abducted but walked out of her life of her own free will—Hauptmann was the one and only kidnapper involved in the Lindbergh case—the Pig Woman of the Hall-Mills murder was a congenital liar—and so on, all worked out with mathematical precision.

"Farrar was on the track of perfecting Sherlock, Jr. to the point where it could handle all kinds of minor crimes when I first saw him.

"'What's the latest?' I asked, looking for a new angle.

"'I have the solution to the Brink robbery in my pocket,' said Farrar. 'Just as I suspected, it was worked out with someone in the know.'

"'Why not send it in?'

"'There's just a little legal hitch,' answered Farrar. 'Sherlock, Jr. hasn't got around to producing evidence as yet. So no conviction is possible.'

"I suppose what happened to Farrar was in a way my fault. That is to say, it was my question that began it. Naturally I wanted some demonstration of the machine's powers and Farrar was nothing loath. He sugested that I take any recent crime and feed the machine all the evidence and testimony in the case. That was how it worked, you see—all the known facts or inferences were fed into the machine. Then it 'digested' them, so to speak, and came up with the solution.

"I don't know what possessed me to hit on the case of Alex Lane unless it was that we had a pretty complete file on Lane in the morgue. I got it out, took it over to Farrar's house and fed it to the machine. I don't have to recall the Lane case—you'll remember how hard the government fought to prove he was a Communist agent, guilty of treason, and how at last the conviction came through.

"Well, I fed the Lane case to the machine.

"The result was spectacular. The machine tore the testimony apart, shredded the evidence and came up with the conclusion that Alex Lane was not a Communist agent, had never been a Communist and

had been framed by someone in the government.

"'Very interesting,' said Farrar, when he read it. 'I'd suspected something of that sort.'

"'No possibility of error?' I asked.

"'None,' Farrar was positive. 'The human mind is capable of all kinds of error. Sherlock, Jr. never makes a mistake.'

"Just to be on the safe side, I tried it all over again. You talked into the machine—and in the Lane case, that meant a lot of talking—quoting from the testimony, and so on, and you had hardly finished before the machine came through with the answer. It was the same the second time.

"I went back to my desk, whipped out the story and took it in to Clark.

"'This is hot stuff,' I said. 'It might cause trouble.'

"'Hell, no,' answered Clark. 'Run it.'

"So we ran it.

"We got results, all right. The government literally fell on Farrar and Sherlock, Jr. Our paper had hardly hit the streets before there was an immediate outcry from the Senate. Senator Jim—otherwise known as Jumping Jim or Holy Jim—Muddeltup, a Midwestern stalwart, flatly accused Sherlock, Jr., of being subversive and demanded to know whether it had a Communist Party card. The Senator had originated the irresponsible custom of wantonly smearing everyone within mud-slinging distance from the immunity of the Senate floor. He couldn't be expected to know the difference between a man and a machine.

"The papers gave him space every time. He was as good as the comics if you didn't take him so seriously as to upset your stomach. Anyway the Senator made a good thing out of Farrar and Sherlock, Jr.

"Things might have quieted down if Farrar hadn't been so bullheaded. This was a trait I hadn't suspected in him. He made a few very dignified statements and was unhappy about the fact that scarcely anyone bothered to print what he said. So he telephoned me.

"'What do I do?' he asked. 'Am I supposed to stand for the ravings of that irresponsible muttonhead? Do I have to sit idly by while Sherlock, Jr. is tarred with Muddeltup's dirt just because that mountebank has Senatorial immunity? Why won't the papers print what I say?'

"'Because you aren't Muddeltup,' I told him. 'The papers like Muddeltup. He's good copy, and besides, the American people have been conditioned to believe the worst of everyone without benefit of doubt and certainly without the chance of self-defense. It's the Muddeltup technique. Smear the man and stand your ground. As long as you have Senatorial immunity you don't have to run for the hills.'

"'It's sensation they want,' complained Farrar.

"'You put it well,' I said.

"Maybe he took me too seriously. At any rate, before that day was over, he called me again and said he

had something for me. He called it 'hot copy.' It was all of that.

"What had happened was this—Farrar had fed Sherlock, Jr., some interesting data about Senator Muddeltup. Out in his home state some non-partisans of the Senator had been digging around in his income tax reports, his bank accounts, and so on. They had discovered some very wide discrepancies. Nothing crooked, you understand. Just some highly questionable matters.

"For instance, just before the Senator had been elected to office for the first time he was in debt to the tune of a cool hundred thousand. Two years after he had begun his Senatorial investigations into subversive activities in the nation his bank balance stood at well over a hundred thousand and his debts had been paid. That was a lot more than he could have got out of his salary.

"Farrar had given all this to Sherlock, Jr., and asked the machine where the Senator had got the money in his bank balance.

"'And here's the answer,' said Farrar, handing me a typical strip of Sherlock, Jr.'s paper.

"I read it. It was hot copy, all right. The machine had worked it all out very neatly. The Senator had been given a quarter of a million to further his investigation, to pay for hiring private investigators who were sent out to try to dig up some dirt to substantiate the Senator's smears and protect him if ever he made a slip and forgot that he didn't have Senatorial immunity away from the Senate.

"Except for twenty thousand dollars unaccounted for, Sherlock, Jr., had got down to the last penny just how much of this the Senator had borrowed and used to speculate—using his knowledge of government services to prevent his taking any very great risks in grain and stocks. That investigation was proving fatly beneficial to the Senator in a financial way. Nothing crooked, since no money was taken. But ethical? Hardly.

"I ate it up. I figured the public would too. Just the same, before taking Farrar's word for it, I worked the whole thing all over again. I checked Farrar's data, found it correct and fed it to Sherlock, Jr. Once more the same answer came out word for word, down to the last period.

"I took it in to Clark. 'This is hotter than hell,' I said. 'Muddeltup will probably sue us unless we can fix it up in such a way . . .'

"Clark wasn't afraid of anyone. 'Fix it up,' he said. 'Fry that pig in some of his own mud. And keep after that machine—there's still twenty thousand unaccounted for if these figures are correct.'

"'They're correct, all right. I checked them myself.'

"We ran the story. All the wire services picked it up and pictures of Sherlock, Jr. with Farrar began to go out on the telephoto wires.

"We expected a reaction. We got it. Safe on the floor of the Senate Senator Muddletup accused Clark of being a Communist agent, smeared the *Post* as a Communist paper, and

even went so far as to suggest that every wire service and newspaper that carried the story was being financed by Soviet funds. He announced that he was suing the *Post* for several million dollars—though that was just bluff, as things turned out.

"The headlines were beautiful. *Thinking Machine Claims Senator Muddeltup Speculates with Government Funds—Senator Charges Sherlock, Jr. Is Communist—Sherlock's Inventor Holds Senator Confused—'Foul Smear!' Cries Muddeltup—'Dirty, un-American Methods Used Against Me!' Says Senator.*

"One paper ran a direct tape-recorded quote from the senator—'All these people who are telling the truth about me are subversives in the pay of Moscow.'

"The Senator had just begun to fight. His next move was obvious. Before Farrar knew it both he and Sherlock, Jr. had been served with subpoenas and ordered to appear before Senator Muddeltup's Senatorial Committee for the Investigation of Subversive Activities in the United States.

"Farrar announced that he was perfectly willing to appear before the Committee but that the Committee would either have to come before Sherlock, Jr., or take it up at their own expense to appear before them. That didn't phase Muddeltup. Since he was wasting the taxpayers' money he simply issued an order for the required number of mechanics to go to Farrar's place and take up the machine.

"In no time at all Sherlock, Jr., was installed before the Senatorial Committee headed by Muddeltup and the Senator was giving out dark statements about the imminence of the Committee's greatest discovery, the flushing out of a master-mind 'right here in Washington', a discovery, he held, 'that will put the Hiss case into the background forever.' In the long run the Senator was right—though not just in the way he had anticipated. The stage was set for the Senator's biggest fight.

"*Senator Muddeltup Vs. Detective Machine*, the papers headlined it.

"That's what it amounted to. Of course we had to cover it. Muddeltup tried to keep the *Post* out of the hearings but he wasn't quite able to swing that. They started out by demanding a demonstration by Sherlock, Jr.

"Farrar took one entire day to feed Sherlock, Jr., his test. I might have known he would do something sensational. He chose the Sacco-Vanzetti case and naturally it took a while to get all the facts, the suppositions and the testimony into Sherlock, Jr. Once all of it was in, however, Sherlock, Jr. had no difficulty about the answer. Sacco and Vanzetti, said the scientific detective, were not guilty, had been framed and legally murdered.

"'Sacco and Vanzetti were Communists,' screamed Muddeltup. 'This proves how subversive this thing is.'

"Saner heads on the Committee prevailed on the Senator to sit down and ordered Farrar to prepare

another demonstration for the next day's hearings.

"I called Farrar up that night. 'Don't you think you'd better do something perfectly orthodox just to prove to the world how well Sherlock, Jr. can perform?'

"'What do you suggest?' he asked.

"'Oh, some well-known case about which everyone knows.'

"'There's no challenge in that,' said Farrar. 'How will that prove anything?'

"'It'll show them that it works. Take the Lindbergh case, for instance. A lot of people still believe Hauptmann had accomplices. You and I don't. Neither does Sherlock, Jr.—only the machine can prove it to our satisfaction.'

"'How will that do for the audience and the Committee? Look, the aggregate intelligence in the Committee amounts to about the level of the tenth grade, allowing for a difference in subjects considered.'

"'Maybe so. But the papers are there.'

"'I'll think about it. But I don't like to put too many burdens on Sherlock, Jr. just now. After all, it still has an unworked problem. There's twenty thousand of Muddeltup's bank account still unaccounted for.'

"It took me a few moments to assimilate that. 'You mean the thing keeps on working on a problem?' I ventured cautiously.

"'Certainly,' he said. 'Sherlock, Jr. never forgets until its answer is made and eventually finished.'

"I hadn't got that at first. It presented interesting possibilities, to put it mildly.

"Well, next day the chamber was packed. The television people had got into the act and were all set for a field day. Senator Muddeltup opened the proceedings with a long breast-beating harangue, which soon gave way to a rousing piece of demagoguery designed to convince the yokelry, giving them the old routine—'I hold here in my hand indisputable proof of the treachery of the witness, Sherlock, Jr.'—and waving around pieces of paper which looked like documents but might as well have been Kleenex for all the value they had as evidence of anything except the skullduggery of Senator Muddeltup. Then he turned on Farrar.

"'Have you ever been or are you now a member of the Communist Party?' he asked.

"'No,' answered Farrar.

"'Isn't it true that you fed this diabolical invention of yours subversive facts?'

"'Senator, a fact cannot be either subversive or otherwise. A fact is a fact and stands by itself without labels.'

"'I hope you gentlemen got that,' said the Senator to the press. 'That's typical of the kind of double-talk we're getting from these Reds. I confidently expect the witness to take recourse in his constitutional rights under the Fourth Amendment.'

"'Fifth, Senator,' corrected Farrar.

"'As a red-blooded American who

fought the enemy and was wounded in the rear echelons during the last war, I resent the insolence of the witness in the attempt to intimidate me by inferring that he knows the American constitution better than I,' said Muddeltup. 'Are you prepared, Mr. Farrar, to give us a non-subversive demonstration of this infernal machine of yours?'

"'I'm prepared for another demonstration,' said Farrar.

"Well, this time he had taken my advice. He gave Sherlock, Jr. all the known facts and pertinent data about the Lizzie Borden case, which dates back, you'll remember, to eighteen ninety-two in Fall River, Massachusetts.

"Did Lizzie, a comely and probably sadly repressed wench of thirty-two, hack her stepmother and father to death with a hatchet after first trying to poison them two days before? The official verdict at her trial the next year was that Lizzie was not guilty, and thereafter she lived well until nineteen twenty-seven on what she inherited from the estate, for the Bordens were pretty well fixed.

"The scientific detective came through. Verdict or no verdict, history or no history, Sherlock, Jr. decided that indisputably Lizzie Borden had helped her parents shuffle off this mortal coil.

"Farrar read aloud the typed strip from the machine.

"Instantly Senator Muddeltup was on his feet, waving to the television cameras. 'The fair flower of American womanhood is maligned again,' he shouted. 'This poor woman was found not guilty. She was no more guilty than those poor German gentlemen who had to slaughter our American boys at Malmédy. But, gentlemen, it's a typical Communist approach to smear our fair women. Once again we have here indisputable proof . . .'

And so on.

"The question was how long could Farrar take it? After all, a man used to some kind of logic in his existence could hardly be expected to hold up forever in the face of the kind of stupid badgering, accompanied by a stubborn refusal to face facts, which he encountered in the investigating committee, and in particular in Muddeltup.

"They would never be able to prove that Farrar was subversive, since Farrar abhorred anything to do with Communism or Fascism. But Muddeltup was ingenious and vindictive. Sooner or later he would 'get' Farrar for his temerity in telling the truth about the Senator.

"The hearings dragged on into the next day. That was the day set for the interrogation of the machine. The Senator proposed to question it, no less. Of course, the first order of business was to dispose of Farrar and that took less time than I had anticipated. Farrar forgot he was under oath and, after being thoroughly muddled by the Senator's stupid questions, made the unhappy mistake of contradicting himself, whereupon they had him for perjury.

"So that left only Sherlock, Jr.

"The Senator had set his stage well. He had watched Farrar and

caught on. He made all the adjustments, once the machine was on, just as if he knew very well that millions of Americans were watching him on their television screens. Then he fed the machine a test case, carefully calculated to bolster his case. The case was that of Benedict Arnold. Was he or was he not guilty of treason?

"The scientific detective decided that his guilt was a matter of terminology. Empirically, Benedict Arnold was not guilty, should not have been so accused.

"You might expect that Muddeltup would make the most of that. He did.

"He had another case all ready. This time it was that of a well-known poet who had sung Italy's praises in World War Two. Was he, too, not guilty of treason? He waited on the machine with vulture-like expectancy.

"His expectations were rewarded. The poet was not guilty by reason of insanity.

"Was it not significant, demanded Senator Muddeltup, that this infernal contraption, the brain-child of a perjurer suspected of left-wing sympathies, should find some method to excuse every traitor to these United States?

"Now he came forth with his *pièce de résistance.* Muddeltup's indefatiguable agents had worked tirelessly to gather all the known data about poor Farrar. They had gone way back into his boyhood to uncover a tiny peccadillo of Farrar's —he had stolen a nickel sack of peanuts at a school picnic—to present a complete picture to the machine.

"And every fact that Muddeltup fed Sherlock, Jr., was slanted and colored, like the columns of many of the newspapers which were wont to support Muddeltup. Hints, aspersions, invidious suggestions—despite them all Sherlock, Jr. was prompt with its answer when Muddeltup asked whether, on the basis of the evidence presented, Farrar was a Communist or at least subversive.

"'No,' replied Sherlock, Jr.

"The Senator was no whit abashed. 'Does this not prove that the machine is its creator's agent?' he cried. 'Is this not evidence beyond cavil that this precious pair of rogues are determined to undermine our faith in our great nation . . . ?'

"This went on for some time. Muddeltup made quite a speech—what there was of it. He never got to the end. Muddeltup could control his Committee and the course of the hearings so long as he had human witnesses. Sherlock, Jr. was something else again. The machine was intractable and unpredictable. Muddeltup might have expected that but then the Senator had no way of knowing about the still unsolved problem on which Sherlock, Jr. had been working.

"In the middle of the Senator's harangue Sherlock, Jr. came to life. I suppose what happened to it could happen to any machine—like a phonograph. It whirred into life and began clacking away a message like mad. The strip of typescript

began to curl out of the scientific detective without stopping. It took only a few moments to realize that the machine was stuck.

"The Senator tore off part of the strip and began to read it. 'Since the methods of Senator Muddeltup are exactly similar to those of the Fascist-Communist mentality . . .' This was as far as he went. Seeing that the strip was still coming from the machine he made a violent lunge for the typescript.

"But others had heard enough to want to see the paper. Reporters jumped for the machine and tore away the paper as fast as it came from the machine.

"Senator Muddeltup tried to control the meeting but all his shouts were unavailing. He ran out of the room and came back with a crowbar, with which he attacked the machine in a perfect frenzy of fury. Even so it took him ten minutes to stop the appearance of the scientific detective's typescript and by that time the machine was a total wreck."

Harrigan paused and said. "Where is Willetts? I'm dying of thirst."

"I'll get you something to drink," I hastened to assure him. "What was on that typescript?"

Harrigan began to chuckle. "We'd all forgotten about that problem of the Senator's unaccountable twenty thousand, you see. And I'd forgotten that the machine kept on working until it had an answer. So, in the middle of the Senator's speech, the machine had its answer ready and out it came.

"I got one of those strips, or a piece of one, and by comparing it with others that some of the boys had managed to get we got the machine's solution. As nearly as I can remember it, this was it—'Since the methods of Senator Muddeltup are exactly similar to those of the Fascist-Communist mentality and since his smear tactics serve the Communist cause better than any other tactics, it follows that Senator Muddeltup is either a Communist or sympathetic to the Communist cause. Senator Muddeltup's unaccountable twenty thousand dollars was a payment in recognition of his services made by the Soviet Government through Andrew Boyybbykins, a Washington lobbyist for Greater Asia, Incorporated.'

"Of course, the story leaked out, even though the *Senator Muddeltup With Crowbar Vanquishes Infernal Machine* headlines made better reading. That perjury charge may have broken Farrar but Sherlock, Jr. took care of Senator Muddeltup. The Senator suffered a nervous breakdown and went on a junket to Europe. He got lost and never returned. Nobody missed him—but Sherlock, Jr. was a genuine loss to America and its voters."

perishing of the pendragons

by . . . G. K. Chesterton

Father Brown did not admit himself a miracle worker. He merely sought to see things as they were.

FATHER BROWN was in no mood for adventures. He had lately fallen ill with overwork, and when he began to recover, his friend Flambeau had taken him on a cruise in a small yacht with Sir Cecil Fanshaw, a young Cornish squire and an enthusiast for Cornish coast scenery. But Brown was still rather weak—he was no very happy sailor—and though he was never of the sort that either grumbles or breaks down, his spirits did not rise above patience and civility.

When the other two men praised the ragged violet sunset or the ragged volcanic crags, he agreed with them. When Flambeau pointed out a rock shaped like a dragon, he looked at it and thought it very like a dragon. When Fanshaw more excitedly indicated a rock that was like Merlin he looked at it, and signified assent. When Flambeau asked whether this rocky gate of the twisted river was not the gate of Fairyland, he said, "Yes."

He heard the most important things and the most trivial with the same tasteless absorption. He heard that the coast was death to all but

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In an age which finds many mystery writers working on the theory of getting to the final page "fustest with the leastest" it is a relief to read the writings of the late, great Gilbert K. Chesterton. There is no hint of hurry in any of his stories nor, mercifully, a trace of dullness. However his fabulous Priest-detective, the simple yet erudite Father Brown, has a way of beating to the finish line the most swift-moving villains—as witness his apparently lackadaisical but actually rapid-fire solution of a crime which had laid its curse on a Cornish family for centuries.

careful seamen; he also heard that the ship's cat was asleep. He heard that Fanshaw couldn't find his cigar-holder anywhere. He also heard the pilot deliver the oracle, 'Both eyes bright, she's all right; one eye winks, down she sinks."

He heard Flambeau say to Fanshaw that no doubt this meant the pilot must keep both eyes open and be spry. And he heard Fanshaw say to Flambeau that, oddly enough, it didn't mean this: it meant that while they saw two of the coast-lights, one near and the other distant, exactly side by side, they were in the right river-channel; but that if one light was hidden behind the other, they were going on the rocks.

He heard Fanshaw add that his county was full of such quaint fables and idioms; it was the very home of romance; he even pitted this part of Cornwall against Devonshire, as a claimant to the laurels of Elizabethan seamanship. According to him there had been captains among these coves and islets compared with whom Drake was practically a landsman. He heard Flambeau laugh, and ask if, perhaps, the adventurous title of *Westward Ho!* only meant that all Devonshire men wished they were living in Cornwall.

He heard Fanshaw say there was no need to be silly—that not only had Cornish captains been heroes, but that they were heroes still: that near that very spot there was an old admiral, now retired, who was scarred by thrilling voyages full of adventures; and who had in his youth found the last group of eight Pacific islands that was added to the chart of the world.

This Cecil Fanshaw was, in person, of the kind that commonly urges such crude but pleasing enthusiasms; a very young man, light-haired, high-colored, with an eager profile—with a boyish bravado of spirits, but an almost girlish delicacy of tint and type. The big shoulders, black brows and black mousquetaire swagger of Flambeau were a great contrast.

All these trivialities Brown heard and saw—but heard them as a tired man hears a tune in the railway wheels or saw them as a sick man sees the pattern of his wallpaper. No one can calculate the turns of mood in convalescence; but Father Brown's depression must have had a great deal to do with his mere unfamiliarity with the sea. For as the river mouth narrowed like the neck of a bottle, and the water grew calmer and the air warmer and more earthy, he seemed to wake up and take notice like a baby.

They had reached that phase just after sunset when air and water both look bright, but earth and all its growing things look almost black by comparison. About this particular evening, however, there was something exceptional. It was one of those rare atmospheres in which a smoked glass slide seems to have been slid away from between us and Nature; so that even dark colours on that day look more gorgeous than bright colours on cloudier days.

The trampled earth of the river-

banks and the peaty stain in the pools did not look drab but glowing umber, and the dark woods astir in the breeze did not look, as usual, dim blue with mere depth or distance, but more like wind-tumbled masses of some vivid violet blossom. This magic clearness and intensity in the colours was further forced on Brown's slowly reviving senses by something romantic and even secret in the very form of the landscape.

The river was still well wide and deep enough for a pleasure boat so small as theirs. But the curves of the countryside suggested that it was closing in on either hand; the woods seemed to be making broken and flying attempts at bridge-building—as if the boat were passing from the romance of a valley to the romance of a hollow and so to the supreme romance of a tunnel.

Beyond this mere look of things there was little for Brown's freshening fancy to feed on. He saw no human beings, except some gypsies trailing along the river-bank, with faggots and osiers cut in the forest. And one sight no longer unconventional, but in such remote parts still uncommon—a dark-haired lady bareheaded, and paddling her own canoe. If Father Brown ever attached any importance to either of these, he certainly forgot them at the next turn of the river, which brought in sight a singular object.

The water seemed to widen and split, being cloven by the dark wedge of a fish-shaped and wooded islet. With the rate at which they went, the islet seemed to swim towards them like a ship, a ship with a very high prow—or, to speak more strictly, a very high funnel.

For at the extreme point nearest them stood up an odd-looking building, unlike anything they could remember or connect with any purpose. It was not specially high, but it was too high for its breadth to be called anything but a tower. Yet it appeared to be built entirely of wood, and that in a most unequal and eccentric way.

Some of the planks and beams were of good, seasoned oak; some of such wood cut raw and recent; some again of white pinewood and a great deal more of the same sort of wood painted black with tar. These black beams were set crooked or criss-cross at all kinds of angles—giving the whole a most patchy and puzzling appearance.

There were one or two windows, which appeared to be coloured and leaded in an old-fashioned but more elaborate style. The travellers looked at it with that paradoxical feeling we have when something reminds us of something, and yet we are certain it is something very different.

Father Brown, even when he was mystified, was clever in analysing his own mystification. And he found himself reflecting that the oddity seemed to consist in a particular shape cut out in an incongruous material—as if one saw a top-hat made of tin or a frock-coat cut out of tartan. He was sure he had seen timbers of different tints arranged like that somewhere, but never in such architectural proportions. The

next moment a glimpse through the dark trees told him all he wanted to know; and he laughed.

Through a gap in the foliage there appeared for a moment one of those old wooden houses, faced with black beams, which are still to be found here and there in England, but which most of us see imitated in some show called *Old London* or *Shakespeare's England.* It was in view only long enough for the priest to see that, however old-fashioned, it was a comfortable and well-kept country-house, with flower beds in front of it. It had none of the piebald and crazy look of the tower that seemed made out of its refuse.

"What on earth's this?" said Flambeau, who was still staring at the tower.

Fanshaw's eyes were shining and he spoke triumphantly. "Aha, you've not seen a place quite like this before, I fancy; that's why I've brought you here, my friend. Now you shall see whether I exaggerate about the mariners of Cornwall. This place belongs to Old Pendragon, whom we call the Admiral, though he retired before getting the rank. The spirit of Raleigh and Hawkins is a memory with the Devon folk—it's a modern fact with the Pendragons.

"If Queen Elizabeth were to rise from the grave and come up this river in a gilded barge, she would be received by the Admiral in a house exactly such as she was accustomed to, in every corner and casement, in every panel on the wall or plate on the table. And she would find an English Captain still talking fiercely of fresh lands to be found in little ships, as much as if she had dined with Drake."

"She'd find a rum sort of thing in the garden," said Father Brown, "which would not please her Renaissance eye. That Elizabethan domestic architecture is charming in its way. But it's against the very nature of it to break out into turrets."

"And yet," answered Fanshaw, "that's the most romantic and Elizabethan part of the business. It was built by the Pendragons in the very days of the Spanish wars—and though it's needed patching and even rebuilding for another reason, it's always been rebuilt in the old way. The story goes that the lady of Sir Peter Pendragon built it in this place and to this height, because from the top you can just see the corner where vessels turn into the river mouth; and she wished to be the first to see her husband's ship, as he sailed home from the Spanish Main."

"For what other reason," asked Father Brown, "do you mean that it has been rebuilt?"

"Oh, there's a strange story about that too," said the young squire with relish. "You are really in a land of strange stories. King Arthur was here and Merlin and the fairies before him. The story goes that Sir Peter Pendragon, who, I fear, had some of the faults of the pirates as well as the virtues of the sailor, was bringing home three Spanish gentlemen in honourable captivity, intend-

ing to escort them to Elizabeth's court.

"But he was a man of flaming and tigerish temper—and coming to high words with one of them, he caught him by the throat and flung him, by accident or design, into the sea. A second Spaniard, who was the brother of the first, instantly drew his sword and flew at Pendragon, and after a short but furious combat in which both got three wounds in as many minutes, Pendragon drove his blade through the other's body and the second Spaniard was accounted for.

"As it happened the ship had already turned into the river mouth and was close to comparatively shallow water. The third Spaniard sprang over the side of the ship, struck out for the shore, and was soon near enough to it to stand up to his waist in water.

"And turning again to face the ship, and holding up both arms to Heaven like a prophet calling plagues upon a wicked city, he called out to Pendragon in a piercing and terrible voice, that he at least was yet living, that he would go on living, that he would live forever; and that generation after generation the house of Pendragon should never see him or his, but should know by very certain signs that he and his vengeance were alive. With that he dived under the wave, and was either drowned or swam so long under water that no hair of his head was seen afterwards."

"There's that girl in the canoe again," said Flambeau irrelevantly, for good-looking young women would call him off any topic. "She seems bothered by the queer tower just as we were."

Indeed, the black-haired young lady was letting her canoe float slowly and silently past the strange islet—and was looking intently up at the strange tower, with a strong glow of curiosity on her oval and olive face.

"Never mind girls," said Fanshaw impatiently, "there are plenty of them in the world, but not many things like the Pendragon Tower. As you may easily suppose, plenty of superstitions and scandals have followed in the track of the Spaniard's curse. And no doubt, as you would put it, any accident happening to this Cornish family would be connected with it by rural credulity.

"But it is perfectly true that this tower has been burnt down two or three times—and the family can't be called lucky, for more than two, I think, of the Admiral's near kin have perished by shipwreck. And one at least, to my own knowledge, on practically the same spot where Sir Peter threw the Spaniard overboard."

"What a pity!" exclaimed Flambeau. "She's going. Wonder who she is?"

"When did your friend the Admiral tell you this family history?" asked Father Brown, as the girl in the canoe paddled off, without showing the least intention of extending her interest from the tower to the yacht, which Fanshaw

had already caused to lie alongside the island.

"Many years ago," replied Fanshaw. "He hasn't been to sea for some time now, though he is as keen on it as ever. I believe there's a family compact or something. Well, here's the landing-stage. Let's come ashore and see the old boy."

II

They followed him on to the island just under the tower. And Father Brown, whether from the mere touch of dry land, or the interest of something on the other bank of the river, which he stared at very hard for some seconds, seemed singularly improved in briskness.

They entered a wooded avenue between two fences of thin greyish wood, such as often enclose parks or gardens; and over the top of which the dark trees tossed to and fro like black and purple plumes upon the hearse of a giant. The tower, as they left it behind, looked all the quainter, because such entrances are usually flanked by two towers; and this one looked lop-sided.

But for this, the avenue had the usual appearance of the entrance to a gentleman's grounds. And, being so curved that the house was now out of sight, somehow looked a much larger park than any plantation on such an island could really be. Father Brown was, perhaps, a little fanciful in his fatigue, but he almost thought the whole place must be growing larger, as things do in a nightmare.

Anyhow, a mystical monotony was the only character of their march, until Fanshaw suddenly stopped, and pointed to something sticking out through the grey fence—something that looked at first rather like the imprisoned horn of some beast. Closer observation showed that it was a slightly curved blade of metal that shone faintly in the fading light.

Flambeau, who like all Frenchmen had been a soldier, bent over it and said in a startled voice, "Why, it's a sabre! I believe I know the sort—heavy and curved, but shorter than the cavalry; they used to have them in the artillery and the—"

As he spoke the blade plucked itself out of the crack it had made and came down again with a more ponderous slash, splitting the fissiparous fence to the bottom, with a rending noise.

Then it was pulled out again, flashed above the fence some feet farther along, and again split it halfway down with the first stroke. And after waggling a little to extricate itself—(accompanied with curses in the darkness)—split it down to the ground with a second. Then a kick of devilish energy sent the whole loosened square of thin wood flying into the pathway, and a great gap of dark coppice gaped in the paling.

Fanshaw peered into the dark opening, and uttered an exclamation of astonishment. "My dear Admiral!" he exclaimed. "Do you—er—do you generally cut out a new front door whenever you want to go for a walk?"

The voice in the gloom swore

again, and then broke into a jolly laugh. "No," it said, "I've really got to cut down this fence somehow. It's spoiling all the plants, and no one else here can do it. But I'll only carve another bit off the front door, and then come out and welcome you."

And sure enough, he heaved up his weapon once more, and, hacking twice, brought down another and similar strip of fence, making the opening about fourteen feet wide in all. Then through this larger forest gateway he came out into the evening light, with a chip of grey wood sticking to his sword-blade.

He momentarily fulfilled all Fanshaw's fable of an old piratical Admiral; though the details seemed afterwards to decompose into accidents. For instance, he wore an ordinary broad-brimmed hat as against the sun—but the front flap of it was turned up straight to the sky and the two corners pulled down lower than the ears, so that it stood across his forehead in a crescent like the old cocked hat worn by Nelson. He wore an ordinary dark-blue jacket, with nothing special about the buttons, but the combination of it with white linen trousers somehow had a sailorish look.

He was tall and loose, and walked with a sort of swagger, which was not a sailor's roll, and yet somehow suggested it. And he held in his hand a short sabre which was like a navy cutlass, but about twice as big. Under the bridge of the hat, his eagle face looked eager, all the more because it was not only clean-shaven, but without eyebrows. It seemed almost as if all the hair had come off his face from his thrusting it through a throng of elements.

His eyes were prominent and piercing. His colour was curiously attractive, while partly tropical. It reminded one vaguely of a blood-orange. That is, that while it was ruddy and sanguine, there was a yellow in it that was in no way sickly, but seemed rather to glow like gold apples of the Hesperides. Father Brown thought he had never seen a figure so expressive of all the romance about the countries of the Sun.

When Fanshaw had presented his two friends to their host, he fell again into a tone of rallying the latter about his wreckage of the fence and his apparent rage of profanity. The Admiral pooh-poohed it at first as a piece of necessary but annoying garden work. But at length the ring of real energy came back into his laughter, and he cried with a mixture of impatience and good humour.

"Well, perhaps I do go at it a bit rabidly, and feel a kind of pleasure in smashing anything. So would you if your only pleasure was in cruising about to find some new Cannibal Islands, and you had to stick on this muddy little rockery in a sort of rustic pond.

"When I remember how I've cut down a mile and a half of green poisonous jungle with an old cutlass half as sharp as this; and then remember I must stop here and chop this matchwood, because of some

confounded old bargain scribbled in a family Bible, why, I—"

He swung up the heavy steel again—and this time sundered the wall of wood from top to bottom at one stroke.

"I feel like that," he said laughing, but furiously flinging the sword some yards down the path, "and now let's go up to the house. You must have some dinner."

The semicircle of lawn in front of the house was varied by three circular garden beds, one of red tulips, a second of yellow tulips, and the third of some white waxen-looking blossoms that the visitors did not know and presumed to be exotic. A heavy, hairy and rather sullen-looking gardener was hanging up a heavy coil of garden hose.

The corners of the expiring sunset which seemed to cling about the corners of the house gave glimpses here and there of the colours of remoter flower beds; and in a treeless space on one side of the house opening upon the river stood a tall brass tripod on which was tilted a big brass telescope.

Just outside the steps of the porch stood a little painted green garden table, as if someone had just had tea there. The entrance was flanked with two of those half-featured lumps of stone with holes for eyes that are said to be South Sea idols: and on the brown oak beam across the doorway were some confused carvings that looked almost as barbaric.

As they passed indoors, the little cleric hopped suddenly onto the table, and standing on it peered unaffectedly through the spectacles at the mouldings in the oak. Admiral Pendragon looked very much astonished, though not particularly annoyed—while Fanshaw was so amused with what looked like a performing pigmy on his little stand, that he could not control his laughter. But Father Brown was not likely to notice either the laughter or the astonishment.

He was gazing at three carved symbols, which, though very worn and obscure, seemed still to convey some sense to him. The first seemed to be the outline of some tower or other building, crowned with what looked like curly pointed ribbons. The second was clearer—an old Elizabethan galley with decorative waves beneath it, but interrupted in the middle by a curious jagged rock, which was either a fault in the wood or some conventional representation of the water coming in. The third represented the upper half of a human figure, ending in an escalloped line like the waves. The face was rubbed and featureless and both arms were held very stiffly up in the air.

"Well," muttered Father Brown, blinking, "here is the legend of the Spaniard plain enough. Here he is holding up his arms and cursing in the sea. And here are the two curses—the wrecked ship and the burning of Pendragon Tower."

Pendragon shook his head with a kind of venerable amusement. "And how many other things might it not be?" he said. "Don't you know that

that sort of half man, like a half lion or half stag, is quite common in heraldry? Might not that line through the ship be one of those *parti-per-pale* lines, *indented*, I think they call it? And though the third thing isn't very heraldic, it would be more heraldic to suppose it a tower crowned with laurel than with fire; and it looks just as like it."

"But it seems rather odd," said Flambeau, "that it should exactly confirm the old legend."

"Ah," replied the sceptical traveller, "but you don't know how much of the old legend may have been made up from the old figures. Besides, it isn't the only old legend. Fanshaw, here, who is fond of such things, will tell you there are other versions of the tale, and much more horrible ones.

"One story credits my unfortunate ancestor with having had the Spaniard cut in two—and that will fit the pretty picture also. Another obligingly credits our family with the possession of a tower full of snakes and explains those little wriggly things in that way. And a third theory supposes the crooked line on the ship to be a conventionalised thunderbolt. But that alone, if seriously examined, would show what a very little way these unhappy coincidences really go."

"Why, how do you mean?" asked Fanshaw.

"It so happens," replied his host coolly, "that there was no thunder and lightning at all in the two or three shipwrecks I know of in our family."

"Oh!" said Father Brown, and jumped down from the little table.

There was another silence in which they heard the continuous murmur of the river. Then Fanshaw said, in a doubtful and perhaps disappointed tone, "Then you don't think there is anything in the tales of the tower in flames?"

"There are the tales, of course," said the Admiral, shrugging his shoulders, "and some of them, I don't deny, on evidence as decent as one ever gets for such things. Someone saw a blaze hereabout, don't you know, as he walked home through a wood; someone keeping sheep on the uplands inland thought he saw a flame hovering over Pendragon Tower. Well, a damp dab of mud like this confounded island seems the last place where one would think of fires."

"What is that fire over there?" asked Father Brown, with a gentle suddenness pointing to the woods on the left river-bank. They were all thrown a little off their balance, and the more fanciful Fanshaw had even some difficulty in recovering his, as they saw a long, thin stream of blue smoke ascending silently into the end of the evening light.

III

Then Pendragon broke into a scornful laugh again. "Gypsies!" he said; "they've been camping about here for a week. Gentlemen, you want your dinner," and he turned as if to enter the house.

But the antiquarian superstition in Fanshaw was still quivering and

he said hastily, "But, Admiral, what's that hissing noise quite near the island? It's very like fire."

"It's more like what it is," said the Admiral laughing as he led the way. "It's only some canoe going by."

Almost as he spoke the butler, a lean man in black, with very black hair and a very long, yellow face, appeared in the doorway and told him that dinner was served.

The dining-room was as nautical as the cabin of a ship; but its note was rather that of the modern than the Elizabethan captain. There were, indeed, three antiquated cutlasses in a trophy over the fireplace and one brown sixteenth-century map, with Tritons and little ships dotted about a curly sea.

But such things were less prominent on the white panelling than some cases of quaint coloured South American birds, very scientifically stuffed, fantastic shells from the Pacific, and several instruments so rude and queer in shape that savages might have used them either to kill their enemies or to cook them. But the alien colour culminated in the fact that, besides the butler, the Admiral's only servants were two Negroes, somewhat quaintly clad in tight uniforms of yellow.

The priest's instinctive trick of analysing his own impressions told him that the colour and the little neat coattails of these bipeds had suggested the word "Canary," and so by a mere pun connected them with Southward travel. Towards the end of the dinner they took their yellow clothes and black faces out of the room, leaving only the black clothes and yellow face of the butler.

"I'm rather sorry you take this so lightly," said Fanshaw to the host, "for the truth is I've brought these friends of mine with the idea of their helping you, as they know a good deal of these things. Don't you really believe in the family story at all?"

"I don't believe in anything," answered Pendragon very briskly, with a bright eye cocked at a red tropical bird. "I'm a man of science."

Rather to Flambeau's surprise, his clerical friend, who seemed to have entirely woke up, took the digression and talked natural history with his host with a flow of words and much unexpected information, until the dessert and decanters were set down and the last of the servants vanished through the pantry door.

Then he said, without altering his tone, "Please don't think me impertinent, Admiral Pendragon. I don't ask for curiosity, but really for my guidance and your convenience. Have I made a bad shot if I guess you don't want these old things talked of before your butler?"

The Admiral lifted the hairless arches over his eyes and exclaimed, "Well, I don't know where you got it—but the truth is I can't stand the fellow, though I've no excuse for discharging a family servant. Fanshaw, with his fairy tales, would say my blood moved against men with that black, Spanish-looking hair."

Flambeau struck the table with

his heavy fist. "By Jove!" he cried, "and so had that girl!"

"I hope it'll all end tonight," continued the Admiral, "when my nephew comes back safe from his ship. You look surprised. You won't understand, I suppose, unless I tell you the story. You see, my father had two sons. I remained a bachelor, but my elder brother married, and had a son who became a sailor like all the rest of us, and will inherit the proper estate.

"Well, my father was a strange man. He somehow combined Fanshaw's superstition with a good deal of my scepticism—they were always fighting in him. And after my first voyages, he developed a notion which he thought somehow would settle finally whether the curse was truth or trash.

"If all the Pendragons sailed about anyhow, he thought there would be too much chance of natural catastrophes to prove anything. But if we went to sea one at a time in strict order of succession to the property, he thought it might show whether any connected fate followed the family as a family. It was a silly notion, I think, and I quarrelled with my father pretty heartily—for I was an ambitious man and was left to the last, coming, by succession, after my own nephew."

"And your father and brother," said the priest, very gently, "died at sea, I fear."

"Yes," groaned the Admiral. "By one of those brutal accidents on which are built all the lying mythologies of mankind, they were both shipwrecked. My father, coming up this coast out of the Atlantic, was washed up on these Cornish rocks. My brother's ship was sunk, no one knows where, on the voyage home from Tasmania. His body was never found.

"I tell you it was from perfectly natural mishap. Lots of other people besides Pendragons were drowned. And both disasters are discussed in a normal way by navigators. But, of course, it set this forest of superstition on fire; and men saw the flaming tower everywhere. That's why I say it will be all right when Walter returns.

"The girl he's engaged to was coming today—but I was so afraid of some chance delay frightening her that I wired her not to come till she heard from me. But he's practically sure to be here some time tonight. And then it'll all end in smoke—tobacco smoke. We'll crack that old lie when we crack a bottle of this wine."

"Very good wine," said Father Brown, gravely lifting his glass, "but, as you see, a very bad wine-bibber. I most sincerely beg your pardon." For he had spilt a small spot of wine on the tablecloth. He drank and put down the glass with a composed face; but his hand had started at the exact moment when he became conscious of a face looking in through the garden window just behind the Admiral—the face of a woman, swarthy, with Southern hair and eyes, and young, but like a mask of tragedy.

After a pause the priest spoke

again in his mild manner. "Admiral," he said, "will you do me a favour? Let me, and my friends if they like, stop in that tower of yours just for tonight? Do you know that in my business you're an exorcist almost before anything else?"

Pendragon sprang to his feet and paced swiftly to and fro across the window, from which the face had instantly vanished. "I tell you there is nothing in it," he cried, with ringing violence. "There is one thing I know about this matter. You may call me an atheist. I am an atheist." Here he swung round and fixed Father Brown with a face of frightful concentration. "This business is perfectly natural. There is no curse in it at all."

Father Brown smiled. "In that case," he said, "there can't be any objection to my sleeping in your delightful summer-house."

"The idea is utterly ridiculous," replied the Admiral, beating a tattoo on the back of his chair.

"Please forgive me for everything," said Brown in his most sympathetic tone, "including spilling the wine. But it seems to me you are not quite so easy about the flaming tower as you try to be."

Admiral Pendragon sat down again as abruptly as he had risen—but he sat quite still, and when he spoke again it was in a lower voice. "You do it at your own peril," he said, "but wouldn't *you* be an atheist to keep sane in all this devilry?"

Some three hours afterwards Fanshaw, Flambeau and the priest were still dawdling about the garden in the dark. And it began to dawn on the other two that Father Brown had no intention of going to bed either in the tower or in the house.

"I think the lawn wants weeding," said he dreamily. "If I could find a spud or something I'd do it myself."

They followed him, laughing and half remonstrating; but he replied with the utmost solemnity, explaining to them, in a maddening little sermon, that one can always find some small occupation that is helpful to others. He did not find a spud—but he found an old broom made of twigs, with which he began most energetically to brush the fallen leaves off the grass.

"Always some little thing to be done," he said with idiot cheerfulness. "As George Herbert says, 'Who sweeps an Admiral's garden in Cornwall as for Thy laws makes that and the action fine.' And now," he added, suddenly slinging the broom away, "let's go and water the flowers."

With the same mixed emotions, they watched him uncoil some considerable lengths of the large garden hose, saying with an air of wistful discrimination, "The red tulips before the yellow, I think. Look a bit dry, don't you think?"

He turned the little tap on the instrument, and the water shot out straight and solid as a long rod of steel.

"Look out, Samson," cried Flambeau; "why, you've cut off the tulip's head."

Father Brown stood ruefully contemplating the decapitated plant.

"Mine does seem to be a rather kill or cure sort of watering," he admitted, scratching his head. "I suppose it's a pity I didn't find the spud. You should have seen me with the spud! Talking of tools, you've got that swordstick, Flambeau, you always carry? That's right—and Sir Cecil could have that sword the Admiral threw away by the fence here. Heavens! How grey everything looks!"

"The mist's rising from the river," said the staring Flambeau.

IV

Almost as he spoke the huge figure of the hairy gardener appeared on a higher ridge of the trenched and terraced lawn, hailing them with a brandished rake and a horribly bellowing voice. "Put down that hose," he shouted; "put down that hose and go to your—"

"I am fearfully clumsy," replied the reverend gentleman weakly. "Do you know, I upset some wine at dinner." He made a wavering half-turn of apology towards the gardener, with the hose still spouting in his hand. The gardener caught the cold crash of the water full in his face like the crash of a cannon-ball—staggered, slipped and went sprawling with his boots in the air.

"How very dreadful!" said Father Brown, looking round in a sort of wonder. "Why, I've hit a man!"

He stood with his head forward for a moment as if looking or listening; and then set off at a trot towards the tower, still trailing the hose behind him. The tower was quite close, but its outline was curiously dim.

"Your river mist," he said, "has a rum smell."

"By the Lord it has," cried Fanshaw, who was very white. "But you can't mean—"

"I mean," said Father Brown, "that one of the Admiral's scientific predictions is coming true tonight. This story is going to end in smoke."

As he spoke a most beautiful rose-red light seemed to burst into blossom like a gigantic rose—but accompanied with a crackling and rattling noise that was like the laughter of devils.

"My God! what is this?" cried Sir Cecil Fanshaw.

"The sign of the flaming tower," said Father Brown, and sent the driving water from his hose into the heart of the red patch.

"Lucky we hadn't gone to bed!" ejaculated Fanshaw. "I suppose it can't spread to the house."

"You may remember," said the priest quietly, "that the wooden fence that might have carried it was cut away."

Flambeau turned electrified eyes upon his friend, but Fanshaw only said rather absently, "Well, nobody can be killed, anyhow."

"This is rather a curious kind of tower," observed Father Brown. "When it takes to killing people, it always kills people who are somewhere else."

At the same instant the monstrous figure of the gardener with the streaming beard stood again on the green ridge against the sky, waving

others to come on—but now waving not a rake but a cutlass. Behind him came the two Negroes, also with the old crooked cutlasses out of the trophy.

But in the blood-red glare, with their black faces and yellow figures, they looked like devils carrying instruments of torture. In the dim garden behind them a distant voice was heard calling out brief directions. When the priest heard the voice, a terrible change came over his countenance.

But he remained composed and never took his eye off the patch of flame which had begun by spreading, but now seemed to shrink a little as it hissed under the torch of the long silver spear of water. He kept his finger along the nozzle of the pipe to ensure the aim, and attended to no other business, knowing only by the noise and that semi-conscious corner of the eye, the exciting incidents that began to tumble themselves about the island garden.

He gave two brief directions to his friends. One was, "Knock these fellows down somehow and tie them up, whoever they are. There's rope down by those faggots. They want to take away my nice hose."

The other was, "As soon as you get a chance, call out to that canoeing girl. She's over on the bank with the gypsies. Ask her if they could get some buckets across and fill them from the river."

Then he closed his mouth and continued to water the new red flower as ruthlessly as he had watered the red tulip.

He never turned his head to look at the strange fight that followed between the foes and friends of the mysterious fire. He almost felt the island shake when Flambeau collided with the huge gardener. He merely imagined how it would whirl round them as they wrestled.

He heard the crashing fall and his friend's gasp of triumph as he dashed on the first Negro—and the cries of both the blacks as Flambeau and Fanshaw bound them. Flambeau's enormous strength more than redressed the odds in the fight, especially as the fourth man still hovered near the house, only a shadow and a voice.

He heard also the water broken by the paddles of a canoe, the girl's voice giving orders, the voices of gypsies answering and coming nearer, the plumping and sucking noise of empty buckets plunging into a full stream—and finally the sound of many feet around the fire. But all this was less to him than the fact that the red rent, which had lately once more increased, had once more slightly diminished.

Then came a cry that very nearly made him turn his head. Flambeau and Fanshaw, now reinforced by some of the gypsies, had rushed after the mysterious man by the house. And he heard from the other end of the garden the Frenchman's cry of horror and astonishment. It was echoed by a howl not to be called human, as the being broke from their hold and ran along the garden.

Three times at least it raced round the whole island, in a way that was

as horrible as the chase of a lunatic, both in the cries of the pursued and the ropes carried by the pursuers; but was more horrible still, because it somehow suggested one of the chasing games of children in a garden. Then, finding them closing in on every side, the figure sprang upon one of the higher river-banks and disappeared with a splash into the dark and driving river.

"You can do no more, I fear," said Brown in a voice cold with pain. "He has been washed down to the rocks by now, where he has sent so many others. He knew the use of the family legend."

"Oh, don't talk in these parables," cried Flambeau impatiently. "Can't you put it simply in words of one syllable?"

"Yes," answered Brown, with his eye on the hose. "'Both eyes bright, she's all right—one eye blinks, down she sinks.'"

The fire hissed and shrieked more and more, like a strangled thing, as it grew narrower and narrower under the flood from the pipe and buckets, but Father Brown still kept his eye on it as he went on speaking:

"I thought of asking this young lady if it were morning yet, to look through that telescope at the river mouth and the river. She might have seen something to interest her—the sign of the ship; or Mr. Walter Pendragon coming home; and perhaps even the sign of the half-man, for though he is certainly safe by now, he may very well have waded ashore.

"He has been within a shave of another shipwreck and would never have escaped it, if the lady hadn't had the sense to suspect the old Admiral's telegram and come down to watch him. Don't let's talk about the old Admiral. Don't let's talk about anything. It's enough to say that whenever this tower, with its pitch and resin-wood, really caught fire, the spark on the horizon always looked like the twin light to the coast lighthouse."

"And that," said Flambeau, "is how the father and brother died. The wicked uncle of the legends very nearly got his estate, after all."

Father Brown did not answer. Indeed, he did not speak again, save for civilities, till they were all safe round a cigar-box in the cabin of the yacht. He saw that the frustrate fire was extinguished and then refused to linger, though he actually heard young Pendragon, escorted by an enthusiastic crowd, come tramping up the river-bank.

He might—(had he been moved by romantic curiosities)—have received the combined thanks of the man from the ship and the girl from the canoe. But his fatigue had fallen on him once more. And he only started once, when Flambeau abruptly told him he had dropped cigar-ash on his trousers.

"That's no cigar-ash," he said rather wearily. "That's from the fire, but you don't think so because you're all smoking cigars. That's just the way I got my first faint suspicion about the chart."

"Do you mean Pendragon's chart

of his Pacific Islands?" asked Fanshaw.

"You thought it was a chart of the Pacific Islands," answered Brown. "Put a feather with a fossil and a bit of coral and everyone will think it's a specimen. Put the same feather with a ribbon and an artificial flower and everyone will think it's for a lady's hat. Put the same feather with an ink-bottle, a book, and a stack of writing-paper, and most men will swear they've seen a quill pen. So you saw that map among tropic birds and shells and thought it was a map of Pacific Islands. It was the map of this river."

"But how do you know?" asked Fanshaw.

"I saw the rock you thought was like a dragon, and the one like Merlin, and—"

"You seem to have noticed a lot as we came in," cried Fanshaw. "We thought you were rather abstracted."

"I was seasick," said Father Brown simply. "I felt simply horrible. But feeling horrible has nothing to do with not seeing things." And he closed his eyes.

"Do you think most men would have seen that?" asked Flambeau. He received no answer: Father Brown was asleep.

a name for baby

by . . . Thomas Walsh

Kilbane thought the girl was an arrogant idiot. But little Miss Pulitzer was there in the clutch.

IT WAS NO MORE THAN a few minutes past ten, on a slow and rainy November night, when Kilbane happened to meet up with her in the street corridor at headquarters. Just as she came out of the press room on the mezzanine landing and tip-tapped down marble steps toward the lower hall Kilbane himself, pushing through the frosted glass doors of the detective bureau, paused by a convenient window to light a cigarette and glance out at the melancholy drizzle slanting down past the street lamps in City Hall Square.

That was what allowed Miss Pulitzer to catch up with him. She came on fast, in her accustomed great hurry; at the front entrance, which they reached almost together, Kilbane looked sideways at her and then flicked a forefinger at his hatbrim in a negligent gesture of salutation.

She glanced up, too. "Kilbane," she said, with an offhandedly casual, man-to-man greeting that matched his own perhaps overdone disinterest. At the moment, a slim girl with black hair and dark eyes, dressed in a gray tailored suit and a plain little

The little terra cotta busts of the late great E. A. Poe, known to the initiate as Edgars, *are handed out sparingly once a year by the Mystery Writers of America to those authors whose achievements within the twelvemonth are considered worthy of such awards—much like the* Oscars *of moviedom. And they are equally coveted. Hence TSDM is delighted at being able to run stories by two Edgar winners in successive issues—Fred Brown in our last and now Thomas Walsh, whose* Nightmare in Manhattan *was a recent winner. It's always a pleasure to watch a champ at work.*

round hat like a boy's, she was nothing important to Kilbane regardless of how he chose to look at it.

He knew that she had covered the police news for the *Morning Tribune* ever since Jack Garrity left for the Army, and he had heard somewhere or other that up in the press room, with exceptionally little friendliness, the boys had begun to refer to her as Miss Pulitzer, Scoop or By-line. That part, of course, was no concern of Kilbane's.

He opened the right-hand door for her by levering his arm against it, let her through, and went out after her.

"It's raining," he said, unnecessarily, on the top step.

Miss Pulitzer nodded. Countless tiny drops sprayed up at them on a moody billow of wind; when she narrowed her eyes against them, peering down at a deserted taxi stand near the corner, he turned up his coat collar and mentioned his car and the possibility of a lift simply because there seemed to be nothing else for him to do.

Miss Pulitzer did not jump at it; but after a moment, with an air of not asking for any favors, she admitted that she wanted to stop in at the *Tribune* office. If that was on his way—

Kilbane brought her down to the car and helped her in. He said, "I'll make a stop first, on Eagle Street. A couple of minutes. Okay?"

"Okay with me," Miss Pulitzer told him, dropping the hat into her lap and fluffing out the black hair carelessly. "Business, Kilbane?"

"I guess," Kilbane said. On that November night S. Pasquariella, who was being guarded against certain unpleasant possibilities by Kilbane on the night shift and Charley Harris on the day, was no topic for conversation with anyone from the press room. Kilbane sheered away from him at once. How was the reporting? he wanted to know. Quiet, eh?

"Deadly," Miss Pulitzer said. She gave him a level glance, as if she didn't want him to think anything he shouldn't think. "I'm not thrilled to death, you know. I've done it before."

Kilbane started the car. On the far side of the plaza, where they turned into Eagle Street, he offered the opinion that there was a swell bunch of fellows in the press room. Personally he liked them.

"Oh, fine," Miss Pulitzer said. But she had her head back against the seat and was smiling up scornfully at nothing. "We still exchange good mornings. Perhaps I'm not quite—meek enough, Kilbane. I don't ask advice and when it's given I don't follow it. That's bad. And then, of course, I don't intend to be a police reporter all my life. There you have the really unforgivable thing."

Kilbane, puzzled by what seemed to be a slight lack of continuity, stopped for a traffic light. "Like the town, maybe?"

"It's all right. It's any American town," Miss Pulitzer said. She blew an impatient stream of smoke against the windshield and then pursed her lips carefully. "I'll stick here six

months," she said. "I might possibly need that. It—well, gives you prestige or something to say you've worked on the *Tribune*. I don't know why it should, but it does. Then—" She shrugged slender shoulders.

Kilbane cocked his nearer eyebrow at her. "Big stuff," he said. "New York."

"Why not?" Miss Pulitzer said. She was very cool about it. "That's why I'm not liked, you know. I'm conceited, you understand. I know what I want and I mean to get it. And that's one of the things you mustn't let people see, of course. Never. You've found that out," she said. "You know that's true, don't you, Kilbane?"

"Once in a while I've got a hint of it," Kilbane said, deciding thoughtfully that here was a funny kind of girl. At the next corner he slowed long enough to see that the barbershop of S. Pasquariella had been closed for the night; then, a block down, he pulled into the curb before a two-story-row house with a scrubbed white flagstone in front of it.

Miss Pulitzer sat in the car while he got out and rang the doorbell. He was admitted presently by a little girl with long black hair and enormous black eyes, who told him that Poppa had gone out but that Momma was upstairs. Momma was sick.

"That's too bad," Kilbane said, patting her head. "You're Angelica Therese. Your poppa told me all about you. Know who I am?"

"No," Angelica Therese said, incuriously.

She was about eight years old. Behind her in the kitchen doorway a smaller-scale model began to emit wailing sobs without taking her eyes from Kilbane. Angelica Therese looked around at her unemotionally. She sighed.

"She always cries," Angelica Therese said. "She's Christina Marie. She's only six, mister. I think she's crazy. I can tell you what my momma's got—'pendecitis. Poppa said so before he went for the doctor. It hurts her bad—awful bad. She—" Noise came from the second floor, and Angelica Therese looked up there with some interest. "You hear her now?"

"Yes," Kilbane said. It seemed to him that he'd have heard her over at headquarters. "Your poppa put an icebag on her before he left?"

"A what?" Angelica Therese said.

Kilbane dropped his hat on the hall table. She should get some ice cubes out of the refrigerator and bring them upstairs as fast as she could. And she mustn't cry. That would only make Momma feel a lot worse.

"All right," Angelica Therese said. "I won't cry."

She didn't. She was perfectly willing to be helpful. But when she went upstairs with the bowl of ice Kilbane erupted violently before her in the bedroom doorway. Did she know what was happening up here? Kilbane demanded in a shrill voice. Did she have any idea—he stopped, added something in a low whisper,

glared helplessly at her and slammed the door.

Three or four minutes later S. Pasquariella and the doctor broke in from the street and ran upstairs. It was all over then. The baby, S. Pasquariella's first boy, weighed eight pounds and seven ounces, and Kilbane hadn't done a bad job for a first-class detective lacking any kind of previous experience.

The doctor complimented him highly; S. Pasquariella, liquid-eyed, crushed his hand in a grip of steel. But Kilbane got out of there as fast as he could, his coat slung over his arm, his face glistening with sweat. Miss Pulitzer, who had a nose for news, was in the hall by that time talking to Angelica Therese. Kilbane looked at her; after a moment he remembered who she was.

"Come on," he said, going by her blindly into the rain. He did not pick up his hat: he did not put on his coat. And on the way to the *Tribune* office, unobservant of everything, he did not notice that Miss Pulitzer kept on staring at him with bright and interested eyes as if he were special.

Next morning he read all about it on the back page of the *Tribune*, where the city news usually appeared. It was a two-column spread, signed by one Janet S. Harrington, and the heading was cute and explicit: "Doctor Late, Baby Early; Detective Waylays Stork."

Kilbane chanced upon those words after a late breakfast of ham and eggs, while he was sitting with his feet propped up on the table and a morning cigarette in the corner of his mouth. For a moment he did not move. Then he sat up slowly, spilling half a cup of coffee into his lap, and reading over the story itself as if it were—as if it had to be—some kind of horrible mistake.

It wasn't, of course. In the first paragraph Miss Pulitzer had done him off brown. There it was narrated that Detective Joseph J. Kilbane, at present attached to the headquarters squad, owned modestly to the principle that the finest was always prepared. Pay-roll bandits or traffic tickets, mad dogs, homicide or arson—Detective Kilbane took all those things in stride. Babies, too. What—and here Detective Kilbane was quoted directly—what was so exceptional about babies? A good police officer could turn his hand to a lot of things. Twins or triplets might have been considered extraordinary; but a single baby, even one of eight pounds and seven ounces—

"Nothing to it," Detective Kilbane was reported to have said. "Wouldn't any of the boys have done the same? You can bet your sweet life they would."

There was more, much more. Further down he was described as the "rugged-looking, Fred MacMurray type," and after that it was asserted that he had borne himself throughout the ordeal with the most incomparable *sang-froid*. Some people might have thought it a fairly amusing story on a night when nothing very much had happened; but Kilbane, who did not agree with their opinion for several grimly

personal reasons, walked into headquarters at four that afternoon prepared for anything.

In that he was wise. When he passed the desk, Sergeant Mulligan referred to him in a deferential way as young Dr. Kilbane; when he entered the locker room he found a statement pasted up on the bulletin board outlining the duties of the newly formed maternity squad, Joseph J. Kilbane, acting chief; when he went upstairs to the chief inspector's office two or three persons waw-wawed blithely after him from the crowd gathered outside police court.

He endured all that; he had to. But at half past five, as he came on Janet S. Harrington—Miss Pulitzer, Scoop, By-line—occupied with a cup of coffee and a sandwich in the basement cafeteria, he licked his lips gently and then touched her once on the tip of the left shoulder.

"Swell story," Detective Joseph J. Kilbane said; his dark blue eyes glittered down at her. "Nice going, I'd call it. There's the kind of stuff that's going to get you places fast, sister."

Janet S. Harrington thought it was pretty good herself. The *Tribune's* city editor had like it. He had even—

"Sure. He knows first-rate stuff," Kilbane told her, with a painful grin she seemed to accept as quite in order. "Suppose I buy you a drink on it tonight? Ten-thirty, say. At the ramp entrance, By-line."

"By-line?" she said. "Oh! You're not angry about it, for heaven's sake?"

"Me?" Kilbane said.

He went off, the grin clamped in place. It was later that night, when he had Miss Pulitzer secure from interruptions behind a table in the nearest cocktail lounge, that he drew up the points of arraignment over the one drink he ever intended to buy anyone like her.

"I wasn't anything much," he said, after a first few matters—common decency among them—had been made clear to her. "Just old Joe Stooge—Officer Pup waiting for the brick to hit him. You had a column to be funny in—that's what mattered. And if you had to crucify somebody in print, why that part was all right. It was nothing you—"

"Crucify?" Miss Pulitzer said. Now she seemed exasperated. "Of course that's ridiculous. I should think you'd be—"

"What?" Kilbane asked, his voice throbbing. "Pleased, maybe. Tickled to death. Because I got my name in a cheap rag, in a smart-aleck, smirking story—"

"Cheap what?" Miss Pulitzer demanded, with some excitement. "Let me tell you something. The *Tribune* is not a—"

Kilbane thumped his chest. Afterward that seemed a lot too dramatic, but at the moment distinctions were beyond him. "I'm kind of proud of being a cop. I like it. It ain't funny to me and I'm the kind of guy that doesn't want it to be funny to other people. That's another laugh, I guess. That's not big stuff, like New York.

You know it's a laugh because you're a couple of months off the Yaphank *Gazette* and you got everything and everybody figured out. But what you—"

There Miss Pulitzer, losing whatever remained of her self-control, pointed a trembling cigarette at him.

"You shut up," she said. "Shut up right now, do you hear? You don't even know what you're talking about. The—the Yaphank *Gazette!* I never saw—"

Kilbane reached for his hat. "There's a lot you never saw," he told her. His voice shook slightly, to his fury. "I guess there's a lot a girl like you is never going to see. Good night!"

He stalked off without looking back, without stopping at the cashier's desk either; when he realized afterward that he must have saddled her with the check it provided him a moment of sullen satisfaction. From the cocktail lounge, still simmering inside, he visited S. Pasquariella for the regular nightly checkup, and there he asked the usual questions without wasting very much time over them: Had anyone, Kilbane wanted to know, been around today to talk to him? Had anyone tried to bother him?

S. Pasquariella, a wiry little man with bushy black hair and glowing black eyes, dismissed that matter with a Latin gesture richly expressive of contempt. Those fellas kept away from him; you betcha, kid. Something else was on his mind. Last night he had not thanked Kilbane. Last night—he gripped Kilbane's forearm, smiling sheepishly and jerking his head toward the bedroom upstairs. The boy—he was a fine boy, eh?

Kilbane put his hand on the knob. Unmatchable anywhere, Kilbane assured him.

"Bambino," S. Pasquariella murmured in a tender voice to himself. "We call him—" He paused, took a deep breath before the plunge, and then without looking at Kilbane punched him lightly and very self-consciously in the stomach. "We call him Salvatore Kilbane Pasquariella. For me—for you. This thing what I say I no say so good. But what I mean, Joe—"

He nodded, very earnestly and at the same time rather shyly; his eyes searched Kilbane's astounded face. Nice guy, this Joe—S. Pasquariella got that out with some effort. All right, you betcha. S. Pasquariella liked and admired him. That's why he had thought—he stopped, smiling painfully at Kilbane's chin. He waited.

"Admired who?" Kilbane asked him after a moment, his ears and the back of his neck slightly flushed. "You ain't got much sense, Salvatore."

"No," S. Pasquariella said humbly. "But—you like it, Joe?"

"I don't know," Kilbane said. He was more in command of himself then. "Nobody ever wanted to name a kid after me before. It's okay, I guess. If you can stand it, I suppose I ought to be tickled to death."

He was, in a way, though he

would never have admitted it to anyone. Still, when he thought of Miss Pulitzer eventually, and of the time Miss Pulitzer could have with something like this, he was not very much disturbed; but by that time, of course, after the third glass of wine in S. Pasquariella's kitchen, Miss Pulitzer was no one to worry about, no one to fret over, from there on in.

During the next ten days he ran into her occasionally at headquarters. Then the procedure never varied: Miss Pulitzer's cool stare would pierce all the way through Detective Kilbane, and at the same moment Detective Kilbane would gaze absently at a point in space some two or three inches above her head.

There was nothing to be said any more. Miss Pulitzer understood that and so did he. Two Saturdays later, the afternoon before the christening, he bought a silver cup and spoon for Salvatore Kilbane Pasquariella at a downtown baby shop; and that night at ten o'clock, coming back to headquarters after a bit of excitement over by the waterfront, he picked up an early edition of the Sunday morning *Tribune*.

It appeared in there that Miss Pulitzer was doing all right for herself. Jack Garrity's weekly feature—"Over a Headquarters Desk"—had her name underneath it now, and Kilbane spared a moment to glance contemptuously through that pile of guff. The last paragraph, in italicized letters, was adorned by the picture of a crystal ball on the side. Inside stuff, Kilbane thought sourly. Right off the— His throat got very dry then, because in Miss Pulitzer's chattiest style he began to read that odds on the conviction of Samuel J. (Little Sammy) Gordon at his trial for murder next month were now five to one in favor of the prosecution.

There was an eyewitness to the shooting, kept undercover and very hush-hush by the higher-ups, who would be the State's big surprise at the proper time. Miss Pulitzer advised her readers to watch for him. "Once over, but not too lightly," would be the D.A.'s watchword.

Kilbane read that part twice. No, he thought then, not even Miss Pulitzer would be dumb enough—he raced off to the chief inspector's office, clutching the paper, and about a minute and a half later, bursting out through the ramp entrance with Beatty and Tom Wilshaw, he rammed head-on into Miss Pulitzer.

"So you did it," he said thickly. "You went and—who told you about Salvatore?"

She blazed up at once. "Who told me?" She mimicked him. "Salvatore told me when I met him coming in here yesterday afternoon. Did you observe that I failed to mention his name? I'm not a fool, you know. And if you've got the faintest idea that you can bully me into ignoring legitimate news—"

"Legitimate news," Kilbane said. He could not seem to get enough breath into him. "He told you because he'd seen you with me. Because he never thought you'd go

ahead and plaster it all over the city."

His right fist pounded the air. Did she know where Charlton Street was? Right by Salvatore's barbershop. That's where Little Sammy knocked off his friend; that's where Salvatore practically watched him do it. He was closing up that night—had the lights off—when it happened. The department hadn't let that get out because there were some others mixed up in it who'd do their best to take care of an eyewitness. They were still running loose. Now they saw what they had to do to protect themselves.

"But that's absurd," Miss Pulitzer faltered. She was just a little breathless. "From what I wrote they could never—"

Kilbane put his face close to her. Maybe she forgot the phrase she used—once over, but not too lightly. They'd get it. Anyone with the brains of a fly would get it. A barber, sure. They'd look for a barber and they wouldn't have to look past the corner of Charlton Street, where the shooting came off. Salvatore was the only barber in the neighborhood. Did Miss Janet S. Harrington understand everything now?

Tom Wilshaw honked at him from the car. "Wait," Miss Pulitzer said. "Kilbane—" He did not wait. He swung onto the car as it circled around the guardrail, and three minutes later he swung off it before S. Pasquariella's barbershop. That was locked and dark now, and after a hurried consultation they split up in front of it. Tom Wilshaw and Beatty sought information in a couple of near-by stores; Kilbane went on down to the house in the next square.

He had pushed the door open, not waiting tonight to ring the bell, when Miss Pulitzer got out of a cab behind him. She followed him into the hall without a word. She did not look or act like Miss Pulitzer at all. In the parlor Angelica Therese put down an accordion and Christina Marie slid off the piano stool. A stout woman, coming out of the kitchen, blushed rosily and hid her mouth with her hand when she saw Kilbane.

She told him that Salvatore was not in yet. On Saturday after work he did the marketing. But soon, any minute now—

"We'll wait a while," Kilbane said. His heart was pounding. They sat down in the parlor and the two girl children, preparing a repertoire for the celebration tomorrow, played something or other when Mrs. S. Pasquariella nodded vigorously at them. Kilbane was given some wine and managed to touch his lips to it. Later, with Miss Pulitzer, he went upstairs and admired Salvatore Kilbane Pasquariella, an infinitesimal peanut snoring placidly in an old-fashioned rocker crib.

Downstairs again they listened to Santa Lucia as interpreted on the accordion by Angelica Therese and on the piano by Christina Marie. In the middle of it Kilbane answered the doorbell and held a low-voiced conversation with Beatty and Tom

Wilshaw on the white flagstone. He learned that at a quarter past nine, not long after the *Tribune* appeared on the streets, Salvatore had walked out of the barbershop with two strangers. No one had seen him since.

For a moment after closing the door Kilbane leaned his shoulders against it. Then, his face much the same as ever, he went back to the parlor.

"We'll get in touch with Salvatore," he announced loudly, surprised that the words came out as well as they did. "Now I guess we'd better be pushing along."

He drove Miss Pulitzer home. "They got men out," he told her quietly, after she whispered her address to him. "Better men than me. You don't have to worry about Salvatore. You aren't, are you?"

She did not answer him—she did not bawl either. Whatever was inside her—and Kilbane realized soberly that there must be pretty much—she was managing to keep inside her. But over on Appleton Street, when he pulled up behind a maroon roadster parked in front of her apartment house, she failed to get out after he walked around the car and opened the door for her.

He glanced down at her, at the side of her face and at the hands all knotted up in her lap; then, because it seemed best to leave her alone there for a minute or two, he went on up the stoop and into the vestibule. That was already occupied. A redheaded man, very broad through the shoulders, looked up at him without friendliness and then shifted position on a stone bench near the stairs.

Kilbane did not pay any attention to him. He walked past him to the row of bells and fussed around there momentarily. Then, as if he had pressed one without receiving an answer, he went out mumbling to himself. He had seen the redheaded man before, standing sullenly beside Sammy Gordon in a morning lineup. But at that time the redheaded man had been on an illuminated stage, while Detective Kilbane sat half a dozen rows back in a darkened auditorium. That was why he knew the redheaded man, and why the redheaded man did not know him.

Before he reached the steps a good many details had dropped miraculously into place. They had Salvatore—they'd had him since nine-fifteen—but what Kilbane had forgotten was that Salvatore was nobody's fool. If he denied everything they'd be careful with him because they were in a spot where they had to be careful, and because Miss Pulitzer, as she said, had mentioned no names.

They had a lead, but if they had not broken Salvatore they could not be positive that it was the right lead. So they got a phone book and looked up the Janet S. Harrington who had signed the column and after that they sent the redheaded man over here to talk to her.

It was not very complicated. By the time he reached the car Kilbane understood the main points well enough to shape them into eight or

nine sentences directed at the top of Miss Pulitzer's round hat.

She looked up at him blindly. What was he trying to tell her? That she was to—

"Keep it low," Kilbane warned her. He wanted to be very calm himself, but a couple of hundred pinpoints that were each as small and hard as the tip of an ice pick had drawn themselves up into a complete circle around his chest. "He won't want to bring you over where Salvatore is—you've got to make him. You've got to tell him that you don't know Salvatore's name, that you only saw him once when someone pointed him out to you at headquarters. You can't describe him very well, either, but you'd know him if you saw him again. Got it?"

He had pulled down ahead of the maroon roadster to the next corner. He parked there.

"Yes." Miss Pulitzer answered him very quietly and without a tremor. "I understand perfectly. I'll go with him and you'll follow us—"

Kilbane nodded. That was the ticket. She'd sit here for five minutes so that he'd have a chance to line things up. After that— He looked narrowly at her. She understood that this wasn't a picnic, didn't she? She understood that she didn't have to do it? It was a good way, but it wasn't the only way. They could—

Miss Pulitzer turned to him, her face blazing with cold excitement. If he tried to stop her now— "All right," Kilbane said. He patted her hand reassuringly, understanding that a girl like this was all right in fundamentals; she was a lot cooler now, for instance, than Joseph J. Kilbane. Before she left the car—a department car—he contacted headquarters by means of the two-way radio, and not very long after that several black sedans with no police insignia on them were cutting over to Appleton Street from City Hall Square.

They were all in place when Miss Pulitzer came down the stoop with the redheaded man and got into the maroon roadster with him. O'Hare and Conlon were two blocks ahead.

When the maroon roadster stopped outside an apartment house at Thirty-second and Greenwood Kilbane was only two blocks away on a parallel road.

O'Hare and Conlon were right behind him. Ed Patterson, who had taken over for the last part of the trip, met them at the corner; Beatty and Tom Wilshaw also appeared from somewhere, but despite the crowd Kilbane got first into the lobby.

Arrangements were made there after they found out that the apartment was 4E. They started upstairs in a creaking elevator, Kilbane breathing slowly and deeply. They got off at four and O'Hare stopped them all before a brass 4E glittering sleekly against dark wood.

"All right," O'Hare said. "We wait till we hear Beatty and Ed Patterson out back. Then!"

Kilbane looked at him. "To hell with that," Kilbane said, through his teeth. It was no time for waiting—

not for Kilbane. He set his revolver almost flush with the lock, fired twice into it, rammed one heel viciously into what the bullets left and plunged far off balance into a long and empty living room.

The redheaded man appeared in a doorway across from him. He was shouting back at someone and trying frantically to get a gun out from under the left flap of his vest. And Kilbane shot him precisely through the chest without breaking stride. Kilbane reached the inner doorway and sprawled over a little sallow-faced man crouched down just in front of him. He landed on a dining-room table that was eight feet long and smooth as ice. On the far end he sailed off into a chair and carried that majestically with him against the wall.

A dapper young man with crisp blond hair raced out of the kitchen and fired down quickly at him with his left hand. Kilbane shot back from an impossible angle.

O'Hare, Conlon, Beatty, Tom Wilshaw and the sallow-faced man poured into the room. S. Pasquariella stood over the blond young fellow and waved the remains of a kitchen chair venomously in the air. Everyone was there—everyone but Miss Pulitzer.

Wobbling, the gun still in his hand, Kilbane got up and staggered out to the kitchen. Dark. Empty.

"Eh?" O'Hare said, when Kilbane croaked something. "What's the matter with you?"

Kilbane staggered by him into the bedroom. She was there, trying to light a cigarette and handle the phone at the one time—the same old Miss Pulitzer. He looked at her for a moment. One sleeve was ripped away from his coat and his buttonless vest bore a fragment of tablecloth and a few crushed flower petals. His nose was bleeding.

"I fell," Kilbane said. "Over the table," he added. "I bet you thought you lost me."

"Oh, no," Miss Pulitzer said, sharp as ever. "I heard you come in." She took a moment to reach up one hand and brush a couple of the flower petals away from him. And she said, very softly for Miss Pulitzer, "I'm all right, you know."

Was he? Kilbane couldn't figure anything out. He nodded though.

"As if you had to do it all," she said. "Now sit down some place where I can't see you and wipe your nose."

She went with him to the christening Sunday afternoon, and when they got out of his car before S. Pasquariella's house Kilbane showed her the silver cup and spoon.

"They're very nice," Miss Pulitzer said. "Monogrammed, too."

"Well," Kilbane said honestly, "that was free. I think it looks pretty nice. S.K.P. You know what the K's for? Kilbane."

"Oh," she said, without adding anything smart. There vas no need for her to take his arm, either, but she did and Kilbane was not very much upset about it. Maybe it meant something—maybe it didn't. Kilbane intended to find out.

the hated woman

by . . . Q. Patrick

Lila Trenton still had beauty—but Lila also had a flair for making men want to murder her.

LIFE WAS EASY for Lila Trenton—too easy. And yet she was discontented. Even now, when she had just awakened safe and warm beneath her rose-colored quilt, there were little lines of discontent around her mouth. Her movements were petulant as she fingered the hairnet which preserved the stiffness of her hennaed waves. Restlessly she stretched her silk-covered limbs, which, despite a slight thickening, were still well molded and voluptuous in contour.

Through the wall she could hear her husband's slow indecisive footsteps as he moved about his separate bedroom. For the thousandth time she wondered why she had married Paul Trenton. She, the pretty Lila, deserved something so much better than this dried-up, useless stick of a man.

She looked back to the time when she had first met him. Then he had seemed so distinguished and everybody had said he was going to become famous with those chemical experiments of his. Lila Trenton—wife of the celebrated Paul Trenton. That's what she had hoped to be. Well, he had fooled her. Fifteen years had gone by and he was still

One of the most important rules of detective-fiction is to rouse sufficient dislike toward your murder victim so that the sympathies of your readers are not outraged. Being pastmasters at their craft the two able young men known as Q. Patrick have here created, in Lila Trenton, one of the most loathsome female creatures since Messalina or anyway Catherine di Medici. More important, they have given her so many elements of reality that each of us must find in Lila seeds of familiarity.

just an ordinary research worker down at the university—never made more than two thousand dollars a year.

Lila Trenton despised her husband because she had money and he had not—because he worshiped her slavishly despite her indifference to him—because she had perfect health whereas he, who never complained, seemed to look older and more frail each day.

The careful footsteps had passed through the living room to the kitchen. Soon they returned and there was a soft tap on the door. "Are you awake, dear?"

A sallow middle-aged man with graying hair slipped into her room, carrying a cup of tea in uncertain fingers. "I've brought the tea rather early, dear. I want to be at the laboratory by ten. There are some interesting developments."

"There've been interesting developments for fifteen years," snapped Lila as her red-nailed hand reached for the cup. "Oh, Paul, you've slopped it all over the saucer!"

"I'm sorry." Paul Trenton's pale sensitive face regarded her with anxious attention. "How do you feel this morning, dear?"

"*Feel!* It's too early to feel anything."

Paul Trenton drew back the curtains and the morning light fell full on his tired face.

He does look old, Lila was thinking not without a certain satisfaction. *Anyone seeing us together would take me for his daughter.*

She stirred the tea, crushing three lumps of sugar with her spoon. "You look simply terrible, Paul. I suppose you've been working all hours of the night with those crazy experiments of yours. You never think how dull it is for me, sitting all day alone with nothing to do but read magazines and listen to the radio."

"I had no idea you were lonely." Her husband's lips curved in a slight smile. "But you won't be alone tonight, dear. I've asked Professor Comroy for dinner. I hope—"

"Oh, *Paul!*" The cold cream on Lila's face puckered into lines of irritation. "You know how I hate fixing dinner for those stuffy university friends of yours."

"We can have dinner sent up, dear." Paul Trenton took the empty cup patiently and laid it on a table. "And Comroy is the head of my department. I owe him a great deal."

"Well, it's quite out of the question tonight," snapped Lila. "I don't feel up to it. And I think I've got a cold coming on. Yes, I'm sure I have. I just couldn't cope with that—that old windbag." She sniffed with what conviction she could muster and produced a lace handkerchief from under the pillow.

"Very well, dear. I can put him off. And I'm sorry about the cold. Why don't you spend the day in bed and take plenty of fruit juices?"

Lila had been staring meditatively at her expensively manicured fingernails. Suddenly she looked up, a crafty expression in her eyes. "There's no reason for you to give up your date with Professor Comroy, Paul,"

she said as though making a generous gesture. "Why don't you take him out somewhere to dinner? I don't mind an evening alone."

"Why, that would be nice, Lila—if you're sure you don't mind."

He bent to kiss her but she pushed him away with bored distaste. "Oh, Paul, not *now!* I can't bear you to come near me in your working suit. It always smells of chemicals."

She watched him move into the hall and heard the front door shut behind him. Then, with a curious inward smile, she slipped her feet into feathery pink mules and hurried to the hall telephone.

"Hello, Larry . . . Yes, this is Lila. I've got a lovely surprise for you. I'm going to ask you to dinner tonight . . . Yes, just us two. It hasn't been that way for weeks, has it?"

There was a short pause at the other end of the wire. Then a man's voice replied hurriedly, awkwardly, "Well, Lila, I don't know whether I can make it. Business is picking up and there's a lot to be done around the garage. But . . ."

"Oh, of course you'll come." Lila's face had hardened but her voice was silky smooth. "I know you'll come if your own Lila asks you."

"Okay. But I've got to see you sooner than that." The voice was curt now and determined. "Is your husband there? . . . Then will it be all right if I come straight away?"

"Oh, not *now,* Larry!" Lila gave a playful little scream. "Why, I'm hardly out of bed. I look a fright."

"Never mind what you look like," replied the man gruffly. "I'll be there in half an hour."

"Larry, *Larry!*" Lila jolted the hook but the man had rung off.

For a moment she stood by the table. Then she ran to the mirror in her bedroom and started to remove the cold cream from her face.

The image in the glass was entirely satisfactory to her. Although she was over forty, to herself she looked no more than twenty-eight. True, the gray was showing through at the roots of her hair. But she could have a touch-up before the evening. Her skin was still smooth and firm and her eyes were as clear and lustrous as those of a young girl. There would be no time to heighten the interesting shadows beneath her long lashes. But Larry would be so pleased to see her he would not notice little things like that.

"Wanting to see me at ten o'clock in the morning!" she thought complacently. "These young men are so impetuous."

Larry Graves slammed the receiver. As he gazed around the garage which he had bought and fixed up with Lila Trenton's money, his young almost too-handsome face went grim. Swiftly he hurried into a small back room, slipped off his greasy overalls, wiped the oil from his hands with a piece of cotton waste.

He felt utterly disgusted at the thought of the scene ahead of him. He could see Lila Trenton waiting for him, saccharine, seductive and

yet so predatory—so suffocating. Well, he'd got himself into this mess with his eyes open. He'd have to find some way out—any way. Slicking down his thick blond hair he took his coat from its hook and moved through the lines of parked cars toward an old roadster.

"Be gone about an hour, Jack," he said as he swung open the door. "Finish fixing the brakes on that Austin, will you?"

As he drove through the busy morning streets the words Claire had spoken to him last night kept repeating themselves in his mind. "You're nothing but a gigolo—a gigolo!" Well, she'd hit the nail pretty squarely on the head.

He drew up outside the Vandolan apartment hotel, hurried into the opulent lounge and, leaning over the desk, grunted a curt, "Mrs. Trenton, please."

Lila had left the apartment door ajar. She was carefully draped on a divan when Larry entered. The pink pajamas had been supplemented by a diaphanous pink wrap. It would have taken a more observant person than Larry to detect the hard work which had gone to create this tableau of seeming spontaneous charm. She held out both hands and crooned, "Larry, how sweet!"

"I've got to talk to you," said the young man shortly. He stood motionless by the door, clutching his hat in two bronzed fists. "It's about the garage."

"Come and sit here with Lila."

Mrs. Trenton patted the edge of the divan invitingly and smiled. For an instant the young man did not move. Then he walked slowly to her side and sat down within the range of her exotic perfume. His untidy oil-stained suit was in striking contrast to the expensive elegance of her negligée.

"That's better," Lila was murmuring, taking one of his hands in hers. "Now tell Lila all the trouble and she'll fix it."

"There's no trouble, Lila. Business is on the up and up. I'm doing fine. But the repayment of your loan falls due tomorrow. I—I want to ask you to extend it."

"But of course I will, darling. You know I never begrudge money to a friend. Five thousand dollars isn't a matter of life and death to me. I don't mind what happens to it just so long as it makes you happy."

"That's swell." Larry shifted uneasily. "Of course, I'm grateful for all you've done but I want you to know that the garage is a good business proposition. You took a gamble when you lent me the capital to start. It was great of you and I'll never forget it. In fact, I'm going to work like the devil to justify your belief in me. I can go on paying good interest and in time I'll be able to pay back every cent of the loan. But just at the moment . . ."

Lila patted his cheek and murmured, "Oh, darling, let's not talk about dull business. Let's talk about us—and tonight."

"That's just the point, Lila." Larry rose and passed a hand through his blond hair. "I can't come tonight. At least, not the way I used to.

Something's happened and I've got to tell you about it now."

"Happened, Larry?" The curves of Lila's lips straightened into a hard red line.

"Yes, it's a—a girl. I met her last month, Lila, and—well, I guess we fell for each other. I want to get married."

"Married!" The powder could no longer hide the lines around Lila Trenton's mouth. Her voice had frosted. "But, Larry, is it wise to think of getting married when you have—er—other obligations?"

"I know it was crazy of me but, Lila"—the blond young man sat down by her side again and gripped her arm—"you've always been so understanding. I know, if you'd meet her, you'd realize I couldn't help myself."

"Meet her!" Lila pulled her hand back swiftly.

"Yes. I was wondering if I could bring her around tonight. Then you could explain that it really was a business arrangement—that I hadn't taken anything from you under false pretenses."

"You mean she isn't willing to accept *your* explanation," said Lila sharply.

"Well, she was mad when I told her about you, of course. Didn't like the idea of my having taken money from a woman. But if she could see you, she'd realize how decent, how—er—disinterested you've been."

Lila Trenton rose from the couch. All the softness had left her. She had become harsh, strident. "My God, you expect me to do your dirty work for you? You expect to bring this woman round here to meet me as if I were—your grandmother? You expect me to give you my money to get married on and then stand back and say, 'God bless you, my children?' Why, of all the—"

"It isn't that, Lila. You know it's just—"

"Just that you want me to tell your lies for you." Lila twisted the expensive pearls around her throat. "Listen to me. I didn't lend you that money as a business proposition—and you knew it. I'm not such a fool as to throw away money on stray young men and their dirty garages. I lent you that five thousand dollars because I liked you. As soon as I stop liking you I want my money back. And I don't like married men."

"But, Lila, I can go on paying the interest."

"Interest! Why should I trust a man like you? Think what you were doing when I first met you! You were little better than a crook. Since you seem to have told that girl so much about me, maybe I should tell her a thing or two about you—tell her that you used to deal in stolen cars, for example. I guess that would interest her—and the police, too."

"But, Lila, that's all over now." Larry's young face looked old and haggard. "You know I've gone straight."

"Strait-laced, I'd say." Lila moved to the mantel and stood there, a sneer on her lips. "You've got all you wanted out of me and now you

tell me you're going to be a good little boy and marry some sweet young thing you met at a church social. Well, let's hope she sings in the choir and gets a salary because, Heaven knows, it'll be *her* job to support you after you get married. I'm through."

Larry strode across the room and stood squarely in front of her. "I know what you are now, Lila. We understand each other perfectly. I know why you lent me the money and I realize exactly what you're going to do about the garage. Well, you can take it and be damned to you. You can ruin me but you can't get me to come near this filthy overheated place again."

Lila was laughing at him—and her laughter was not pretty. "You look so funny," she cried weakly. "So damn funny!"

"Funny, do I?" With a sudden gesture of fury Larry's arm shot out and he brought his palm onto her cheek in a stinging blow.

"You—you—" he muttered.

Lila's fingers flew up to her cheek and the laughter drained out of her eyes. In its place there came a new strange expression. "Larry!" she whispered hoarsely. "You struck me."

The young man stood in front of her, stiff and dazed. Then the realization of what he had done seemed to dawn on his face. "I'm sorry, Lila. I'm all worked up. I didn't know...."

Lila did not take her eyes off him. As he stood there, angry and ashamed, she realized suddenly that she had never seen him so handsome before. In the past she had thought him weak, pliable, but this new streak of firmness intrigued and attracted her. He had just struck her but she still had the whip hand. She was not going to let him get away from her.

"I'm sorry," he repeated dully.

"You should be," said Lila slowly, "but I think—I think I shall forgive you. That is, if you come and apologize very nicely—when we have dinner together tonight."

Larry turned away. As he moved to the door she crossed the room swiftly and took from her pocketbook the key to her apartment. She handed it to him and he snatched it fiercely.

"I'll come back," he muttered thickly.

"That's right," she whispered. "You're going to think it over, aren't you? You don't want to lose that lovely new garage, do you?"

After he had gone she stared at herself in the mirror. On her left cheek were the red imprints of his fingers. It was a new exciting sensation to think that a man had struck her. Larry!

She touched the marks gently, almost carressingly. Somehow, she did not even want to cover them with powder.

II

Larry Graves could still smell Lila's perfume as he hurried out of the Vandolan Hotel. He felt sick—disgusted with himself and with her. He had been crazy to accept that loan—he saw it clearly now.

But at the time it had seemed his salvation. He had not realized there would be these complications—that it would end in this.

His mind turned back to the picture of Lila handing him the key a few minutes before. He hated her now with a hatred almost physical in its intensity. He saw her as a spider, himself as a wretched creature struggling vainly in her accented mesh.

He thought of the old days, before the garage, when there had been no regular job, nothing but small commissions on cars doubtfully bought and sold. Of course, if he had strength enough, he could throw it all up, return the money and start from the beginning again. But Larry Graves knew that he would not have the courage for that—that he would not have the courage to face the investigation into his past which a break with Lila would inevitably involve.

As he got into his car he was gripped by an impulse which made him half sick with excitement and apprehension. No one except Claire knew Lila had lent him that money. Lila would not have dared tell because of her husband. She had written a check to herself and given him the cash. He, Larry Graves, had tried to play square with her. But she had not any intention of playing square with him. Why should he be so scrupulous? If only he could get that receipt!

Then as his thoughts ran swiftly along this channel, he remembered the key. No one knew he had that key. Lila Trenton would be alone tonight—quite alone. He could imagine her there, waiting, triumphant in her victory. The remembered scent of her perfume made him feel dizzy. Well, maybe he would go. Maybe she'd get something she wasn't expecting.

But Claire knew. He had told her about Lila last night. He would have to see her again before—before he made up his mind. If only he could get her to understand the way he had felt when he borrowed that money. If only she would see that things weren't as ugly as they seemed. Then everything might still be all right. There might be no need . . . He released the clutch and sent the car sharply forward.

Claire French ran a beauty parlor a few blocks away from the Vandolan Hotel. She had money of her own—money she had earned. Larry never thought of that before but Lila's cynical words brought it back with fresh bitterness. Perhaps that was why she had been so hard on him. She didn't realize how it was when a guy . . .

Larry pushed open the door marked "Mayfair Beauty Shop," and hurried to the girl behind the cash desk. "Miss French, please."

"What name is it?"

"Graves."

"Just a moment." The girl disappeared and returned almost immediately. Her voice was flat and impersonal. "Miss French says you must have mistaken the address. The Vandolan Hotel is three blocks east."

"Tell her I've got to see her," said Larry fiercely.

"I'm sorry. She's very busy just now."

"I can't help that."

Larry pushed the girl aside and made for the inner door. He strode down a line of cubicles where women were sitting with electrical equipment on their heads, having permanent waves, face massages, manicures. In a small office at the back he found Claire sitting alone at a desk, busy with accounts. She rose swiftly.

As they stood staring at each other, the physical contrast between these two young people was almost as violent as the state of their emotions. Claire was as dark as Larry was fair. And while his features were regular, if a trifle weak, hers had the irregularity of strength—a strength which came from within and did not in any way detract from the elusive charm of her face.

Her wide-set gray eyes smoldered as she spoke. "I thought I told you last night that I didn't want to see you again."

"But, Claire, we've got to have this thing out. You've got to understand."

"I'm afraid there's nothing about you that isn't too easy to understand."

"After all, Claire, I'm only human. Lila was an attractive woman. You're not a prude. You wouldn't have objected to my knowing her before I met you if it wasn't for this damned money. And can't you see that a loan like that has nothing to do with her and me? It was just a business deal—a perfectly good investment for her. She wasn't doing me a favor. She'll make money."

Claire French sat down wearily. "It's no use, Larry. I can't get worked up over the problems of a man who accepts money from a woman he's having an affair with. It doesn't make the slightest difference to me whether she was getting good value for her investment or not."

"Well, maybe I have made a mess of things, Claire, but you said you loved me. Can't you give me a break—can't you take my word that I'm doing my damnedest to straighten everything out?"

"Are you going to pay her back her money, Larry?"

"I can't yet. You know I can't. And she won't extend the loan unless—"

"Unless you go around regularly—paying your interest," said Claire bitterly.

"She did ask me around tonight." Larry drew away slightly. "You know I don't want to go but she threatened to have me dispossessed, to make me bankrupt if I didn't."

"Well, why not let her!" Claire's gray eyes fixed his squarely. "You can start over again. Other people have."

"Oh, what's the use? You see, you don't know everything. It's not just a question of the money. I guess I could raise that. I could sell the garage for half of what it's

worth. But Lila Trenton would still have her hooks in me."

"You mean there's something else?"

Larry thrust out his jaw. "I'm not handing you a sob story. Heaven knows I've had all this coming to me. But I got out of college in the middle of the depression. I tried to get a job—tried for about a year. Then I got tired of starving. When people came along and made offers that weren't exactly—honest—I didn't see the sense in having scruples.

"I got tied up with a concern which dealt in cars and wasn't too particular about their titles. Lila's car was stolen, and it was brought around to our place. That's how I met her. She guessed what the racket was and I thought it was swell of her at the time not to do anything about it.

"But now she's threatened to tell." He looked down at his feet. "I can't let her do that, Claire—not so long as there's any hope with you. I couldn't ask you to marry me without a cent and with a possible prison sentence hanging over my head."

"You'd have more chance if you actually *were* in prison," said the girl quietly, "than asking me to marry you on that woman's money."

"Well, I guess I can't blame you. That means we're really through."

"I thought I made that clear last night." Claire turned away. She did not want him to see her face. "I don't give a damn if you bought or sold a million stolen cars. I don't give a damn about your being weak either. Heavens, we're all of us weak most of the time. It's—it's just that I think your type of weakness is particularly unattractive."

Larry gazed at the back of her head a moment in silence and then turned toward the door. As he reached it Claire spun round suddenly. "Larry, are—are you going to see her tonight?"

Larry's hand was in his pocket. His fingers were clasped tightly around the small, steel key. He stared at Claire with a grim determined look in his eyes. "Yes," he said slowly, "I'm going to see her tonight. Now that we're washed up I don't give a damn what happens to me. I'm going to do exactly what I want to do."

For a few seconds after he had gone Claire's eyes remained fixed unseeingly on the closed door. Then, throwing herself into a chair, she covered her face with her hands. She did not cry but her whole body shook with long strangled sobs.

Larry said he loved me, she was thinking desperately, *but it's Lila Trenton who still owns him, body and soul. Oh, how I wish she was dead, dead, dead!*

She sat there awhile, motionless, her pale face set in a strained, expressionless mask. Then, suddenly, as though an idea had just come to her, she lifted the telephone receiver. Her fingers trembled as she spun the dial.

"Hello, hello . . . Is that the Vandolan Hotel . . . I want to speak to Mrs. Trenton, please."

After Larry had gone, Lila Trenton returned to her room. In the thrill of his violent parting she had completely forgotten her spurt of anger against him. He would come back. He'd have to. The very fact that he would come against his will added a fresh excitement. And she could soon make him forget about that girl, she reflected, feeling assured of her own experienced charms.

She was still enjoying the reassurance of her mirror when the telephone rang.

"Good morning, madam." A girl's voice was speaking with saccharine politeness. "This is the Mayfair Beauty Shop. We are running a special today for new clients and we're eager to get your custom. Is there anything in particular you were wanting?"

"Well, I don't know," said Lila cautiously. "I was thinking of having a touch-up this afternoon. But I usually go to the beauty parlor here in the hotel. It's disgracefully expensive."

"Our specials are extremely reasonable," said the voice.

Although her appearance meant more to her than anything else, Lila Trenton was always interested in a bargain. "I might try you out but I can't leave the hotel today. I've got a nasty cold."

By this time she had persauded herself that she really had.

"That's all right, madam. We can easily send a girl over. No extra charge."

"Very well. Make it four o'clock. Lila gave a few details as to her requirements and concluded, "Tell the girl I'm very particular."

"Thank you, madam. And don't worry. We're very particular, too."

Lila had hardly rung off before the phone sounded again. It was the desk downstairs. "Professor Comroy to see you, Mrs. Trenton."

"Tell him my husband's out," snapped Lila.

"But it's you he wishes to speak to, madam."

"Tell him I'm in bed with a cold."

There was a pause. "Professor Comroy says he will not keep you a moment. It's urgent."

What did the old fool want? thought Lila impatiently. He was to dine with Paul tonight and couldn't have anything to say to her. It was only curiosity that made her utter a grudging, "All right," to the telephone operator.

Lila was suspicious of all her husband's university colleagues. She felt they tried to be intellectual and superior. But even though intellectual, middle-aged and plump, Professor Comroy was a man. Instinctively she hurried to her vanity dresser, bathed her cheeks with astringent lotion, fluffed the pink wrap around her. She was ready to greet her husband's friend with a sweet invalidish smile.

"Oh, Professor, I'm simply miserable about dinner tonight." She pressed a lace handkerchief to her face and held out her left hand. "But you see what a dreadful cold I've got. I don't want to spread it.

Please sit over there—away from the germs."

Professor Comroy took the chair that she indicated and leaned ponderously forward. He was a shortish rotund man with the spectacled face of a benevolent owl. Behind the thick lenses his eyes, usually bright and twinkling, were grave.

"You must forgive my insisting on seeing you when you are unwell, Mrs. Trenton. But I have come to ask a favor—a favor which I feel sure you will be only too willing to grant."

"Favor?" echoed Lila with a slight diminution of effusiveness.

"As I expect you know your husband has been working for several years on a most important piece of research which has been financed by a special endowment fund. Yesterday I received a letter from the Abel Foundation which stated that the fund was to be discontinued immediately."

"Oh, how terrible!" Lila forgot to control the guarded expression which had slipped into her eyes. "But what can I do about that? There doesn't seem anything I can do."

"Your husband has given all his time and energy to that research, Mrs. Trenton." The professor had removed his spectacles and was wiping them deliberately on a corner of his handkerchief. "He has very nearly obtained results which would mean a great deal to chemistry—and to himself. But if we cannot raise five thousand dollars at once the work will have to be abandoned."

"Poor Paul!" sighed Lila. "But with a big rich university like that I don't see why—"

"That's just the point, Mrs. Trenton." The professor slipped his spectacles around his ears and smiled sadly. "The university is not rich. It is heavily in debt to the city. Besides, even if the trustees were willing to listen to me they could not possibly put through an appropriation until the end of the academic year."

Lila patted the back of her head but did not speak.

"Your husband is not only a very brilliant man," went on Professor Comroy. "He is also my greatest friend. If I had the money I would gladly offer it myself. But I'm afraid I haven't. That's why I came to you."

"But I don't understand," said Lila with a tightening of the lips. "Do you mean you want me to put up five thousand dollars?"

"It would only be a loan. There is some rather expensive apparatus to be bought. I'm sure you are as eager as I am that your husband should continue uninterruptedly with his work."

Lila thought a moment. Then she said with sudden, overripe sweetness. "Oh, I'm afraid it's impossible. You don't know how sensitive Paul is. Why, he'd rather starve than feel he was using any of my money."

"I haven't told him that the fund has stopped," said the professor quietly. "He need never know. It can be a little secret between the two of us."

"Well, of course, I'd be delighted

—but I'm afraid it's quite out of the question." Lila plucked nervously at the down on her cuffs. "Five thousand dollars is a lot of money. What with my obligations and everything I couldn't possibly find it just now."

Professor Comroy screwed up his bright shortsighted eyes and looked from the genuine pearls on Lila's throat to the expensive furniture in the apartment. "I can only repeat," he said at length, "that it means your husband's happiness—the crowning of his life's work. Surely that is worth making a few sacrifices for, Mrs. Trenton."

"Sacrifices!" Lila rose and stared at him with narrowing eyes. "Really, Mr. Comroy, I hardly feel it your place to tell me how I should spend my money."

"I'm sorry." The professor had also risen and his cherubic face had lost something of its pleasantness. "But I want you to consider this matter very seriously. I cannot believe that you are indifferent to your husband's career even if you are not interested in the progress of science."

"Science!" exclaimed Lila scornfully. "Do you suppose I've heard about anything else for the past fifteen years? It's always science, science, science. He's going to do this. He's going to do that. But he never gets anywhere so far as I can see—nowhere at all.

"There's no reason why I shouldn't be frank with you, Mr. Comroy. My husband has been a great disappointment to me. He's weak—got no push. Why, he's never made more than two thousand a year. If it wasn't for my poor father dying and leaving me my money we couldn't even live here at the Vandolan.

"That's why I wouldn't dream of letting you have five thousand dollars. I have to support him at home. I fail to see why I should support him at the university too."

"Very well, Mrs. Trenton," said Professor Comroy with steely quietness. "I see that it was foolish for me to come."

"It was not only foolish," replied Lila who was working herself up into a pitch of righteous indignation. "It was impertinent."

The professor crossed abruptly to the door. "There is no need to tell you that I think your attitude a wrong one. Your husband is one of the finest men I have ever known. And what's more, Mrs. Trenton, I feel I am old enough to tell you something for your own good." Gilbert Comroy's rotund form was standing by the door and he was peering fixedly at her through his spectacles.

"It is easy to feel that you owe obligations to no one. But there will come a time when you yourself may be in need of help—when you see all that you care most for in life falling about you like a pack of cards. It will not be very pleasant then to find yourself—absolutely alone."

"Thank you, Mr. Comroy." Lila emitted smoke from her nostrils. "Thank you for the charming little sermon. Thank you ever so much."

III

All the rest of the morning Claire French struggled with the confusion of her thoughts. The night before, when Larry first told her about Lila Trenton, she had felt she hated him —had told herself that she could not even bear the sight of him again. But now she realized she had been deliberately blinding herself. He had been foolish, weak, but it takes more than that to make any real difference. Slowly, illogically, she felt her anger and disgust shifting from him and settling upon Lila Trenton, the woman whom she had never even seen.

She could not get the thought of her out of her head. While she massaged, shampooed, chatted with clients, her mind was fixed on one thing, only—her four-o'clock appointment at the Vandolan Hotel.

Her fingers were trembling when at last she collected her things, packed them in a suitcase and hurried out into the street. She looked very young and very determined as she gave Mrs. Trenton's name to the desk-clerk and took the elevator to the twenty-seventh floor.

Lila called a querulous, "Come right on in."

Claire stepped into the hall and, controlling her voice with an effort, said professionally, "Good afternoon, Mrs. Trenton. I'm from the Mayfair Beauty Shop."

As Lila languidly shook the folds out of her wrap Claire regarded her with shrewd critical eyes. She was handsome, the girl had to admit that. But her looks wouldn't last much longer. Claire, with her expert knowledge of cosmetics, could detect instantly all the little devices which held up the slipping structure of Lila Trenton's beauty.

Not a day under forty, she thought with sudden satisfaction. She eats too much and doesn't get enough exercise.

"I'm not altogether pleased with the touch-ups they give me here," Lila said as she helped herself to a piece of chocolate candy without offering the box to Claire. "I hope you're going to be more satisfactory."

Suddenly a vision of Larry with this woman slipped into the girl's mind. She had to grip tightly to the suitcase to keep herself steady. Her thoughts were racing. Everything that had been so confused before now seemed clear. She knew that she loved Larry—that she would do anything for him.

All her high-sounding moral principles boiled down to the one vulgar word—jealousy. She was insanely overpoweringly jealous of the woman who had played such an important part in Larry's life. It was this moment of honest self-revelation that made her feel calm, assured, prepared to act.

"I'm ready, Mrs. Trenton—ready when you are."

Claire fixed up a miniature beauty parlor in the large, black-tiled bathroom. Lila was patronizing but gossipy, telling little intimate physical details about herself.

"It's only at the roots that the gray patches show," she murmured as the hot soapy water trickled

around her ears. "Be careful it doesn't get spotty."

"Oh, it won't be spotty." Claire's fingers worked firmly across the other woman's scalp—more firmly, perhaps, than was strictly necessary.

Lila gave vent to an irritated, "Ouch!"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Trenton. But it's worth suffering a bit to be beautiful, isn't it? Maybe there's a boy friend coming around tonight."

"Maybe there is." Lila's voice was glossy with self-satisfaction. "I don't see why all fun should stop when you're married, do you? Particularly when you're a girl and your husband's so much older."

Claire dried off the hair with a towel, put on her rubber gloves and started to work in the henna paste. She was amazed at the almost physical pleasure she felt at having Lila Trenton helpless and unsuspecting beneath her fingers.

"How about a facial when you're through, Mrs. Trenton? The skin around your chin is getting rather flabby."

"Flabby!"

"Oh, it's nothing to worry about. Most women of your age have trouble with sagging muscles. I think I could do wonders to those lines around the mouth too."

"Listen," said Lila tartly, "I asked for a touch-up. If I need anything else I'll tell you."

There was an inscrutable smile on Claire's lips. "Oh, I didn't mean it that way, Mrs. Trenton. Really, you're marvelous. You could easily pass for thirty-eight in an artificial light."

Lila jerked her head backward. She was just about to speak when Claire cut in with, "Mustn't talk, Mrs. Trenton, the henna might get in your mouth."

The atmosphere grew thicker as Claire rinsed out the hair and, selecting a warm dry towel, wrapped it around Lila's head like a turban.

For a moment the two women looked at each other's reflections in the misty mirror without speaking. Lila's exotic perfume had impregnated the steamy air. As it invaded Claire's nostrils she felt a vague wave of nausea. Once again she thought of Larry and knew that her control was weakening.

"Hot in here," gasped Lila.

"Yes, it is." Claire's hands fell suddenly to her sides. Her voice, which had been soft, almost sycophantic, was hard as flint. "You fat useless women always live in a stifling temperature."

"What—what did you say?" Lila was gazing at her in utter astonishment.

"I said that fat useless females like you always pamper yourselves. You overeat. You—"

"How *dare* you!" Lila's voice rose to a high furious scream. "Of all the impertinent, disgraceful—get out of here. Get *out,* I say!"

"But your hair's not dry, Mrs. Trenton. Surely, with the boy friend coming in, you want to look your charming best."

"This—this—I'll report you. You'll be dismissed instantly."

"Lovely," said Claire. "But I very much doubt it."

"And this Mayfair Beauty Shop—I shall call up your employers immediately."

"Oh, I don't think they'll mind." Claire was standing by the door, her gray eyes blazing. "And it would be worth it anyhow. There's lots of things I'd like to say to you, Mrs. Trenton. And lots of things I'd like to ask you, too.

"How does it feel to be getting old and fat? How does it feel to be cheating on your husband? How does it feel to be giving money to young men because you can't get them any other way? Oh, there are so many things but I guess you don't even know the answers yourself." Her laughter rose shakily. She was almost as hysterical as Lila herself. "If you knew how funny you looked sitting there with that towel around your head!"

Lila was completely taken aback. For a moment her lips could form no words. Then she rose to her feet and shouted stridently, "Get out! Get out before I call the police!"

"I'm going." Swiftly Claire assembled her things and packed them in the suitcase. "I guess you'll be able to dry your own hair, Mrs. Trenton. There will be no charge for what I've done to you. You'll be able to make yourself beautiful for that date with the boy friend tonight. But before he comes round take a good look at yourself."

She gripped the suitcase, ran out of the apartment and slammed the door behind her furiously.

For one dreadful moment after Claire had gone, Lila Trenton's anger gave way to a sensation bordering upon panic. Growing old! Could it be true? Swiftly she bent forward and gazed at her reflection in the steamy mirror. Despite the towel around her hair and the absence of make-up the blurred reflection looked fresh, young, reassuring.

Lila breathed a little sigh of relief. The girl was crazy. Of course—*that* was the explanation. Still it had been very unpleasant. All that about buying young men! What a ridiculous thing to say. The girl must have a nasty mind—jealous, probably, or sex-starved.

She had almost calmed down sufficiently to call the Mayfair Beauty Shop and complain when there was a knock at the door. For some reason she started nervously. The knock sounded again and she cried out an agitated, "Who is it?"

"Hotel electrician to look at the refrigerator, madam."

Lila crossed to the door. A young man in overalls stood on the threshold. He was dark, strong, rather attractive. Instinctively, Lila smiled. "Come in," she said, patting the towel around her head. "I was just washing my hair."

The young man grinned back rathed too intimately as she conducted him to the kitchen. "Been working here long?" she asked.

"Just a couple of months, Mrs. Trenton." The young man grinned again and moved his arm slightly so that it brushed against Lila's thigh. "There's not much money in it but

I sometimes get odd jobs on the side. I got a kid brother, you know. Putting him through school."

"How nice of you! Oh, excuse me a moment."

With her best smile Lila hurried away as the telephone shrilled its insistent summons.

"Hello, what is it?"

"Mrs. Trenton?"

"Yes."

"This is the manager speaking. There is nothing to be worried about but several of our guests have registered complaints of petty theft the past few days. We are asking everyone to keep their doors locked —especially in the apartments like yours which have back doors leading onto the fire escape."

"Oh, all right," said Lila testily. "But why must you bother me with things like that? There's a house detective, isn't there?"

"Yes, Mrs. Trenton," said the voice wearily. "We do all we can to protect our guests but the detective can't be everywhere at the same time."

Lila put down the receiver and returned to the kitchen. The young man unbent as she entered.

"Well, Mrs. Trenton, the refrigerator's in pretty good shape." His dark eyes were appraising her boldly. Thrusting his hands in his trousers pockets, he sauntered into the living room. "Nice place you've got here. Gee, it must be swell to have money."

Lila was wondering whether her hair was dry enough to look pretty without the towel. She decided to go into the bedroom and see. The young man followed her in.

"Geez," he said, "I wish I was a girl. Maybe then you could use me around this place, Mrs. Trenton. I'm pretty good at housework too. Used to be a houseboy when I was a kid."

Lila felt a tingling thrill of excitement. The young man was very near, very masculine.

"Is there anything you'd like me to do for you before I go, Mrs. Trenton?" His dark eyes were playing on the rose-colored quilt.

"Why—er—yes," said Lila hurriedly. "You might light the fire in the living room. I want to dry my hair."

"Okay, Mrs. Trenton." The young man had taken out a cigarette and was glancing at her over the match flame. "Got kindling?"

"What? Oh, I don't know. No, I don't think so. But there's some wood on the little balcony just outside the back door. You'll find a hatchet there too."

The young man strolled into the kitchen and Lila could hear the strong blows of the hatchet outside. For some reason she could not define, she felt nervous. That crazy girl from the beauty parlor must have upset her more than she had thought.

She actually started when a few minutes later the bedroom door was pushed open and the young man stood on the threshold. "The fire's ready and waiting," he said.

"Oh! Oh, thank you very much. Did you lock the back door?"

"Sure. I locked it all right for you," he remarked.

His gaze moved casually around the room, settled on the dressing table, then flicked away. "If ever you need me, Mrs. Trenton, it's easy to get me. Sam Nolan's the name."

He made no attempt to leave. After a second's indecision, Lila rose and slipped past him. She felt his breath warm against her cheek. Once again she experienced that momentary sensation of nervousness.

But the living room reassured her. When she saw the fire crackling cheerfully in the grate, she felt her silly fears disappear and her coquetry return. "Well, Sam, thanks a lot. And I'll certainly think of you if I want anything."

"Do that, Mrs. Trenton."

He had moved close again. His dark face with its slightly full, drooping mouth was smiling meaningly. A sudden glow swept through Lila. This man was young, attractive. And yet he obviously found her desirable. To think that girl had said she was old!

Sam Nolan was still gazing at her fixedly. Lila flushed. Then the color drained from her cheeks. Suddenly she realized what the boy was looking at. That eager covetous expression was not directed toward herself. His eyes were fixed, not on her face but on the string of pearls around her throat. Almost instinctively she moved toward the telephone.

"Well," she faltered, "what are you waiting for?"

The young man jerked his eyes away. "Sorry, Mrs. Trenton. Just daydreaming."

The door slipped shut behind him. Sam Nolan moved down the corridor with a hand thrust deep in his trousers pocket. Between his fingers he was gripping a key—the key to the back door of Mrs. Trenton's apartment.

IV

After he had gone, Lila felt the sensation of panic returning. *Why was he looking at my pearls?* she repeated time and time again in her mind. *Why was he looking at my pearls?* And then the words of the girl from the beauty parlor slid back into her thoughts—*You're getting old. You're getting old.*

She gave a little shiver and moved toward the fire as though its very warmth would bring comfort. She had reached the hearth before she noticed the hatchet. It was standing propped against the wall by a box of logs. The blade shone dully. Somehow, she could not tear her gaze from it. And yet it was just the wood hatchet, she told herself. The young man—Sam Nolan—he had brought it in from the balcony and hadn't taken it back. There was nothing to be afraid of.

Suddenly everything about the day seemed sinister to Lila Trenton. First there had been that scene with Larry—then the professor with his strange warning—the girl from the beauty parlor—and now this boy, Sam Nolan, with his queer looks and hints. Everyone was against her. They were jealous—that's what it

was—they were jealous because she had money, because she was still young and pretty.

For a moment Lila Trenton stood motionless, twisting her scarlet-nailed fingers. Then, as usual, she ran to the mirror for reassurance. With trembling fingers she pulled the towel from her hair. She was not old. She . . .

Lila Trenton's eyes widened. Her mouth dropped half open and hung there. Then she gave a strangled sob.

Half blind with panic, she rushed to the mirror in the bathroom. It gave her no comfort. The girl's words were ringing in her ears. "Before the boy friend comes take a good look at yourself!"

She stumbled to the telephone and swiftly, clumsily dialed a number. "Hello, is that the university? . . . I want to speak to Paul Trenton, please . . . Yes, yes, it's urgent—urgent! I need his help."

In the pause that followed Lila Trenton twisted the beads around her throat hysterically. Her voluptuous breasts were moving quickly, unevenly. She had never felt this way before—never. For the first time in her married life she was conscious of a desperate need for her husband. He would understand. He would comfort her.

"Hello, Paul, is that you? . . . Oh, you must come, darling. Come quickly. . . . Something awful has happened. I'm frightened—terribly frightened."

Gilbert Comroy thought he would never forget the look in Paul Trenton's eyes when he told him about the discontinuance of the Abel Foundation Fund. He had hoped desperately to raise the five thousand dollars so that his friend should never know. He had interviewed trustees, scientific organizations. He had even contemplated the money lenders. But there had been no success despite his efforts.

Trenton was not an expansive man. He never showed or spoke of his feelings. But Comroy had seen the brief instant of disappointment and frustration in his friend's eyes, the momentary droop of his mouth. He knew that something had been taken away from Paul Trenton, something which could never be replaced.

He had worked with Trenton at the university for nearly twenty-five years. He had seen him as an enthusiastic vital young man—had seen him through his disastrous marriage to Lila, through the years of his life with her during which her contemptuous selfishness had slowly, relentlessly turned him from an ambitious young scientist into a frail broken old man.

Comroy had watched the gradual change in his friend with a bitterness that held Lila wholly responsible. His dislike of her was the only violent element in his otherwise mellow placid existence.

He knew that Paul Trenton had given his all to the Abel research in a last desperate attempt to prove to himself and to Lila that he was not a failure. Results were near—success almost within his grasp. But

here—as in everything else—Lila Trenton had let him down.

Not only had she failed him, she had added petty insult to real injury. That afternoon she had called Paul back from the laboratory. That was typical of Lila. Even at the moment when she knew her husband had found the ground cut away from beneath him she had called him home—called him most likely to do some trivial errand for her.

And he had gone meekly! That was Paul's tragic weakness. He had never got over his blind infatuation for that useless heartless woman.

Although he looked as calm and benign as ever Gilbert Comroy felt hatred in his heart when, at seven-thirty that evening, he stood outside the Trenton's apartment at the Vandolan Hotel.

Paul Trenton's face was pale and drawn when he let him in. "I'll be ready in a few minutes, Comroy. Poor Lila's had quite a shock. She's in bed and there are just a few little things—" He broke off, hurrying back to his wife's bedroom. "She says she doesn't mind being left alone. We can go out to dinner. But she's very upset."

Comroy moved into the living room and stared around him moodily through his thick spectacles. From the open door he could hear his friend's voice, soothing, consolatory. "Don't worry, Lila, dear. Just stay in bed and drink all the fluids you can. Comroy and I won't be long. We'll be back by ten." There was a pause. Then, in a louder voice, "Ready, Comroy?"

"Yes, I'm ready when you are."

"Well, good night, dear." Trenton closed the door of his wife's bedroom.

As Comroy followed him out of the apartment his expression was placid but his thoughts were turbulent. For the first time in his benevolent life he was consciously wishing evil to a fellow creature—he was wishing fervently that Lila Trenton was dead.

Over dinner at the Davenham Grill Gilbert Comroy made no reference to the Abel Research Fund. He did his best to chat lightly about unimportant university topics. Trenton listened gravely but his mind was obviously straying. Once or twice Comroy had the impression that he was trying to tell him something but it was not until dinner was finished and they were smoking over coffee that he spoke. His drawn almost ethereal face had taken on a strange determination.

"There's something I want to tell you, Comroy. It's about the Abel research. I think that it can go on for awhile. At least we'll be able to get that new equipment."

"You mean you've raised some money?" asked Comroy, his plump face alight with pleasure.

"Well, hardly." Trenton's mouth twisted in a smile. "You see, I went to my doctor this morning. I've had pain for some months, but I've been busy, never had the time—" He broke off and added softly. "The doctor told me that it was too late to operate."

"Is—is it . . . ?"

Trenton nodded slowly. "Yes, cancer. It's just a matter of months —weeks, possibly. I've got a small insurance policy, Comroy. Just about three thousand dollars. I've left everything to the university. Fleming's a good man. He's been working with me and he could carry on. I think he might get what we want very soon."

"But, Paul, this is terrible!" Comroy felt a sudden constriction of the throat. "You mean there's no hope?"

"Don't worry about me." Trenton stirred his coffee slowly. "I've been pretty much of a failure. I admit it and now I don't care a great deal. If I felt that Fleming could complete the work with my money that's all I'd want. Lila has ample to support herself. And I think she would be willing to pay the funeral expenses."

"Don't talk that way, Paul." Comroy had gripped his friend's arm. "You never know. Tomorrow I'll go to the doctor with you. There's always—"

"No," said Trenton quietly. "I'm happy that it will solve the problem for us. Now let's forget about it. I'll order some brandy—a little luxury."

While they sat there, sipping old cognac, Comroy's mind was working feverishly—thinking of Lila Trenton. It was she who had done this. For years she had been taking advantage of Paul's almost reverent love for her. She had worn him down, neglected him. This morning she had willingly cut off his career. And now—now he realized that she had been letting him die before her very eyes.

"Another brandy, Comroy?"

"Yes, I think I will."

Trenton glanced up at the clock. "We've got plenty of time. But I'd like to get back at ten o'clock because poor Lila will be alone."

And so they sat together until ten o'clock, those two old friends, thinking their thoughts of life and death. But to the waiters and other diners they were just a couple of commonplace middle-aged men who could not possibly have anything interesting to say to each other. Just a pair of old fogies.

V

It was ten minutes after ten when finally Paul Trenton and Gilbert Comroy returned to the apartment. "Excuse me a moment," said Trenton, "I'll just look in the bedroom and see if Lila wants anything. Why don't you go into the kitchen and get yourself a highball? While you're at it mix me one too. You know where the refrigerator is."

Trenton moved to the door of his wife's bedroom and, tapping gently, murmured, "Lila, are you awake?"

Comroy made his way through the living room toward the kitchen. Lila Trenton! The image of the woman was still haunting him like an obsession. He glanced at his own reflection in the mirror and was startled at the pallor of his face. God grant he would not have to see her again tonight! If she were there in front of him, he thought sud-

denly, he could not answer for what he would say—or do.

When Paul Trenton hurried anxiously toward the kitchen a few seconds later, Comroy's ample figure was blocking the doorway. His shoulders were bent, his hands hanging limply at his sides.

"Is Lila there?" asked Trenton. "She's not in her room. I'm worried. I can't seem to—"

"She's here." Comroy's cheeks, usually pink and unlined, were now a rough parchment ivory. "She's here!"

Slowly he moved aside. The two friends stood together in the doorway, Comroy peering shortsightedly forward, Trenton pressing against the woodwork in a kind of trance that held him motionless.

The kitchen was in a state of utter chaos. The glass panel in the back door leading to the balcony and fire escape was shattered. The door of the refrigerator had been flung open. And on the floor, with a hatchet at her side and surrounded by sharp splinters of glass, lay Lila Trenton. She was hunched in an awkward ugly posture across the gray linoleum. The diaphanous pink wrap was torn and spattered with red. Around her head was a wide crimson pool. But there was one thing—one thing which added a final touch of macabre horror to that ghastly scene.

Her tangled untidy hair was not of the auburn tint which Lila Trenton had so carefully and expensively preserved. It gleamed in the hard illumination from the ceiling light *—and it gleamed green, a dull metallic green.*

For a second neither of the men spoke. Then Paul Trenton stumbled forward and knelt shakily at his wife's side. His head was against the crumpled pink silk that covered her left breast.

"She's dead, Comroy," he whispered tonelessly. "You'd better call the police."

The little professor did not seem to hear. He was clasping his hands in front of him and gazing at the twisted body at his feet with glazed eyes.

"The police, Comroy." Once more Trenton's voice rose, swift, agitated. "And call a doctor to make sure there's no hope. *Quick!*"

Comroy seemed to gather his wits with an effort. Throwing a last glance at Lila Trenton he turned and hurried into the living room. In the shock of what had happened his mind was confused with a thousand terrible thoughts. Visions of Lila Trenton swept before his eyes—visions of her as he had seen her that morning in the pink dressing gown—visions of the hatchet and of the scarlet pools on the linoleum.

"The telephone," he found himself repeating half aloud. "The telephone. I must call the police, the police—and a doctor."

As he reached the passage which led toward the front door he saw something which at first his numbed senses could not take in. The door of the hall closet was opening slowly. He paused and looked over the top of his spectacles. A man

in a gray hat and raincoat had slipped from the closet and was moving swiftly toward the front door.

The sight of another living creature, appearing however unexpectedly, instantly banished the nightmare images from Professor Comroy's mind and brought him back to reality.

"Stop!" he called. "There's been a murder done."

The man's hand clutched the front doorknob. He swung round, his young face pale with fear. *"Murder!"* he gasped.

He stood motionless for a second as though unable to make up his mind what to do. Then, as Comroy hurried purposefully toward him, he threw open the front door and started to run out.

Comroy could not see what happened next but he heard a woman's voice exclaiming sharply, "Get back in there, Larry." And while the professor's fingers moved toward the receiver of the hall telephone the young man backed up the passage, followed by a girl. The lines of her face were set and determined. In her gloved hand she held a revolver.

Comroy watched her shut the front door slowly behind her and point the gun at the young man. "I knew you'd be here, Larry. I had to come too. I wanted to be sure that nothing would happen." Her gaze flicked to Comroy and instantly her gray eyes faltered. "Who—who are you?"

"I have no idea what all this is about," Comroy said calmly. "Mrs. Trenton has been murdered and I'm just about to telephone for the police."

"Murdered!" The girl's lips turned pale. Slowly she moved the revolver so that it was aimed at the very center of the professor's expansive vest. "Stay where you are," she said softly. "If you use that telephone I'll shoot."

Her eyes flashed back to the young man. "So I was too late. You *did* do it—did kill her, Larry!"

Larry Graves did not seem conscious of what was going on. He was looking at the girl dazedly. "I waited around the garage all evening, Claire. I hoped you'd call but you didn't. I guess it was crazy for me to come here. But nothing seemed to matter and I knew there was only one way to clear up this mess."

"Oh, I'm not blaming you." Claire French's voice was swift, breathless. "But you've got to get away. The police will soon be here. You've got to go."

"But you don't think that I—"

"What's the use? There's no need to lie to me, Larry. But I'm for you. Don't you understand that?"

Both the young people seemed to have forgotten the professor, although the girl was still pointing the gun at him. Gilbert Comroy watched them closely, understanding gradually dawning on his face.

So he was not the only person who had wanted Lila Trenton dead. There were other lives besides her husband's in which she had been a destructive influence.

"Get out of the country, Larry,"

the girl was whispering. "The midnight train to Canada. I'll keep this man quiet—stop him calling the police until you've gone. Only hurry."

Larry Grave's square-cut face broke into an expression of grateful relief.

"Claire, you mean you can forgive me for . . . ?"

"Oh, Larry, how can anything like that matter now?" She broke off and then, impulsively, she laid her hand on his arm. "If you get away I'll follow. I'll find you wherever you are."

"But you don't think I would leave you here alone!"

Claire turned on him impatiently, almost fiercely. "Go, you fool, while there is yet time! *Go!*"

For a moment the young man stood gazing at her irresolutely. Then he turned and hurried out, closing the door behind him, leaving Comroy alone with Claire French.

After Larry had gone the girl passed a weary hand across her eyes. Professor Comroy regarded her face thoughtfully through his spectacles.

"Well, this is a most extraordinary affair," he said. "It is my duty to call the police, you know. Do you still intend to prevent me from doing so with that revolver?"

The girl continued to menace him with her gun. "I suppose you're her husband."

"Lila Trenton's husband!" The professor's mouth moved in a slight smile. "Heaven preserve me—*no!* I'm sure it would be idle to ask whether you or your friend committed this murder. I do think I am entitled to some explanation."

"I'm sorry—I can't tell you anything." Claire French's lips tightened. For a moment she was silent. The she added suddenly, "But there's one thing I do know. If Larry did kill her she deserved it. She was a wicked despicable person. She had no right to live."

"Sh-h!" The professor glanced over his shoulder as faint sounds came to them through the living room from the kitchen. Then, to the girl's utter astonishment, his smile returned. "My dear," he said softly, "I agree with you absolutely."

"You mean . . ."

"I mean that it might be a very good plan if you were to put that revolver back in your bag and leave the Vandolan Hotel as quickly as possible." Gilbert Comroy crossed his hands over his vest. "The police have been kept waiting as it is. I feel they can wait a little longer."

Claire was looking into his sympathetic eyes and, before she knew what she was doing, she had poured out the full story of Larry's relationship with Lila—the instinct of jealousy which had led her to go and see Mrs. Trenton that afternoon—and the scene which had taken place between her and the other woman.

"It was crazy of me," she concluded, "but Mrs. Trenton's the kind of person who'd make anyone do crazy things. That's why I came back tonight. I realized she'd be furious and make things worse for Larry.

I've got to save him somehow. So you will help me?"

The professor did not speak for a moment. "It may be difficult. Even if neither of you—er—killed Mrs. Trenton it's rash to run about with guns and hide in closets. In a civilized world you can't turn life into melodrama without getting into trouble."

"I'm so grateful—"

"Oh, don't be grateful, my dear." Behind his spectacles the professor's eyes were benevolent. "It's unconventional of me to say this. But I feel Lila Trenton's death is—a benefit to society and I do not want any one to suffer for it. Now you'd better hurry up and go. Mr. Trenton is still in the kitchen. He may not feel the same as I do."

As he spoke, there were slow footsteps in the living room. Paul Trenton appeared, looking very gray and ill. He was holding a hand to his side and his eyes were glazed. He did not seem to notice the girl.

Swiftly Claire slipped the revolver into her pocketbook and moved to the door. Then, as her fingers touched the knob, she gave a little gasp and stepped backward. Some one was knocking loudly.

The sound seemed to bring Paul Trenton back to the reality of the moment. As a swift glance passed between Claire and the professor he hurried to the door and swung it open. "Are you the doctor?" he asked eagerly.

A policeman stood on the threshold. "Mr. Trenton? Is anything wrong here? I'm Patrolman Davis."

"Why—er . . ." Trenton seemed unable to form the words.

"The hotel detective arrested a man on the fire escape," continued the policeman as he stepped into the hall. "Sam Nolan—he was an electrician around here—and for some time they've had their suspicions here that he was a thief.

"I was called in when the house detective found Nolan on the fire escape, injured. He had a valuable pearl necklace in his pocket and also the key to the back door of this apartment. He's being held downstairs. I came up to find out if you'd missed anything?"

"I'm afraid it's not merely a question of missing things," murmured Comroy. "A murder has been committed. You'd better come, look things over and take charge."

The policeman hurried after Comroy to the kitchen. There Comroy swiftly outlined the details of their discovery. For an instant the policeman gazed at the dead body of Lila Trenton. Then he snapped, "Have you called the police?"

"Er—not yet. I was just going to when you came."

The policeman moved back to the hall and for the next few minutes replied rapidly to questions from the other end of the wire. At length he hung up the receiver.

"Captain Lee will be around right away," he said. "Meanwhile, no one's to leave the apartment. It looks as if Nolan did it but we can't take chances." His eyes rested on Claire. "How about the young lady? Did she come in with you?"

Comroy looked momentarily nonpulsed. "No, Miss—er—she had dropped in to see Mrs. Trenton just before you arrived. Naturally she didn't know anything about the murder."

The policeman grunted.

"Perhaps," continued Comroy, "it would be all right for her to leave."

"Sorry—you'll all have to stay."

As the policeman spoke Paul Trenton gave a little groan and doubled forward. Instantly Comroy was at his side.

"He's a sick man," he explained, "and it's been a terrible shock. Paul, can I do anything?"

"Tablets," gasped Trenton. "Green bottle in the bathroom."

As Comroy hurried away the policeman lifted Trenton's slight body and carried him into his bedroom. When the professor returned Claire was standing by the bedside.

"I'll stay with him," she said.

Leaving the girl with Trenton Comroy and the policeman returned to the kitchen. Where before the professor had been numbed and stupefied by the shock of that grisly scene his mind was now clear. While the policeman's eyes darted around the room he stood on the threshold, thinking.

"Look at that hair!" exclaimed the policeman.

Watching carefully where he stepped he moved to the body and, tilting forward the grotesquely coiffured head of Lila Trenton, revealed an ugly wound on the back of the skull. Instantly his gaze flashed to the stained hatchet at her side.

"Easy to see how it was done," he muttered.

"The pearls are gone," put in Comroy. "She was wearing them the last time I saw her alive."

"I guess that puts Nolan on the spot."

The professor was looking down at the broken fragments of glass which strewed the floor. Gingerly he turned one of them over with his foot.

"Don't touch anything," snapped the policeman.

"Looks like part of a pitcher," said Comroy reflectively, "and there are some drops of fluid still in it—tomato juice, I think. That explains the open refrigerator door. Mrs. Trenton had a cold and was taking a liquid diet. She must have been getting some tomato juice when she was attacked."

The policeman glanced quickly at the piece of glass and then at the refrigerator. "Yeah. Looks that way. Nolan must have come in through the back door with the key, picked up the hatchet and hit her from behind while she was still pouring the tomato juice. It's all over the floor."

Gilbert Comroy had moved almost fussily to the back door and was gazing through the smashed glass panel. "This is extraordinary."

"What?"

"You said Nolan had a key to this door." Gilbert Comroy looked thoughtful. "Surely, if he had the key, he wouldn't have bothered to

break the glass in the panel in order to get in."

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean," said Comroy, shaking his head sadly, "I mean that I believe you are suspecting quite the wrong person."

The policeman's eyes narrowed. "Well, we'll soon see. But whoever did it, it's a pretty nasty piece of work."

"Oh, undoubtedly, it's—terrible."

Professor Comroy took out a handkerchief and wiped the shiny skin of his forehead.

Poor Lila, he was thinking. And for the first time he felt some vestige of pity for this woman he had always hated. How ironical that she, who had always lived for her appearance, should die like this, with her negligée torn and stained, her face distorted and ugly, her hair so grotesquely discolored.

VI

With the arrival of Captain Lee and his men the Trentons' apartment became a scene of professional activity. The captain hurried into the kitchen, accompanied by the medical examiner, the fingerprint man and the police photographers. Comroy and Claire French were taken to Lila's bedroom to await questioning. Only one room was quiet, that of Paul Trenton, who had yielded to the narcotic effect of the tablets and fallen into an uneasy sleep.

At length the body of Lila Trenton was removed and a policeman summoned Professor Comroy into the living room. Captain Lee sat at a table. He was a quiet middle-aged man with alert eyes and broad shoulders.

"Well, professor," he said with a smile. "I didn't realize who you were at first. My son is in your chemistry class at the university. He thinks the world of you. Too bad we should meet in such unpleasant circumstances."

"Too bad indeed."

The professor drew up a chair and outlined the salient facts of his discovery, omitting to mention either Claire French or Larry Graves.

Lee listened keenly. When Comroy had finished he said, "Doctor Jones made a cursory examination. From the congealing of the blood and rigidity of the limbs, he thinks Mrs. Trenton died between nine-fifteen and ten. That means she was probably killed a very short while before you and Mr. Trenton found the body."

"She died instantaneously?" asked the professor.

"Doesn't need an autopsy to tell us that. Her skull was crushed like an eggshell. Of course this looks like a pretty clear case against Nolan. He was caught with the pearls a few minutes before ten. I haven't had a chance to talk to him yet because he sprained his ankle trying to get away and a doctor is still fixing it. But before I see him there are just a few things I'd like cleared up. I suppose I can't talk to Mr. Trenton tonight?"

"He's a very sick man," said the professor gravely, "but I think I can

tell you anything you want to know."

"Well, Mrs. Trenton was well off. I happen to know that. Do you know how she left her money?"

"As I understand from something Trenton once said," replied Comroy reflectively, "his wife made no will. She liked to think of herself as younger than she really was and I believe she felt making a will suggested age. Of course, if she died intestate, the money, or a good share of it, goes to her husband."

"I see." Captain Lee glanced at his hands. "And you were with Mr. Trenton all evening? It wouldn't have been possible for him to—"

"Quite impossible." The professor shook his head emphatically. "Mrs. Trenton was alive when we left here at seven-thirty and we were together every moment until we returned. You say she was killed before ten. We were just leaving the restaurant at that time."

"No family quarrel, I suppose?"

Comroy's eyes grew cold. "Paul Trenton was always devoted to his wife."

"Just another matter." Lee's gaze was still fixed on the professor's face. "You say you arrived here at about ten minutes past ten. The police were not notified until ten-thirty. Why did those twenty minutes elapse?"

The professor removed his spectacles and began to wipe them thoughtfully. "Naturally, we were both rather upset by our discovery. But I did hurry to call you. Unfortunately Miss French arrived just as I was about to lift the receiver."

"What did she want?"

"I really don't know. To call on Mrs. Trenton, I suppose. But I didn't care to tell her about the tragedy. I was trying to get her to leave when the policeman arrived to report about Nolan's arrest." The color in his face deepened. "That's why there was a delay."

The captain nodded slowly and glanced at the policeman by the door. "If the doctor's through with Nolan you can bring him up."

"I was wondering," remarked the professor, "whether you would permit me to stay for this interview. Being an old friend of the family I am naturally interested."

"Sure you can stay, professor—only too pleased. Perhaps you can learn something you don't teach at the university."

When he hobbled in with the officer Sam Nolan was a very different person from the self-assured impudent young man who had attended to Lila Trenton's refrigerator and hearth that afternoon. His youthful face had lost its easy grin. His dark eyes seemed strained.

"Well, Nolan," said the captain curtly, "you're in a pretty tough spot. Are you going to talk? Of course you needn't if you don't want to. It's up to you."

The young man lowered his head and said nothing.

"You took that back-door key when you fixed the refrigerator, didn't you?"

Sam Nolan's eyes shifted uneasily. And still didn't say anything.

"And tonight you came up the fire escape to steal those pearls. You let yourself in with the key and killed Mrs. Trenton."

"I didn't kill her!" Sam Nolan's voice was dull and toneless.

"What's the use? You had the pearls on you. You—"

"Might I interrupt for a moment?" put in the professor mildly. "I'd like to ask the young man a question."

Captain Lee's eyes widened slightly but he shrugged assent.

"Tell me this." Comroy looked over his spectacles at Nolan. "Was the glass panel in the back door broken when you came up the fire escape?"

"Why, yes—sure it was."

"I thought so." The professor trned his solemn gaze to Lee. "We all know this man had a key to the back door."

"You think someone else broke that panel and got into the kitchen?"

"That is a possibility."

"I'm afraid you're going a bit scientific on us, professor." Lee's voice was slightly sarcastic as he added, "If you didn't kill Mrs. Trenton, Nolan, maybe you can tell us what happened."

"If I did, you wouldn't believe me." A look of fear came into Nolan's eyes. Then he shook the dark hair from his forehead and continued fiercely, "But it's God's truth. Yeah, I did steal that key. And I did come up the fire escape to get them pearls. What's the good of saying I didn't? But there's one thing I didn't do. I didn't bump her off. When I got into that kitchen she was dead already."

"Ah!" exclaimed the professor.

"Yeah. When I got up onto the balcony, the kitchen was all dark. But I wasn't taking no chances. I flashed my light in before I unlocked the door. And she was there on the floor, lying with blood all over her and that—that green hair."

Sam Nolan looked very young and very frightened. "At first," he went on, "I was going to scram just as quick as I could. I didn't want to get mixed up in no murder. But I could see them pearls sort of gleaming on her neck. Although I was scared I thought I might as well get 'em. I went in and lifted them. And—and then, as I was bending over her, I heard someone open the front door and call out 'Lila,' so I beat it."

Lee looked interested. "You're sure of that? Was it a man?"

"Yes, a young man. He sounded kind of excited."

"And then?" put in the professor.

Sam Nolan gripped the arms of his chair. "You won't believe it. I know you won't. But it's the truth, I swear it. After I was out on the fire escape, I flashed my torch back in, just for a last look." He paused, and added almost inaudibly, "Mrs. Trenton was still there on the floor but she was moving.

"At first I thought it was just my eyes and the light and everything, because I knew she was dead. But she moved again. Sort of turned as if she was going to come after me. God, it was awful. I couldn't do

anything, not run, not move—nothing! I could see that green hair and the blood all over her clothes. And she'd been dead, I tell you—*dead!*"

Slowly Sam Nolan's hands slipped to his sides. "Then I guess I lost my nerve and started to run like hell. On the fire escape I slipped and turned my ankle. It hurt so, I let out a yell, like a damn fool. That's how the house dick got me."

There was a moment's silence. Then Captain Lee smiled wearily. "As a story, Nolan, that's not so hot. You say Mrs. Trenton was dead when you came in and the doctor says she was killed instantaneously. She couldn't possibly have moved."

"But I tell you it's true. Honest, that's what happened."

"Davis!" Lee glanced at the policeman by the door. "Get Mallory to take this bird down to the station house. I'll talk to him again later."

Sam Nolan made no resistance as the policeman slipped on the handcuffs. He rose dazedly and limped out of the room with Mallory.

"These small-time crooks," exclaimed Lee, "when it comes to faking a story they have an imagination of a louse."

Professor Comroy's round face was thoughtful. Absently he tapped a button on his vest. "Of course," he murmured, "one cannot go against the medical evidence. The boy must have been suffering from some sort of hallucination. But wasn't it possible that the body was being moved by some one he could not see? After all, he said he heard a voice in the next room."

"Well, if he isn't lying, I'd like to know who that man was. It couldn't have been you or Mr. Trenton because it all happened before ten o'clock." Lee turned to the officer. "I'll see the girl now."

Claire French was very pale when she entered. She clutched her pocketbook firmly and her eyes turned swiftly to Comroy, trying to guess how much he had told. She was reassured by an infinitesimal movement of the professor's eyelid.

"Well, Miss French," began Lee, "there are a few routine questions."

Claire nodded.

"Professor Comroy tells me you arrived here just as he was going to call the police. You had come to see Mrs. Trenton?"

"You were a friend of hers?"

"No—I was not."

"Then why . . ."

Claire bit her lip. "I own a beauty parlor a few blocks away. This afternoon I came round at Mrs. Trenton's request. It was the first time I had attended to her hair. She asked for a touch-up and I used a henna compound. It was not until later that I remembered that this compound, if used on hair that's been dyed already, turns it a sort of greenish color. I was very worried and came to—er—find out if anything of this sort had happened."

"So that explains the color of the hair," mused Lee. "But why didn't you realize your mistake when you were here this afternoon?"

"Oh, Mrs. Trenton wanted to dry her hair herself. The discoloration

wouldn't show until after the hair was dry."

"And that was your only reason for coming here tonight?"

Claire inclined her head slowly.

"All right, Miss French. That will be all for the moment."

Swiftly Claire French rose. As she did so the pocketbook slipped from her lap and fell to the floor with a heavy thud. She bent instantly to retrieve it but Captain Lee was too quick for her. His lips tightened as his fingers gripped the soft material and flicked open the catch. For a second there was absolute silence.

Then he said slowly, "If you were merely going to discuss hairdressing with Mrs. Trenton was it necessary to bring a revolver?"

Comroy flashed the girl a warning glance but she did not seem to notice. Her gray eyes fixed the captain's in a level stare.

"I lied to you," she said calmly. "I did use the wrong henna compound but it wasn't a mistake. I'm afraid I gave way to a thoroughly spiteful instinct."

"And the revolver—was that a spiteful instinct."

"No." Claire's face had gone cold. "That was more serious. I came here tonight to threaten and, if necessary, to kill Mrs. Trenton."

For the first time that evening Captain Lee seemed shaken out of his official composure. He was still gazing at the girl in speechless astonishment when there were swift noises in the hall and a policeman hurried in.

"There's a guy out here who—"

He broke off as Larry Graves pushed past him and strode to Claire's side.

"Larry!" the girl swung around on him almost fiercely. "You *fool!* I told you to go. Why—*why* did you come back?"

"Did you think I'd leave you here? I waited for you downstairs. But you didn't come. Then I saw the police arrive. I had to see if you were all right."

"What is all this about?" asked Lee sharply.

Larry was standing very close to Claire. "I don't want Miss French mixed up in this. She hasn't anything to do with it. She didn't even know Mrs. Trenton."

"She seemed to know her well enough to fix her hair and then want to kill her."

"If she said she wanted to kill her it was a lie, just a crazy attempt to shield me." Larry lighted a cigarette with fingers that shook. "You see, she thinks I killed Lila Trenton. Of course I didn't but—"

"Why does she think you killed Mrs. Trenton?" Lee asked quickly.

"Because I was here in the apartment tonight."

"So it was you who came here just before ten?"

"Yes. I had a key. Mrs. Trenton gave it to me this morning." Larry produced the key from the pocket of his raincoat and tossed it across the table. "I might as well tell you exactly what happened. When I let myself in the apartment was in darkness. I called Mrs. Trenton's name but she didn't answer. I

thought she was out, so I turned on the light in the living room and waited for her there."

"Did you look for her in the kitchen?"

"Why—no. The door was shut. I never thought about it."

"Did you hear anything?"

"No."

"And how long did you wait?" The question was sharp.

Larry jerked his head toward the professor. "Until that man and Mr. Trenton arrived. Then I hid in a closet in the hall. I waited till they had gone into the kitchen and ran on out."

Captain Lee turned to the professor, who was tapping mildly on his chair arm. "Do you know anything about this?"

"Why—er—perhaps I may have heard a scuffling sound but I was very upset at the time. And then I am slightly myopic. I . . ."

The detective did not appear to be listening. Once more he was addressing Larry Graves. "That's the third unlikely story I've heard in this place tonight. You don't expect me to believe it?"

"Of course—it's the truth."

"Well, then, there's one thing you haven't explained. Why did you come to see Mrs. Trenton tonight?"

The lines of Larry's face were set and resolute. He was speaking to Claire rather than the captain and, without knowing it, he used almost exactly the same words as she had used. "I came here," he said slowly, "to threaten Mrs. Trenton and, if necessary, to kill her."

VII

After these two dramatic confessions, Captain Lee had no alternative but to take Larry Graves and Claire French to the Police Station for further questioning. At length Gilbert Comroy was left alone. He had pleaded the necessity of spending the night with his friend and promised to make himself available the next morning.

When the door closed behind the captain the professor gave a sigh of relief and crossed to one of Lila's mirrors. For the first time in his life he was eager to see his own face. There should, he felt, be some radical change in his appearance, for he was not used to lying. And he had been telling or acting a lie the whole evening.

The plump benevolent countenance which looked back at him seemed much the same as usual. "Well, well," murmured Gilbert Comroy, "I ought to be thoroughly ashamed of myself."

But he wasn't.

He tiptoed to his friend's bedroom and silently opened the door. Paul Trenton was still asleep. One shaded lamp played on his sallow face, smoothing from it the lines of pain and leaving only peace and serenity. Softly Professor Comroy crept to a chair and sat down.

The hours passed. The clock in the living room chimed two—three—four—five.

Once during the night the professor's round eyes closed like a sleepy owl's but he shook them open again and moved into the bathroom

for a glass of water to keep him awake.

The pale rays of the February dawn were filtering through the shades when Paul Trenton finally stirred. He moved his head on the pillow and murmured, "Lila."

Comroy jumped up. "How do you feel, Paul?"

"Gilbert! It's you." A look of remembered pain had come into Trenton's eyes. "Poor Lila. Did they find out . . ."

"Don't worry, Paul." Gilbert Comroy bustled out of the room and returned shortly, carrying a cup of tea. "Drink this. It'll make you feel better."

As he passed the cup, the hot liquid spilled over into the saucer. "Tut!" he exclaimed. "What a mess I've made!"

Paul accepted the tea gratefully. "Do you know, Gilbert," he said suddenly, "this is the first time I've had a cup of tea in bed since I was a boy."

While he drank it Comroy told him, as gently as he could, everything that had happened the night before. Trenton nodded sadly. "Poor Lila," he said at length. "So both those young people wished her out of the way."

"The man Nolan is under suspicion, too."

"Well, I only hope an innocent person will not be convicted."

"Don't worry, my friend. Innocent people are very seldom convicted, despite popular prejudice to the contrary."

"Poor Lila," murmured Trenton again, and his voice was very low. "She was such a pretty girl. And now she's dead. Died before me, after all. Do you have any ideas about it, Gilbert?"

"Yes."

"You suspect one of those three people?"

"No." Comroy took the empty cup from his friend's hand and set it down on the bed table.

"Things will take their course, Paul, and there's nothing much that we can do about it. I may be an old meddler, but I did tell Captain Lee my own reasons for thinking that two of those three young people were not guilty of murder. Eventually, I feel sure, any grand jury would be forced to the same conclusion and not indict them."

Almost without realizing it Comroy had started to speak as though he were discussing a scientific experiment in the laboratory rather than the death of his friend's wife.

"Obviously there will be no serious charge against Miss French other than carrying a revolver and obstructing justice in a rather theatrical attempt to help the young man. She arrived at the apartment *after* the murder had been committed. Doubtless she will come to her senses and furnish an alibi for her actions before ten. And although I am no expert criminologist I cannot help thinking that guilty people are not so eager to admit that they had guilty intentions.

"That is also true in the case of Larry Graves. He came back when there was no need to come back.

Besides, from Nolan's story, it can be proved that Lila was already dead when Graves first let himself into the apartment."

Gilbert Comroy rose and drew the shades so that the early-morning light struck across his friend's bed.

"I have no particular sympathy with Nolan," he went on. "A man who steals from a dead body deserves the prison sentence which he will most certainly get. But I do not think him guilty of the more serious charge. There was something about him as he told his tale last night which made me feel he was speaking the truth.

"And there is one real piece of evidence in his favor, the broken panel in the glass door. Nolan had a key—he was an experienced thief—he would never have broken that glass at the risk of being heard. No, it was broken by someone else, by the person who really did kill Lila."

"And who was that person?"

"I hope that the coroner's jury will reach the only acceptable conclusion." Gilbert Comroy was looking curiously at his friend. "That your wife was killed by another prowler—one who broke into the kitchen before Nolan arrived. A prowler who, I trust, will always be described in the official records as person or persons unknown."

There was a long silence. At length Paul said irrelevantly, "It is curious that Lila was willing to lend that young man five thousand dollars when she would not make a loan to help us continue our work at the university."

"But you have money now, Paul," put in Comroy gently. "You will be able to finish your research."

Trenton smiled sadly. "Yes, if there's time."

"Nonsense, of course there will be time. To live and the will to live are closely bound together, Paul."

"Perhaps," said Trenton dreamily. "And there is always Fleming. He's a good man. At least the university will benefit by all this unhappy business. But those two young people. Gilbert—they are going to have a hard time."

"A hard time works wonders when you are young and in love. They'd had a pretty serious misunderstanding—this will bring them together."

"I hope," continued Trenton quietly, "that you, as my executor, will consider the garage a good investment and continue the loan. I do not want them to suffer."

Once more the bedroom was strangely quiet. At length Gilbert Comroy spoke: "Paul, I must be frank with you. I have another reason for being certain that none of those three people killed your wife. You see—I *know* who really did it."

"You mean you don't believe in that 'unknown prowler,' Gilbert?"

"Officially yes—actually no. Of course, I have taken a great deal of liberty with the truth. And I have a certain amount of responsibility on my shoulders. But while I sat here during the night I gave the matter much thought. I am sure I

was justified in everything I did. Can you bear the truth, Paul?"

"As a scientist the truth should be one thing I can always face." Trenton smiled wanly as he sank back on the pillows and regarded his friend with questioning eyes.

The professor was cleaning his spectacles. "The medical examiner stated Lila died instantly from a blow which was struck before ten o'clock. He was right and there is no need to question his statement."

"Yes?"

"But there was something that the medical examiner could not tell. This crime—as I suppose it must be called—did not begin at ten, Paul. It had already started much earlier in the evening."

Trenton was still looking at him fixedly.

"Sam Nolan told a seemingly incredible tale but it happens to be true. He did see Lila lying there on the kitchen floor at ten o'clock. And he did see her move."

"Poor Lila!" echoed Trenton tonelessly. "I do hope she didn't suffer."

"Sam Nolan said he saw her lying dead and covered with blood—just as you and I saw her later. But it is easy to deceive the eye. Lila was not dead when Nolan stole the pearls. She was unconscious. And he did not see blood. He merely saw—tomato juice."

"Comroy!"

"Yes," continued the professor calmly, "earlier in the evening Lila was struck with what is usually referred to as a blunt instrument. Let us suppose that in this case it was the flat side of the hatchet. The blow was hard enough to keep her unconscious for a long time. But it did not kill her and it did not draw blood. If there had been blood the medical examiner could have told at once that she had been wounded earlier. But in this case there was no means of guessing."

Trenton's lips parted slightly but he did not speak.

"The man who struck Lila," went on Comroy after a pause, "knew that he would be returning to the apartment later with a witness. He decided that he and the witness should find Lila apparently dead. Therefore he poured tomato juice over the floor and over the unconscious body—tomato juice which would give a convincing impression of blood at first sight and which could later be explained away by the fact that Lila was about to take some fruit juice from the refrigerator at the moment of her death."

"And then?"

"The tableau was set. He returned with the witness—and a shortsighted one at that. They found Lila lying there and the witness was sent to telephone the police." The eyes behind Professor Comroy's spectacles were closed. He was not looking at his friend.

"While the witness was out of the room he completed what he had begun with a blow of the hatchet—a blow which must have killed instantaneously. The medical examiner—even after an autopsy—could not have told that she had been unconscious for over two hours before

she was killed. But the rigidity of the muscles would incline him to set the time of death earlier than it actually occurred.

"A lucky occurrence and one which gave both you and myself an unshakable alibi. If any one were suspected it would be the imaginary prowler, the man who had broken through the glass panel in the door."

"And yet," said Trenton softly, "the man who killed poor Lila could not have foreseen that, instead of an imaginary prowler, there would be a real one. And then those two young people complicated things."

"They did." Comroy looked long and closely into his friend's eyes. "I guessed almost at once, Paul, but only by instinct. No one else will guess. And yet I am still curious—curious to know what exactly it was that made you decide yesterday to kill your selfish wife."

Paul Trenton did not speak immediately. His worn face had a strange faraway expression. "It is difficult to tell exactly why one does things, Gilbert. For years now I've known about Lila—known that she despised me, that there were other men, that—well, I need hardly go into her shortcomings now. About the five thousand dollars to young Graves. But in spite of everything she was an attractive woman. I still thought I loved her. It was only yesterday that I realized I had been blinding myself."

"But what was it that changed you, Paul?"

"When Lila called me back from the university in the afternoon, I'd had two terrible shocks. I had heard about the Abel research and I'd been to see my doctor. I suppose that in itself was enough to make any one deviate slightly from the normal.

"And then, when I got home, I saw Lila with that horrible dyed hair and her face lined and distorted with anger. It's strange how important little things can be. I think it was that one stupid detail which shifted my whole point of view. Suddenly I seemed to realize that she wasn't young any more—wasn't attractive."

Comroy was listening in rapt attention.

"We were together in the kitchen," continued Trenton, "and all the time she was talking indignantly about some girl from a beauty shop. I could think of nothing except that one fact—*She isn't attractive any more.*

"She wanted to start a lawsuit, spend money to satisfy some little quirk of her vanity. And then, when I wouldn't take it seriously, she told me about your visit and started sneering at my work. I tried to tell her what the doctor had said but she was too busy to listen—too busy telling me how weak I was, what a failure I'd been.

"She said something—I can't remember what—but suddenly I lost control. Hardly knowing what I was doing I picked up the hatchet and hit her. I meant to kill her, Comroy, but I've always been a bit of a bungler, I suppose I must have used the flat of the blade."

"You meant to kill her! So you had planned nothing deliberately?"

"No, I did nothing deliberate. And I really thought I *had* killed her. It was merely a vague instinct of self-preservation which made me break the panel in the door and pretend to talk to her in the bedroom when you arrived a few minutes later. The tomato juice was just a coincidence. She had it in her hand when I struck her."

"So when you and I found her there in the kitchen—you still thought she was dead?"

Trenton nodded. "It was only later—after you had gone to telephone the police—that I felt her heart still beating. At first I was glad. But then I realized that if she lived I'd be charged with attempted murder. That's why I struck her the second time."

For a moment there was deep silence. When Trenton spoke again, his voice seemed to come from far-away.

"I thought I was a scientist," he said musingly, "a man whose passions and emotions were nicely under control. But there are some things we don't learn in laboratories—and one of them is how very human and frail we all are."

"There is always a lot to learn about ourselves, Paul. I never dreamed that you would do what you did and I never dreamed that I would be a willing accessory after the fact."

The light was brighter now. It played on those two middle-aged men sitting together and regarding one another solemnly. Paul Trenton turned his face toward the sunlight.

"It's strange," he murmured. "Somehow I don't feel any remorse for what I have done. People like Lila do not give happiness. Nor can they get it themselves. However, I am human enough to wish that I might not be punished until after my work is finished."

"But no one will ever suspect you, Paul." Gilbert Comroy moved to his friend's bed and laid a hand gently on his shoulder. "By a series of coincidences you have given yourself a flawless alibi."

"But you must tell the truth, Gilbert—and so must I. I am little better than a dead man. The doctor told me I had but a few weeks more to live and there is an unmistakable feeling within me that tells me I am all but dead now. No one living must suffer because of me. If they do not find out who really murdered Lila before I am gone I will leave a written confession and put it in your care."

"You can trust me, Paul. Write your confession—but unless it is absolutely necessary I shall never dare to use it."

"And why not?"

"Because you might set a precedent, Paul." The professor's voice was so low that his friend could not hear. "There are many husbands in the world and many Lilas. I believe that unintentionally you have stumbled upon the perfect method of killing a wife."

take your lunch

by . . . Luke Short

Big-city detectives don't have to be tougher than small-town plain-clothesmen, but now and then like Cernowitz they're a shade smarter.

WHEN DETECTIVE CERNOWITZ came into the chief's office that morning, following a toothpick cocked at a sober angle, he got a surly greeting. That made eight in a row, he thought, and even to an insensitive man, which Cernie was not, it was obvious that the chief didn't love him. Nobody loved him in this hick town.

He said, "Hiya, Chief," and went over to the sergeant's desk. "What's new?" he said to Payne.

"Nothing that Hohmann and Keefer can't handle," Payne said.

The chief laughed at that, and Cernie nodded thoughtfully. Hohmann and Keefer were the other two detectives. Cernie was the third on the Mapleton force. The difference between the three of them, however, was considerable.

Hohmann and Keefer were local boys. Cernie was a loan-out from the city, the result of a decision made by an irate city council, sick of a minor crime-wave and sicker of its bumbling police force. They had ordered the chief to ask nearby Cleveland for the loan of a good man to teach them modern methods. Cernie, with a wife and two kids who could use some green grass and

To see the by-line Luke Short attached to a detective story is to realize that the curse of modern complexity, specialization, has invaded the field of authorship along with just about everything else. For Luke Short, lo, this past decade, has become justly and widely famed as one of our leading practitioners of the Western novel. But in acquiring this profitable specialty Mr. Short deprived non-Western readers of one of the best mystery writers in the business, as this story plainly shows.

country scenery for a change, had volunteered to go.

He was sorry now. They called him "the Slicker" and rode him all the time and walked out of the room when he made a suggestion. The chief had him chasing down stolen tires and busting up kids' ball games and Cernie wanted the summer to end. Quick.

The chief said, "There was a stickup last night. Some punk that works in the Roseland ballroom was carrying the night's loot down to the night deposit-box at the First National. Somebody slugged him in the three-hundred block. What does the book say to do? What did you do in Cleveland?"

"Is he in the tank?" Cernie asked.

"Yeah, we held him. What do you think of that? We didn't like his story. How do you like that? Do they do that in Cleveland?"

Cernie didn't say anything and the chief grinned at Payne, who grinned back. The chief said, "Another car stripped last night. Go see about it—and take your lunch."

The chief walked into the office and Payne grinned slyly at Cernie. Take your lunch—in other words, get out and stay out all day.

Cernie copied down the address and stepped out into the hall. He could hear Keefer's bull voice down in the detectives' room. On impulse he wheeled and went down the corridor and opened the door. The talk ceased.

Keefer and Hohmann had their coats off and were questioning the Roseland punk in the chair before them. Hohmann was a mad Dutchman, Keefer a vitriolic and wicked little Mick. The Roseland punk looked tough, a small-boned overdressed kid who contrived to sneer at everyone without moving his lips. A real sociable type.

Keefer said, "Come to tell us how to do it?" when he saw Cernie.

Cernie leaned against the doorjamb and reached for his toothpick, saying nothing. Keefer looked at Hohmann, who winked and looked at the kid.

"Once more, punk. We don't hear good."

The kid said cockily, "Sure. I put the heap in the garage and started for the bank with the night's take when—"

"What time was this?" Keefer asked.

"Midnight or so. The streets was dark. I was a coupla doors from the bank when this guy jumped me. I never seen him. I heard him a little bit and then he lays a sap on me. Feel the bump on my head if you think I'm lyin'."

"We felt it," Keefer said. "Where'd this guy jump you?"

"A coupla doors from the bank like I said. How do *I* know? It was dark."

"Make up your mind, punk," Hohmann said. "Where'd he jump you? There's a jewelry shop next to the bank and then Fischer's store and then the Light and Power Company office and then a music store. Which one was it?"

The punk shrugged. "I hadn't passed that doll in slacks that's in

Fischer's store, so it must have been before that."

"The Power Company office, then. He was hiding in that doorway?"

"Sure—right there in the door where I couldn't see him. He laid this sap on me. I heard him a little bit. He took the dough, that's all."

Hohmann moved his foot. He put it on the punk's foot and then put all of his two hundred pounds on it. The punk winced a little but he looked at Hohmann and sneered.

"Once more, punk. We don't hear good. Where'd you hide the dough?"

Cernie straightened up and opened the door. Keefer looked at him and said, "Stick around, Slicker, if it won't make you sick."

Cernie went out. He was smiling a little. They'd never crack the punk by beating him. He was too tough for that. But that wasn't why he felt so good. He got in his coupé and drove into the business section, past the bank. Yes, it was just as Hohmann said. He'd remembered the stores and the punk had identified the spot.

Cernie spent a lazy day. All he did was make a couple of phone calls at noon and then he watched the softball league games. All in all a very pleasant day.

After supper he drifted down to the station. Ten minutes before he arrived Hohmann and Keefer had come back from supper and hauled the punk out of the tank again. Cernie went in to see it and this time he took a chair.

They were both sore but Keefer was the sorer. They were each trying to be tougher than the other. Keefer had been using the rubber hose that afternoon and he wanted to use it again, only he was afraid of Cernie. Cernie obliged him by going to a double feature. When he came back they still hadn't cracked the punk but they'd worked him plenty. They were getting stubborn and so was he. Cernie, bored, watched it for an hour. Finally he thought it was time to break it up.

"You'll never beat it out of him," Cernie said. "Crack his story and you got a case."

"Crack his story!" Keefer growled. "Hell, it was midnight! Nobody saw him. It was dark and he was sapped. The dough's gone. Crack that if you can!"

"Sure I can," Cernie drawled.

Hohmann laughed and so did Keefer. Cernie just shrugged and that made Keefer madder. "All right, Slicker, here's where you get tagged and sent home! Take him and crack his story!" Hohmann nodded, his eyes vindictive.

Cernie got up and yanked the punk to his feet. "First we'll let him show us," he said mildly.

They got in the squad car and drove into the business section. It was after midnight and deserted. As the punk had said the block was dark. The street lamps at the bank corner gave the only light and not much of it. They pulled up at the curb in the middle of the three-hundred block and Cernie took off the cuffs.

"Show us," he said to the punk.

Keefer and Hohmann didn't bother to hide their delight as the punk straightened up, looked around him, then walked over to the Light and Power Company. The door was set back between two show-windows.

The punk stopped and crouched beside one show window in the dark, facing them. "Here's where he hid," the punk said, triumph in his voice. "Try it yourself and see if you can see me."

"You're sure it was here he hid?" Cernie asked.

"Sure I am."

Cernie grunted, put the cuffs on him and said to Keefer, "Wait."

He went up to the Power Company office door, opened it and yelled, "All right, Mr. Thompson."

Immediately, the lights came on, a flood of them from the dozen lamp displays in each window.

Cernie turned and waited while Mr. Thompson and another man, the president of the city council, came out to them.

Cernie pointed to the punk but looked at Keefer. "His story's cracked. See it, Keefer?"

"No," Keefer said slowly. "I don't see it."

Cernie sighed. "Nobody could have hidden in this doorway to sap the punk. It's lighted—it's always lighted. This is the first time in six years those lights have been out at night and that's only because I asked Mr. Thompson to turn them off. The Light and Power Company office is lighted all night long. Practically every electric office in the country is. It's the way they advertise."

He turned to the councilman. "That's what's the matter with your force, mister. They've lived here all their lives but they didn't know that. All you need is a couple of detectives, rubes or city slickers. It don't matter which."

He looked at the sky. "Nice night. I think I'll walk home. I ain't feeling so good." He looked at Keefer, added, "Too much lunch."

with his back turned

by . . . Hayden Howard

What is the worst way to kill a human—by fire, rack, death of a thousand cuts? This California character came up with a murder method crueler by far.

IT WAS THE SECOND DAY of the annual Red Feather Drive and the Community Chest Office was so crowded with volunteers that Hal Dodd's stenographer, Betty Hiryama, made no attempt to shout above the din. She mounted her chair and whistled shrilly, gesturing from her phone to his, watched him nod.

But his pale earnestly-young face went on lecturing to the push of clubwomen around his desk. Hollow-eyed with responsibility, he talked with both hands. Betty whistled again, urgently, and he acknowledged her signal with an impatient twitch of his cheek and made some new and finger-thrusting point to the assembled Solicitor-Captains that set them nodding like pheasants. The Red Feathers in their hats bobbed with diminishing vigor while he talked on and on.

Betty waved her arm, trapping his gaze. Thrusting her forefingers to her temples, framing a wide-eyed expression, she waggled her thumbs like revolver hammers, and Hal Dodd, Secretary of the Chest and tense greasegun of community effort, smiled in spite of himself.

He made a few quick concluding remarks. His snapping blue eyes traversed the volunteers' departing posteriors to the Progress-Thermometer Chart with its puny red first-day scores. His sharp nose wrinkled as he lifted the phone.

AN UNUSUAL NEW MYSTERY WITH A NOTE OF DEEP HORROR.

"*Starved* to death?" His voice creaked between incredulity, laughter and personal insult. "Lister Frank, let go of my leg. People don't go hungry in Oascena."

But a heartbeat later he echoed softly, "A young woman on the sidewalk in front of the Alp Street Bakery. No, Frank, surely there's some other explanation. Could she be an escapee from an institution or have suffered from anemia or a glandular disease—or even have been the victim of a weird crime like that old man whose son-in-law chained him to the bed?

"I don't believe she simply starved. She could have gone to Family Aid or Salvation Army or Catholic Welfare or any of our Chest agencies—even to County Welfare—or simply knocked on any door. Has there been an autopsy?"

Quick with surprise, the fingers of Hal's left hand, lean and white, feinted at a pencil. His voice queried with rising emphasis, "Starvation but with an expensive diamond-studded cross and a photograph of the devil smiling? . . .

"Can't they check her prints, Frank, or trace the cross through jewelry stores? That so-called picture of the devil should demonstrate that something outside of starvation occurred . . .

"I guarantee she was not turned away by any of our recipient agencies," he continued. "Positively, that is my statement to the Oascena Suburbian. You can tell Randolph that."

Staring at the Progress-Thermometer, Hal Dodd listened to the gabbling phone. Long face tightening around his blazing eyes he slammed his open hand upon the desk.

"He *can't* write an editorial like that during the Red Feather Drive. Not a *where-are-our-welfare-agencies?* blast while we're making our single yearly attempt to solicit contributions. The newspaper will be penalizing all our recipient agencies from Salvation Army to Boy Scouts . . .

"This is no time to play bull in the china shop. There are less destructive ways to sell papers. Listen, Frank, surely Randolph's going to give the police a few days to investigate before he jumps to any more insane editorial conclusions . . .

"In the morning?" Hal echoed in pain.

"Well thanks for warning me, Frank," his voice eased off. "I'll keep mum that you let the cat out. Yeah, no hard feelings but if you find your editor-in-chief with a sword in his back and a spear in his navel you'll know who . . .

"Yeah, okay, I owe you eleven beers. Right, you guessed it, I'll prod City Hall for action. I have one foot in the Police Department now."

He passed Betty's desk in three steps. "I'll be back in fifteen minutes. If Jim Tunney phones tell him the placards should be wired to every third lamppost as far north as the Lion Building. And you know whom to remind their speeches are tonight and if Baumer should long-

distance shunt it to me in the Identification Bureau."

His daddy-long-legs strides echoed through the City Hall. His lower lip squeezed his upper. While his thoughts rattled. . . . *that Nineteenth Century Randolph, criticizing whenever anyone tries to change anything. If we stayed where he is mentally, people really would be starving. You can't reason with that old fool.*

He talked emphatically to the Desk Sergeant, who yawned. And upstairs in the Chief's office all he found was a secretary doing her nails. She said that was a cute bow-tie he was wearing today and as for the plainclothes boys, they would attend to the poor little Alp Street girl any day now but not for a little while because some big-city crook had been discovered this morning with his foot sticking out of a storm-sewer and they were all over there striking heroic poses for the photographers. She didn't think they'd figure out who did it though, they never did, so why not sit down and make himself cumfy?

"It's lonely in here," she added.

Hal Dodd made a pass at his tie. He said he was already late for a Red Feather briefing and doubled back to the Identification Bureau.

"Here's who you want to talk to." The Desk Sergeant idly flipped his thumb over. "Segar's all hot and bothered too. He found her."

Stumping toward Hal the olive-skinned young patrolman wore his lips in an angry kiss beneath a fiercely drooping nose. His coat flapped unbuttoned as though he were going off-duty. His stubby hands sketched excited recollections in the air.

"I lifted her, she didn't weigh nothing. She was real pretty I think and she was whispering, 'Hungry, hungry,' like a little girl. There she was, lying under the bakery window. When the ambulance driver comes, he tells me she is dead. I say, 'You should stick her with one of those needles to start up her heart.' He didn't."

"Didn't you ask her name?"

"Huh? No, well, she couldn't hear me anyway. I thought somebody in the neighborhood would know who she was. I don't see why they should let her starve right here in Oascena." The young patrolman's face drooped like an angry child's. "It isn't right."

"She's downstairs in the morgue if you want to look at her," the Sergeant suggested to Hal. "But you won't find any leads except what we're already on. Like I told Randolph we checked the institutions for escapees and sent her fingerprints back to Washington and Murphy is showing that diamond cross around to the suburban jewelers and we'll send it into Los Angeles, where chances are better, but it looks like a heirloom to me, so I think it's a dead end."

He yawned mightily. "She'll get identified though. In a week or two we'll get a call that somebody is missing somewhere and that a relative is coming to Oascena to see if

this particular body is her. Her mother or father will come probably and look in the icebox and say, 'There is my daughter who ran off to the big bad city and didn't write letters any more'."

The Desk Sergeant shifted palms under his chin. "So no use you, Hal or rookie Segar here or Mr. Randolph, who was nosing around this morning early, getting stirred up because when she's identified, sure as my buttons are brass, we'll trace her to the city and the L. A. boys will find she died there and was dumped here in the suburbs for reasons they'll never lay a hand on. That's how it goes. Oascena is in the clear. Like I was telling Mr. Randolph people don't starve in Oascena."

"But she wasn't dead when I found her, it's in my report," the patrolman rushed irritably. "She even whispered."

"Yeah, okay, but as good as. She's no Oascena girl," the Sergeant sighed. "Somebody'd know her, you can bet on it."

"Did you tell Randolph that?" Hal blurted.

The Sergeant scratched himself noisily. "Yeah but he got up on the wrong side of the bed. He said if she was dumped out of a car from L. A., how come her expensive diamond cross was not stolen? I said probably it was too hot. He said, just like he figured, we are up to our old tricks, trying to whitewash Oascena. He said with millions being wasted on welfare aid they let a girl starve to death right here on the streets of Oascena and he doesn't care who knows it."

Hal flushed. "It isn't true. Whether she's from Los Angeles or Oascena there's another explanation for this and by godfrey I'm going to find it if I have to hire private detectives out of my own pocket. Where's that photograph of the devil?"

"Where'd you hear about the devil?" The Sergeant snorted, his feelings hurt by the mention of private detectives. His hand rose out of a drawer. "See, it's only a mug smiling with mustache and goatee burned on with a red-hot nail or something. You won't make anything out of it."

Hal Dodd laid his finger on it. "Those look like horns."

"That's what Mr. Randolph was saying. He already on your tail huh?" The Sergeant laughed acidulously.

"Well, why don't you put it under ultra-violet light and find out quick who it is?" Hal snapped.

"We haven't all those modern conveniences," the Sergeant retorted, smiling sweetly. "We're making a composite photo. The burned areas are drawn like flesh."

"Would you be able to get me a copy of it, as well as, say a few prints of the girl?" Hal asked.

Inexplicably the Sergeant heehawed.

"What are you so happy about?" Hal let his temper slip.

"Something Mr. Randolph said." The Sergeant began to look embarrassed, quite unhappy. "I'll get your

photos. Here, let me show you her clothes."

"What did Randolph say about me?"

"Nothing about you. See, these are the clothing of a rich child—not her skirt at all, it didn't come to her knees."

"Way too short," the patrolman seconded. "I think she was maybe seventeen or eighteen and these were hers a long time ago. Whoever's to blame for this I'd like to kick him in the belly."

As Hal Dodd lifted her yellowed velvet bolero, her faded red skirt, her crinkly shirtwaist, an odor of dark dry rooms and dead moths rose like dust.

"Is the morgue open?" Hal asked quietly.

Downstairs on the marble slab nearest the door, old Doc Grimes and the crosseyed attendant sat drinking from beer cans.

"Hi Doc," said Hal. "Hear you decided no inquest."

The old man bridled. "Plain as the back of your hand. The deceased went into a coma and died of plain ordinary back-alley starvation."

Silently the attendant slid off the marble and led Hal to Drawer A in the icebox. He grunted it open. A sheet lay rumpled in shadow. Without warning the attendant exposed her to the waist. Hal Dodd choked.

In death she lay fragile-cheeked, white-armed, rib-sculptured. Her hair swirled in a dark lustrous wave across the skeletal contour of her collarbone.

"Between eighteen and twenty years of age," the old doctor called. "No scars, gunshot wounds or contusions, no external signs of poison or asphyxiation. Nothing except no food for about a week and very little food for a long time before that. Been undernourished for at least three years."

"Gee, long time to go hungry, huh?" the attendant laughed.

Hal Dodd walked hollowly back to Doc Grimes and got out a cigarette. The doctor lit it for him. "Someone you know, I gather?"

Hal Dodd shook his head. "I don't think so but I'm going to find out. I'm going to find out who she was and that's not all I'm going to find out."

"Doc," Hal asked when his cigarette was a bright stub. "She's so pale, and those out-of-style clothes, do you think she could have been a recluse of some kind?"

"How should I know?" the old man retorted.

"There are screwy old guys who live down by the dump," the attendant volunteered. "One time one that had seventeen cats died and his hut was full of money. We went digging to see if we could find more of it, but I guess I'm not lucky when it's money."

The phone jangled and to the attendant's surprise it was a long-distance for the Secretary of the Oascena Community Chest. Hal talked briefly and thick-headedly with Baumer about their chances of landing a Hollywood comedian to perform at the Halfway Point Rally.

The trouble was not the actors but the guys who owned their contracts. Hal clumped upstairs.

The angry-visaged young patrolman, Segar, was waiting for him. "You want these?"

"Thanks." Hal stared at the photos of the corpse and of the repaired devil.

Since the rookie did not go away, Hal tossed him a question. "Do you think she was a female hermit?"

"We worked on that one," Segar replied. "I knocked on doors for a couple of blocks around and where anyone came to the door I asked about her. Nothing. The Sergeant sent Malone down to case the huts on the dump but those bums don't talk."

Segar extracted his own photograph of the devil. "I'd like to kick him where it hurts. I see him locking her in a little room with no food. How she hated him to draw his face into the devil's!"

Hal shrugged. "It could be a chance photo of someone she never met. Perhaps a movie star?"

"Too young, just a kid, a good-looking kid," Segar retorted. "Kids are the bad ones in this town. Drunk, smacking their fists through windows, running when you shout you'll shoot because they know you won't. Driving down Weald Street ninety miles an hour, doing a Brody so your cycle will crash into them and kill you.

"Good-looking kids, nice clothes, out for blood. And it would be like a kid, a crazy kid, to lock a girl up, keep her prisoner for him and a few of his buddies, then forget to feed her. I tell you, in the big cities worse things than that go on."

"This is Oascena, not Los Angeles," Hal replied.

Segar snorted. "There's plenty goes on right here."

Hal shrugged again as though the movement of his shoulders could erase something. "Want a ride uptown?"

"Yuh, thanks."

"Wait a minute," Hal said. "While we're here I'll take the girl's photo into the State Employment Office. She could have been in there to apply for unemployment insurance."

Several of the clerks claimed they might just barely recognize her but they could supply no names nor could they agree on the time or manner of her appearance. Hal doubted if they had ever seen her. Segar laid the retouched photograph of the devil on the counter.

"I figured you'd get after him someday," the clerk wearing the Red Feather laughed. "That's the world's fastest job-jumper, name of Russ or Rust or something like that. I can look him up easy enough. He was mostly a car-washer or gardener but I haven't seen him around lately. I take it he turned to crime as paying better than unemployment insurance?"

On the card the name was Robert Rusk. His last visit was dated the previous year. Hal and the patrolman drove to the address listed and found a somber woman of middle-aged-spread watering the tired patch

of lawn before a grey house with a ROOM FOR RENT sign. She was not wearing a Red Feather.

"Robert Rusk? I look like his grandmother, don't I? I'm his mother, Mrs. P. B. Jarles. But don't come to me about his fines. You cry to that Sarah Beamish, she married him—and my car."

Tossing a glance at the upstairs window the woman began a dreary harangue. Rob and that woman had gone to L. A. Rob was getting rich in an airplane factory but that woman wouldn't let him pay back the $122.00 or bring back the car, which was Mr. Jarles', who was lying upstairs paralyzed. Her sour expression began to focus on Hal.

"What do you want Rob for?" She sprayed the hose inhospitably close to his shoes. "I always done my best for him. I always done my best for him and he's no worse than anybody else's kid."

"This is nothing serious," Hal said. "We want his address because we hope he can help us identify a girl."

She blinked. Behind her face something reversed itself, rearranging her wrinkles. Her voice came out a sneer. "He's in the Army. He's overseas, where you healthy-looking young men ought to be. How should I know where he is? Why don't you telephone Eisenhower or something?"

Darkening the young patrolman blustered, "You better watch your tongue, Grandma. You just tell us where Robert Rusk lives or I'll have you in for withholding evidence."

She coolly turned the hose on his feet.

When Segar had finished shouting Hal Dodd led him away. Opening the trunk of the sedan he handed the florid patrolman a rag. "You can wipe your shoes off while we drive to the drugstore."

In the pay-phone booth, Hal looked up the name Beamish and talked to Robert Rusk's mother-in-law on the first try. When he introduced himself as a friend of Rob's, she told him the couple's L. A. address. Smiling grimly to himself Hal phoned the Community Chest office.

"Hello, Betty, this is Hal. Did Tunney call about those placards? . . . Will you call him then? I hope our speechmakers are present and accounted for? . . . No, Marshal eh? Well, I'll make his speech. That's at Oascena Plaza at eight, right? I'm driving into Los Angeles but I'll be back long before then."

Hal Dodd strode back to the car. The patrolman was sitting with Robert Rusk's photograph on one knee and the unknown girl's on the other.

"You want to ride into L. A.?" Hal asked.

"Yeah, if I can get an in-the-flesh look at this guy. If he's done what I think he's done, he's going to be sorry to see me."

"Are you just in this," Segar asked as they turned onto Sepulveda, "because you want to head off some bad publicity for the welfare agencies?"

"We'll leave it at that," Hal replied. He couldn't have explained himself if he tried.

Sarah and Robert Rusk lived in a paint-scaling duplex that spelled poverty but there was a new powder-blue pickup truck parked on the street with gold lettering on its door—BOB RUSK, LANDSCAPE GARDENER.

The early afternoon sun made Rusk stand blinking in the doorway. With curly blond eyelashes, pink cheeks and golden hair, white teeth and sturdy V-shaped torso, he was a startlingly handsome young man. His wife was startlingly homely. Behind him, elbows akimbo, she stood as solidly suspicious as a nursing sow.

Rusk's smile wavered when he registered that Dodd's companion was an Oascena cop but smoothly he began to explain. "About Ma's car, it's not what you're thinking. The main bearing started to thump like an earthquake and when second gear stripped the best deal I could get for her and Jarles was to trade her on a truck."

"Rob likes to work out of doors," his wife stated hopefully.

"Yeah, I'm doing even better than before I was—before I left the airplane factory. And any day now I'll be able to give her what I got for the car."

"Excellent," said Hal. "But we're here to have you identify this photograph."

Robert Rusk emitted a frightened squeak. He whirled at his wife, blocking her view.

"What is it, honey?" she grunted.

"I never saw her before," Rusk stated. He whirled again, breathing almost inaudibly at Hal, "See you around the corner in a minute." He crowded Hal backward.

The Community Chest Secretary turned quickly enough to restrain the patrolman as the door slammed in their faces. While they argued outside they could hear the man and wife arguing inside. Finally Segar slouched back to the car and they drove around the corner, where Hal parked and the cop got out and eased around a hedge where he could watch Rusk's dwelling.

But Rusk walked straight to his truck and drove slowly. They followed for three blocks. Rusk stopped and got out.

"If you think you can blackmail me," he announced thinly, "You got another think coming. I'm broke."

"You have a jealous wife, though," Hal replied. "Tell us about the girl in the photograph."

"Gawd, how'd she get so thin?" Robert Rusk breathed, staring at it again.

"We'll ask the questions," Segar shouted in suddenly overpowering anger.

"All right, all right," Rusk shouted back. "Go ahead, ask. But if that son-of-a-bitch sent you, by gawd, tell him I haven't been near the house, near Alp Street even, in three years. That's the truth, I swear it. I haven't—"

"We'll see if you remember her name," Hal said quietly.

"Denise Withering."

Hal nodded, "Now tell us how you met her."

"Don't you know?" Rusk demanded savagely.

"We would like to see how many stories agree," Hal replied through an angry smile.

"Well, when her brother hired me to work in the garden she was there. There she was. Gawd, I was only seventeen and I didn't know how young she was. I thought she was as old as I was, easy. I tell you, when they start to fill out it's hard to figure their ages." Rusk stopped suddenly, twisting his hands.

"This boy's worried about San Quentin quail," the patrolman snapped. "Keep talking, kid, or you'll get more than a free train ride."

"Aw gawd, I was just a kid myself. Ed found us and dragged me out of the lathe-house and told me she was only fourteen years old and what would happen to me. He told me he'd send me to jail if he ever saw me again. I lit out so fast I didn't even get my tools.

"But afterward I began to worry about her and I was going to go back and take her away with me. Then I read in the paper she had gone East to school and she never sent me any notes or anything, so that was the end of it."

Rusk paused, his face quivering like a girl's. "I'm sorry as hell about it. As I got older I realized she was just a kid and being all alone so much she was lonely. She didn't know anything about boys. But that's the way it goes. They all have to sometime."

He blurted suddenly: "I don't see why he was such a fool—hiring me in the first place. He was paying me one-fifty an hour, twice what I'd get any place else. No matter how weird he acted I couldn't afford to quit."

"What about her parents?" Hal demanded.

"Denise told me they were killed in an airplane accident. Ed was over twenty-one so he was her guardian, I guess. But he was no bargain. He was always away scoring in L. A., leaving us together there, days at a time. He'd come back, never a sound, like he was walking on rubber, floating through the garden, smiling, really stoned."

"Stoned?" Hal asked.

"High, H in the mainline, jolt in the arm—you know, heroin. That's where his money was going, I guess—her half as well as his. He was really in love with his arm."

Hal opened his mouth.

"Wait," Rusk continued, "I'll picture you Withering. He looks like a nice gentle guy, the kind you'd loan money to. He talks that way, no dirty words. But see my arm."

Robert Rusk rolled up his sleeve to the biceps. A long lumpy blue scar crossed the big veins on the inside of his forearm. "Here I was, weeding, no shirt on. All of a sudden I feel his shadow on my back. Before I can turn, he touches me with the red-hot poker. Right there on the arm, no reason at all. I thought I was going to faint or get

sick. Before I could get up he was apologizing and giving me a ten-dollar bill so I wouldn't tell my mother. An awful tough way to earn ten bucks."

Segar snorted his disbelief. "Tell it right, kid. Hypes burn over the needle scars on their arms when they think they're going to be booked. Isn't that the reason you have that burn-scar on your arm—to cover you're an addict?"

"No, no, I wouldn't bull you, that's how it was. He was gone, he was ga-ga. The way he treated Denise was enough to prove that. He'd spank her like she was a little child. He had her trained like her cocker spaniel, both of them wriggling and moaning and trying to do right when he was around.

"Sometimes he'd make her kneel and confess to him. Anything she did that he didn't like he said that was a sin. He made her sit with her hands over her eyes until he forgave her. He had her so she didn't know whether she was coming or going."

Again Segar snorted in disbelief.

"It's the truth." Rusk's voice twanged hysterically. "He was weird. All of a sudden he'd be standing behind you. He'd be looking at you like he could see inside you and smiling like he had a bad taste in his mouth. Whatever you'd think he was thinking you'd be wrong." Rusk thrust out his trembling hand.

"When he moves to shake your hand, he'll pat your arm. If he starts to light your cigarette he'll hold the match under your nose instead of the end of the cigarette. It's probably when he doesn't have a gun he's most likely to shoot you."

"Oh bull!" Segar exclaimed in disgust.

"Did he ever threaten to kill Denise?" Hal asked quietly.

"He used to say he'd spank her, was all, but you had a feeling he'd do a lot more if you didn't keep him happy."

"Did he ever threaten you?" Hal persisted.

"No. Except for that last morning in the lathe-house, and the hot poker, he was quiet and polite to me. He was nice to Denise for that matter when he thought I was around. He knew I would have knocked the tar out of him if he hurt her."

Segar guffawed savagely. "You little liar. You couldn't knock a pansy out of bed."

"Wait," exclaimed Hal, "let me get this straight. Denise told you these things, am I right? You never actually saw him spank her. Did you ever hear him say he was going to spank her?"

"Well," Rusk rubbed an eye uncomfortably. "She wouldn't lie to me. She loved me. She told me everything. And I did hear her confess to him the time she went downtown to the movies by herself. When he took her in the house I climbed the pepper tree outside and listened. He told her to kneel down. He told her she would go to hell. Then he forgave her and she began to cry."

He peered cautiously at Hal. "He said she had to do some kind of

make-up, pay-back, but he was talking so softly I couldn't hear what it was and she never would tell me. She wouldn't tell me anything that went on in the house. I only looked through the windows—he wouldn't allow me inside. It was a mess, all the blinds were drawn. She'd cook my lunch and bring out to the lathe-house. Jeez she was pretty."

"What are you shaking for?" Segar roared without warning.

"I can shake if I want to," Rusk screamed.

"Take it easy." Hal told Segar. "I think this kid has had a traumatic experience at the Witherings'. He may be trying to tell the truth."

He turned to Robert Rusk. "Did her brother ever have Denise sign any papers?"

"I don't know, probably lots. I don't know."

"Whose picture is this?" Hal thrust the retouched devil at him.

"That's me, that's mine. How'd you get it? I gave it to her. Denise said she'd hide it under her mattress."

"Do you remember the Witherings' address?"

"Eleven hundred and nine Alp Street, the big brick house. Hey!" Robert Rusk yelled with amazement. "You were bluffing. You were pumping me, you didn't know the address, I can see it on your face. What are you dicks trying to pull?"

Hal handed Robert Rusk the photograph of Denise Withering. "Apparently you didn't notice the first time, and I did not mention that you are looking at the face of a dead girl, very likely a murdered girl."

The blond youth made a gurgling sound.

"Now the way you can make the least trouble for yourself," Hal went on, "is to get in the car. We assume you had nothing to do with Denise's death but we want you to point out her house because you just gave the number as eleven hundred and nine, which is surprising since that is not the number of a dwelling but of the very bakery where this patrolman found her."

Rusk blinked.

"Get in the car, Robert," Hal said.

Blanching, Robert Rusk took a backward step but Segar was behind him before he could decide to run. Like a stiff old man he climbed into the back seat with Segar following. Hal kicked the starter and let out the clutch.

When they reached Oascena Hal stopped in front of the City Hall. Segar and he got out and moved away from earshot of the car.

"I'll get the Sarge," Segar whispered.

"Hold it a minute." Hal whistled for a newsboy. Opening the evening edition of the Oascena Suburbian, he nodded. "The editorial won't hit until the morning edition but the factual report of your discovery of an unknown girl is here. If Ed Withering—granted there is such a person—reads this, possibly in an L. A. paper, he'll make a move.

"He'll either pull an immediate vanishing act—or rush home to recover certain valuables and documents before the police identify his sister—or simply stay home, waiting for the law, planning to brazen it out. He could claim she was hopelessly insane, that she had run away or was on a hunger strike, any weepingly-devoted brother story—and I doubt if he could be convicted of a major crime against her."

"Yuh?" Segar gaped. "By Judas, if I find him he'll go on the books for resisting arrest."

Hal raised his eyebrows, eyeing the motionless head of Robert Rusk through the car window. "Of course, there could be nothing but a bakery at eleven hundred and nine Alp Street. There may be no such person as Ed Withering. Robert Rusk may be the one who kept her a prisoner."

"Houses and stores are all mixed up on Alp Street," Segar muttered. "There could be rooms above the bakery. I only been on the beat two days and I don't notice things too quick—I'm a little by little guy. Listen, Hal, I think maybe we ought to get out there right away. You said this Withering may be packing his stuff."

"Okay, we'll find out how big a liar Robert Rusk is," Hal replied, stepping quickly to the car.

Segar sat in front, hanging over the bounding seat, glaring back at Robert Rusk. "Open your eyes, kid. How come Denise didn't run away? How come she didn't throw junk out the windows and scream for somebody to let her out?"

"She wasn't locked in," Rusk replied.

"You're a liar or I don't understand this business at all," Segar retorted. "How come a girl let her brother get away with stealing her money and keeping her inside year after year."

"She went outside when I was there," Rusk replied.

"But nobody in the neighborhood ever seen her," Segar retorted.

"He must have tightened up on her after he caught me," Rusk answered. "You don't get the picture of Withering, you don't see how he'd got his hands in her brain."

Segar snorted. "The picture I see is you with horns on your head. If there isn't any Ed Withering, kid, you better start running."

Hal turned onto Alp Street, past block after block of tall pre-First World War boxes of brick already eroding. Cleaning-and-dyeing establishments, cheap cafes—liquor stores blinking their neons from ground-floors. Upstairs, grey in the dusk, old men leaned over railings in their undershirts. This was the fashionable part of Oascena, a generation ago.

At 1109 Hal cut to the curb, got out, looked up.

Three-and-one-half stories of brick with crumbling corners, a bronze gargoyle in his dotage on the roof-peak silhouetted against the evening sky.

With shutters jammed like withered palms against an old maid's eyes the house crouched on the Alp Street Bakery, gulping steam. A

truck backed from a ragged hole in the brick and growled off, leaving the aroma of newly-baked bread and exhaust fumes.

"Get out." Segar's voice was hard, and Robert Rusk stiffly obeyed.

"Is this it?" Hal said.

"There wasn't a bakery, it was all their house, but that was three years ago." Rusk's voice ended in a squeak.

Hal Dodd walked into the bakery. "Say, could you tell me how to get upstairs?"

"You go around back." The bakers were hurried, white and sweating.

Once there had been a formal garden. The hedge had died in stiff brown geometrics about the toppled birdbath, the lathe-house was a jackstraw pile. Rusk whimpered and ran toward it. Segar started after him but stopped when the young man stopped, bending as if to look for something. Hesitatingly Rusk circled the pile. But on the far side he made a dash for the back fence. He went over it like a wall-scaler, feet tilting up against the sky while Segar clawed at his holster.

Matching the feat, gun-hand flung high, Segar bellied over the fence and Hal could hear his feet hammering along the driveway on the other side. He listened while the running merged with honking autos and the roar of the bakery. He turned, looked up at the steep unpainted two-by-four stairway. No carpenter had built that. It creaked threateningly beneath his feet.

A long way to the door. He raised his knuckles but the door was ajar. He looked back for Segar.

Should have a search-warrant, he thought, and pushed the door inward. The darkness was tangible against his face. With a nervous cough he stepped across the threshold and punched the wall switch but no lights came on.

He stood with his back to the wall, his gaze jumping from hulking shadow to formless core of darkness until the monster became an easy chair, the hand a rumpled antimacassar. There was no movement but the shivering transmitted from the bakery machinery, no sound but the rumbling of the dough-mixers and the swish of suburban traffic.

When Hal walked forward the room raised ghosts of dust. Blinking he advanced to the floor-to-ceiling drapes at the far end and tore them open, jumping aside as though he expected a bullet. The immense spool-bed lay greyly unmade. The bed of a princess, Hal considered. Beneath masks of dust the furniture arched expensively but the silver had been pawned. Candles stood in tin cans.

The rhythm of the shaking floor redoubled. Hal whirled as a figure loomed in the doorway. Dull-blue light glided along the barrel of Segar's revolver.

"Think we should go back for a warrant?" Hal asked softly.

"The kid got away," the patrolman panted. "I never even got a shot at him. I phoned a description

and Sarge is dispatching a radio car and notifying the L. A. cops to be waiting if he tries to go home."

The patrolman prowled the rooms. "She lived here though, huh? Hey, the stove don't light. Lots of open cans, nothing to eat. What a filthy dump!"

Recalling Robert Rusk's mention that Denise had hidden his photograph under the mattress Hal knelt beside the bed. Underneath he noticed a two-foot-long galvanized iron box with something bristling on top. It made a scraping sound as he dragged it out. An artificial hat-flower was fastened with court-plaster and the end of the box wore a gleamingly scratched cross. Hal rapped the metal with his knuckles. Solid as though crammed with earth —it was vaguely coffin-shaped.

He looked up at Segar. "Do you think she had . . . ?"

"That son-of-a-bitch," the patrolman wheezed, letting a fistful of papers flutter onto the bed.

While Segar muttered and paced up and down, gun in hand, impatiently peering down the stairs, Hal Dodd stared from the papers to the box to the papers. He struck a match, scanned them quickly. He struck a second match and felt someone standing over him.

Hal looked up at the swaying muzzle of Segar's revolver.

"It could have been like this," Hal said. "When Ed and Denise's parents were killed in the airplane accident Ed, who was undoubtedly a mental case to begin with, went overboard. In a quiet way he started boosting himself with heroin. Money goes fast that way.

"He must have worked out an arrangement whereby Denise, though a minor, could sign away her money little by little. Possibly he made the bank believe it was for school expenses. Remember, Rusk said he saw a newspaper notice that she had been sent East to school; very likely her brother had already worked fictional variations on that theme.

"The trouble was," Hal went on, "little girls grow less docile as they mature. Ed Withering couldn't have her escaping to the neighbors to tell her troubles—that would have brought in one of the welfare agencies. The investigation would have stopped his thefts of her money, cut off his means of getting heroin. He had to keep her completely docile and quiet for his own protection—on the same emotional level as her cocker spaniel. He built her prison within her, a prison without locks to pick or bars to file.

"He was not stupid." Hal smiled thinly. "Probably in school he'd had a psychology course or two. He preyed on the guilt feelings that are in all of us, skillfully magnifying hers by this rigamarole of forcing her to confess. Think of the sly strings of words with which he gradually entangled her until she must have seen herself as a moral monster. He distorted her conception of herself until she couldn't face people, until she mentally locked herself into her dark house.

"It's very possible Withering

hired Robert Rusk, a handsome juvenile-delinquent type, expressly as the final instrument of sin, as the final slash between Denise and the real world. Withering knew what would eventually happen when he left Rusk alone with that lonely pretty adolescent girl. And when he was ready Ed Withering sprung the trap. Think of the things he must have called his sister!

"He punished her mentally until she became weak and fearful and malleable as a concentration-camp inmate—the methods were not dissimilar. He found the photograph of Rusk and transformed it to the devil. He literally murdered his own sister as he drove her deeper into her web of guilt. Soon he was her only link with the world.

"After he rented the lower part of the house to the bakery I doubt if he even lived with her—there are no signs of men's clothing. He brought her food when it suited him; she went hungry when he forgot. Physically as well as mentally she starved little by little. He stayed away too long. In her animal agony she had to go out and you found her downstairs beneath the window of the Alp Street Bakery."

"Not guts enough to murder her all at once," Segar said, "or was there still money for her to sign away?"

"Her money was spent," Hal retorted. "He was living off the bakery lease-money. She was of no further use to him. It was comforting to forget her. So, figuratively, he murdered her with his back turned."

With a grunt, Hal lifted the box to his hip. "I'm going to ask Doc Grimes to open this. There are two possibilities but I hope it's her pet cocker spaniel."

He stumped toward the door. "I presume the patrol car is out looking for Robert Rusk. I'll tell the Sergeant to get some more men up here. I'll swear out some kind of complaint—after Doc Grimes has opened this. Wait, listen—oh blast, I've got to make a Red Feather speech, at eight. But I'll do those things first, I'll have some more men up here."

"I don't need any more men," Segar answered quietly.

After Hal had eased Doc Grimes away from his canasta game he telephoned Police Headquarters, then drove too fast to the Oascena Plaza with the Sergeant's parting words ringing ominously in his ears. "Take it easy Hal, I'm not even sure what the crime is. I'll try to pull a plainclothesman off that big-city-style assassination, and see about a complaint in the morning, but there's no rush, these minor cases take time."

In the noisy Plaza Hal spoke without listening to himself. He'd said it all before and he trusted it was coming out the usual way. Hurrying out the back he rammed into Frank, the newspaper's information leak.

"Hal, she wasn't refused by a welfare agency, was she?"

"No," Hal said and kept moving. He gunned his car out of there. If Ed Withering came home he

wanted to be there. Ed Withering, smiling and rubbery, without a face, danced among the reflections on the windshield. Hal squinted from the force of his headache.

There was no squad car parked outside the bakery nor was Hal surprised. The mills of the Gods grind slowly in Oascena.

With a face as stiff as if his coat had become an Egyptian mummy-wrapping, Hal mounted the two-by-four stairs with awkward bounds, bones grating. He paused, panting.

"Hey, Segar, it's Dodd," he yelled, stepping aside as he pushed in the door on the chance the patrolman was set to shoot.

There was no sound. Although it was evening outside, Hal's pupils could not widen enough to encompass the darkness of the upstairs room. He waited, listening to the sounds of the bakery, wondering where Segar had gone, watching the darkness reassemble in recognizable shapes, the easy chair, the couch. Segar might have chased Withering somewhere, he considered, or Robert Rusk came back and Segar ran after him.

With a quick breath, he skipped sideways, removing his silhouette from the doorway.

"Hey, Segar, you in the kitchen?"

As he moved along the wall, trying to stare the ominous shapes from the shadows, something turned under his foot. Very cautiously he bent, while an uncomfortable psychic hole opened in the back of his neck. His hand closed on cold iron; he rose with a frightened inhalation. It was a poker, a fire-poker, and he could not remember it lying there before.

Curiously, beside the easy chair, the sole of a shoe appeared. It must have been there all the time, he decided. And now his widening pupils transformed a splash of lighter-shadow into a hand. A mottled area on the floor became a man's face.

Hal sprang forward with the poker upraised. The oddly twitching face was Segar's. As Hal knelt beside him, he sensed he was committing a tactical error. But nothing happened, no one moved. The loudest sound was the whistling of Segar's breath.

He put his hand on the patrolman's chest. It was damp, sticky and heaved suddenly as a low, "Whuzzat?" passed through the patrolman's lips. Hal felt his own mouth opening but his ears overwhelmed his other senses, enormously magnifying a mouselike rustle from the direction of the kitchen.

The kitchen door opened as Hal began to rise.

A flick of white cheek—Hal blinked at the white profile turning into a black dead-on silhouette of ears and cheekbones abruptly familiar. Halfway down a bundle of fingers advanced a gleaming tube with a hole in the end, the little round eye of death.

On the floor Segar's body jerked, his head bumped with waking fright. Hal, with froglike despera-

tion, hopped his rigid torso behind the easy chair as the room exploded.

The second shot smashed echoes of the first and the shuttered window came down in ringing clatter as Hal lunged behind the couch. Scrambling over broken glass he rose to throw the poker.

The luminous face, surprisingly, was in the air, diving forward with the rug billowing up magically behind and the mouth a jarred-open gap of blackness.

Parlor magic! The rug whisked backward from beneath frantic feet so that the falling man's gun-hand clashed with hardwood floor.

Like an awkward cape the rug flared up and over with a rising Segar its matador. Hal lunged across the couch, slashing the poker against an outflung bundle of fingers. The pale fish of a hand squirted a gun across the wood. Hal found it.

As he whirled about on the floor he heard the crunch of Segar's knee on the back of the hissing man. The patrolman's fists clumped against a twisting face. The man bucked, gasping, as Segar rode him.

Segar bounced the head against the floor, turning off the noise, and gave a choked laugh when Hal tried to push him away. The rookie tried to bounce the head again but Hal's arms roped them together.

"It's over, Segar, let up." Hal butted gently with his shoulder and the patrolman toppled onto his back.

His legs remained crooked over the motionless shoulders of the man. His voice muttered, "When was I shot?"

"Can you hold the gun?" Hal shouted. "I'll get the bakery to phone for an ambulance."

"Whoo-zit? Not Rubbert Rosk?" Segar asked thickly.

Hal lifted the stained face by the hair. Fragile features, a curl of dark hair across the forehead, quivering eyelids—here was the dead girl—but stamped from the opposite mould. "This is her brother, Ed. Can you hold the gun on him?"

"Who's inna box, her baby?"

"Her dog, the cocker spaniel Rusk mentioned. Doc Grimes tested and found arsenic."

Segar's foot rose on the slow lever of his leg and dropped ineffectually on Withering's back. "He was behinda couch. I came back from the kitchen and sat down. My gun's where?"

"I'm holding it. After he slugged you he shot you with it. He may have touched your lung. Can you hold the gun while I—"

"Kill him!" Segar wheezed in sudden pain. "Inna chest! Where's Denise?"

Giving up all thought of leaving the wounded patrolman Hal pointed the revolver at the floor, calculating that a bullet through the downstairs ceiling would bring even sound-dulled bakers charging up the steps. He pulled the trigger.

"Murder!" someone breathed.

Hal blinked; his burning eyes swept along the paper trail that wandered through curtains to the unmade bed of the girl who starved to death in the pleasant suburb called Oascena.

the inspiration of mr. budd

by . . . Dorothy L. Sayers

The *Evening Messenger*, ever anxious to further the ends of justice, has decided to offer £500 reward to any person who shall give information leading to the arrest of the man, William Strickland, alias Bolton, who is wanted by the police in connection with the murder of the late Emma Strickland at 59, Acacia Crescent, Manchester.

DESCRIPTION OF THE WANTED MAN

The following is the official description of William Strickland: Age 43; height 6 ft. 1 or 2; complexion rather dark; hair silver-grey and abundant, may dye same; full grey moustache and beard, may now be clean-shaven; eyes light grey, rather close-set; hawk nose; teeth strong and white, displays them somewhat prominently when laughing, left upper eye-tooth stopped with gold; left thumbnail disfigured by a recent blow.

Speaks in rather loud voice; quick, decisive manner. Good address . . . May be dressed in a grey or dark blue lounge suit, with stand-up collar (size 15) and soft felt hat. . . . Absconded 5th inst., and may have left, or will endeavor to leave, the country.

Perhaps luckily, most barbers are lambs—however, properly spurred, even Mr. Budd turned into a lion.

MR. BUDD READ THE description through carefully once again and sighed. It was in the highest degree unlikely that William Strickland should choose his small and unsuccessful saloon, out of all the barber's shops in London, for a hair-

This story, culled from a distinguished British anthology published in 1931, offers definite proof that Dorothy L. Sayers did exist before she burst in fine full bloom upon the American public with Lord Peter Wimsey a few years later. Yet even more important, from our point of view, it reveals that different mystery authors, writing different kinds of stories upon different sides of the Atlantic, may for totally different story purposes come up with identical devices. For evidence just read Q. Patrick's THE HATED WOMAN in this issue of TSDM and do a little marveling.

cut or a shave, still less for "dyeing same"—even if he was in London, which Mr. Budd saw no reason to suppose.

Three weeks had gone by since the murder and the odds were a hundred to one that William Strickland had already left a country too eager with its offer of free hospitality. Nevertheless, Mr. Budd committed the description, as well as he could, to memory. This procedure was virtually automatic.

It was a chance—just as the Great Crossword Tournament had been a chance, just as the Ninth Rainbow Ballot had been a chance and the Bunko Poster Ballot and the Monster Treasure Hunt organized by the *Evening Clarion.* Any headline with money in it could attract Mr. Budd's fascinated eye in these lean days, whether if offered a choice between fifty thousand pounds down and ten pounds a week for life or merely a modest hundred or so.

It may seem strange that in an age of shingling and bingling Mr. Budd should look enviously at *Complete Lists of Prize-winners.* Had not the hairdresser across the way, who only last year had eked out his mean ninepences with the yet meaner profits on cheap cigarettes and comic papers, lately bought out the greengrocer next door and engaged a staff of exquisitely coiffed assistants to adorn his new *Ladies' Hairdressing Department* with its purple-and-orange curtains, its two rows of gleaming marble basins and an apparatus like a Victorian chandelier for permanent waving?

Had he not installed a large electric sign, surrounded by a scarlet border that ran 'round and 'round perpetually, like a kitten chasing its own cometary tail? Was it not his sandwich-man, even now patrolling the pavement with a luminous announcement of Treatment and Prices? And was there not at this moment an endless stream of young ladies hastening into those heavily-perfumed parlors in the desperate hope of somehow getting a shampoo and a wave "squeezed in" before closing-time?

If the reception clerk shook a regretful head, they did not think of crossing the road to Mr. Budd's dimly-lighted window. They made an appointment four days ahead and waited patiently, anxiously fingering the bristly growth at the back of the neck and the straggly bits behind the ears that so soon got out of hand.

Day after day Mr. Budd watched them flit in and out of the rival establishment, willing, praying even, in a vague ill-directed manner, that some of them would come over to him—but they never did.

And yet Mr. Budd knew himself to be the finer artist. He had seen shingles turned out from over the way that he would never have countenanced, let alone charged three shillings and sixpence for. Shingles with an ugly hard line at the nape, shingles which were a slander on the shape of a good head or brutally emphasized the weak

points of an ugly one. Hurried, conscienceless shingles, botched work, handed over on a crowded afternoon to a girl who had only served a three-years' apprenticeship and to whom the final mysteries of "tapering" were a sealed book.

And then there was the "tinting" —his own pet subject, which he had studied *con amore*—if only those too-sprightly matrons would come to him! He would gently dissuade them from that dreadful mahogany dye that made them look like metallic Robots—he would warn them against that widely advertised preparation which was so incalculable in its effects—he would use the cunning skill which long experience had matured in him—tint them with infinitely delicate art which conceals itself.

Yet nobody came to Mr. Budd but the navvies and young loungers and the men who plied their trade beneath the naphtha-flares in Wilton Street.

And why could not Mr. Budd also have burst out into marble and electricity and swum to fortune on the rising tide?

The reason is very distressing and, as it fortunately has no bearing on the story, shall be told with merciful brevity.

Mr. Budd had a young brother, Richard, whom he had promised his mother to look after. In happier days Mr. Budd had owned a flourishing business in their native town of Northampton and Richard had been a bank clerk. Richard had got into bad ways—poor Mr. Budd blamed himself dreadfully for this. There had been a sad affair with a girl and a horrid series of affairs with bookmakers and then Richard tried to mend bad with worse by taking money from the bank. You need to be very much more skillful than Richard to juggle successfully with bank ledgers.

The bank manager was a hard man of the old school. He prosecuted. Mr. Budd paid the bank and the bookmakers and saw the girl through her trouble, while Richard was in prison, and paid their fares to Australia when he came out and gave them something to start life on anew.

But it took all the profits of the hairdressing business and he couldn't face all the people in Northampton any more, who had known him all his life. So he had run to vast London, the refuge of all who shrink from the eyes of their neighbors, and bought this little shop in Pimlico, which had done fairly well until the new fashion, which did so much for other hairdressing businesses, killed it for lack of capital.

That is why Mr. Budd's eye was so painfully fascinated by headlines with money in them.

He put the newspaper down and as he did so caught sight of his own reflection in the glass and smiled, for he was not without a sense of humor. He did not look quite the man to catch a brutal murderer single-handed. He was well on in the middle forties—a trifle paunchy with fluffy pale hair, getting a trifle

thin on top—partly hereditary, partly worry, that was—five feet six at most and soft-handed, as a hairdresser must be.

Even razor in hand he would hardly be a match for William Strickland, height six feet one or two, who had so ferociously battered his old aunt to death, so butcherly hacked her limb from limb, so horribly disposed of her remains in the copper. Shaking his head dubiously Mr. Budd advanced to the door to cast a forlorn eye at the busy establishment over the way—and nearly ran into a bulky customer who dived in rather precipitately.

"I beg your pardon, sir," murmured Mr. Budd, fearful of alienating ninepence. "Just stepping out for a breath of fresh air, sir. Shave, sir?"

The large man tore off his overcoat without waiting for Mr. Budd's obsequious hands.

"Are you prepared to die?" he demanded abruptly.

The question chimed in so alarmingly with Mr. Budd's thoughts about murder that for a moment it quite threw him off his professional balance.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he stammered and in the same moment decided that the man must be a preacher of some kind. He looked rather like it, with his odd, light eyes, his bush of fiery hair and short, jutting chin-beard. Perhaps he even wanted a subscription. That would be hard when Mr. Budd had already set him down as ninepence or, with tip, possibly even a shilling.

"Do you do dyeing?" said the man impatiently.

"Oh!" said Mr. Budd, relieved. "Yes, sir—certainly, sir."

A stroke of luck, this. Dyeing meant quite a big sum—his mind soared to seven-and-sixpence.

"Good," said the man, sitting down and allowing Mr. Budd to put an apron about his neck. He was safely gathered in now—he could hardly dart away down the street with a couple of yards of white cotton flapping from his shoulders.

"Fact is," said the man, "my young lady doesn't like red hair. She says it's conspicuous. The other young ladies in her firm make jokes about it. So, as she's a good bit younger than I am, you see, I like to oblige her, and I was thinking perhaps it could be changed into something quieter, what? Dark brown, now—that's the color she has a fancy for. What do *you* say?"

It occurred to Mr. Budd that the young ladies might consider this abrupt change of coat even funnier than the original color—but in the interests of business he agreed that dark brown would be very becoming and a great deal less noticeable than red. Besides, very likely there *was* no young lady.

A woman, he knew, will say frankly that she wants different-colored hair for a change, or just to try, or because she fancies it would suit her. But if a man is going to do a silly thing he prefers, if possible, to shuffle the responsibility onto someone else.

"Very well then," said the cus-

tomer, "go ahead. And I'm afraid the beard will have to go. My young lady doesn't like beards."

"A great many young ladies don't, sir," said Mr. Budd. "They're not so fashionable nowadays as they used to be. It's very fortunate that you can stand a clean shave very well, sir. You have just the chin for it."

"Do you think so?" said the man, examining himself a little anxiously. "I'm glad to hear it."

"Will you have the moustache off as well, sir?"

"Well, no—no, I think I'll stick to that as long as I'm allowed to, what?" He laughed loudly and Mr. Budd approvingly noted well-kept teeth and a gold stopping. The customer was obviously ready to spend money on his personal appearance.

In fancy Mr. Budd saw this well-off and gentlemanly customer advising all his friends to visit "his man"—"wonderful fellow, wonderful—round at the back of Victoria Station—you'd never find it by yourself—only a little place but he knows what he's about—I'll write it down for you." It was imperative that there should be no fiasco. Hair-dyes were awkward things. There had been a case in the paper lately.

"I see you have been using a tint before, sir," said Mr. Budd with respect. "Could you tell me . . .?"

"Eh?" said the man. "Oh, yes—well, fact is, as I said, my fiancée's a good bit younger than I am. As I expect you can see, I began to go grey early—my father was just the same—all our family—so I had it touched up—streaky bits restored, you see. But she doesn't take to the color, so I thought, if I have to dye it at all, why not a color she *does* fancy while we're about it, what?"

It is a common jest among the unthinking that hairdressers are garrulous. This is their wisdom. The hairdresser hears many secrets and very many lies. In his discretion he occupies his unruly tongue with the weather and the political situation lest, restless with inaction, it plunge unbridled into a mad career of inconvenient candor.

Lightly holding forth upon the caprices of the feminine mind, Mr. Budd subjected his customer's locks to the scrutiny of trained eye and fingers. Never—never in the process of nature could hair of that texture and quality have been red. It was naturally black hair, prematurely turned, as some black hair will turn, to a silvery grey. However, that was none of his business. He elicited the information he really needed—the name of the dye formerly used—and noted that he would have to be careful. Some dyes do not mix kindly with other dyes.

Chatting pleasantly Mr. Budd lathered his customer, removed the offending beard and executed a vigorous shampoo, preliminary to the dyeing process. As he wielded the roaring drier, he reviewed Wimbledon, the Silk-tax and the Summer Time Bill—at that moment threatened with sudden strangulation—and passed naturally on to the Manchester murder.

"The police seem to have given it up as a bad job," said the man.

"Perhaps the reward will liven things up a bit," said Mr. Budd, the thought being naturally uppermost in his mind.

"Oh, there's a reward, is there? I hadn't seen that."

"It's in tonight's paper, sir. Maybe you'd like to have a look at it."

"Thanks, I should."

Mr. Budd left the drier to blow the fiery bush of hair at its own wild will for a moment, while he fetched the *Evening Messenger*. The stranger read the paragraph carefully and Mr. Budd, watching him in the glass after the disquieting manner of his craft, saw him suddenly draw back his left hand, which was resting carelessly on the arm of the chair, and thrust it under the apron.

But not before Mr. Budd had seen it. Not before he had taken conscious note of the horny, misshapen thumbnail. Many people had such an ugly mark, Mr. Budd told himself hurriedly—there was his friend, Bert Webber, who had sliced the top of his thumb right off in a motorcycle chain—his nail looked very much like that.

The man glanced up and the eyes of his reflection became fixed on Mr. Budd's face with a penetrating scrutiny—a horrid warning that the real eyes were steadfastly interrogating the reflection of Mr. Budd.

"Not but what," said Mr. Budd, "the man is safe out of the country by now, I reckon. They've put it off too late."

The man laughed.

"I reckon they have," he remarked.

Mr. Budd wondered whether many with smashed left thumbs showed a gold left upper eye-tooth. Probably there were hundreds of people like that going about the country. Likewise with silver-grey hair ("may dye same") and aged about forty-three. Undoubtedly.

Mr. Budd folded up the drier and turned off the gas. Mechanically he took up a comb and drew it through the hair that never, never in the process of Nature, had been that fiery red.

There came back to him, with an accuracy which quite unnerved him, the exact number and extent of the brutal wounds inflicted upon the Manchester victim—an elderly lady, rather stout, she had been. Glancing through the door Mr. Budd noticed that his rival over the way had closed. The streets were full of people. How easy it would be to try to . . .

"Be as quick as you can, won't you?" said the man, a little impatiently but pleasantly enough. "It's getting late. I'm afraid it will keep you overtime."

"Not at all, sir," said Mr. Budd. "It's of no consequence—not the least."

No—if he tried to bolt out of the door his terrible customer would leap upon him, drag him back, throttle his cries and then, with one frightful blow like the one he had smashed in his aunt's skull with . . .

Yet surely Mr. Budd was in a position of advantage. A decided man would do it. He would be out

in the street before the customer could disentangle himself from the chair. Mr. Budd began to edge 'round towards the door.

"What's the matter?" said the customer.

"Just stepping out to look at the time, sir," said Mr. Budd, meekly pausing. Yet he might have done it then, if he only had the courage to make the first swift step that would give the game away.

"It's five-and-twenty past eight," said the man, "by tonight's broadcast. I'll pay extra for the overtime."

"Not on any account," said Mr. Budd. Too late now, he couldn't make another effort. He vividly saw himself tripping on the threshold—falling—the terrible fist lifted to smash him into a pulp. Or perhaps, under the familiar white apron, the disfigured hand was actually clutching a pistol.

Mr. Budd retreated to the back of the shop, collecting his materials. If only he had been quicker—more like a detective in a book—he would have observed that thumbnail, that tooth, put two and two together and run out to give the alarm while the man's head was wet and soapy and his face buried in the towel. Or he could have dabbed lather into his eyes—nobody could possibly commit a murder or even run away down the street with his eyes full of soap.

Even now—Mr. Budd took down a bottle, shook his head and put it back on the shelf—even now, was it really too late? Why could he not take a bold course? He had only to open a razor, go quietly up behind the unsuspecting man and say in a firm loud convincing voice, "William Strickland, put up your hands. Your life is at my mercy. Stand up till I take your gun away. Now walk straight out to the nearest policeman." Surely, in his position, that was what Sherlock Holmes would do.

But as Mr. Budd returned with a little trayful of requirements it was borne in upon him that he was not of the stuff of which great man-hunters are made. For he could not seriously see that attempt "coming off."

Because if he held the razor to the man's throat and said, "Put up your hands," the man would probably merely catch him by the wrists and take the razor away. And greatly as Mr. Budd feared his customer unarmed, he felt it would be a perfect crescendo of madness to put a razor into his hands.

Or, supposing he said, "Put up your hands," and the man just said, "I won't!" What was he to do next? To cut his throat then and there would be murder, even if Mr. Budd could possibly have brought himself to do such a thing. They could not remain there, fixed in one position, till the boy came to do out the shop in the morning.

Perhaps the policeman would notice the light on and the door unfastened and come in? Then he would say, "I congratulate you, Mr. Budd, on having captured a very dangerous criminal." But supposing the policeman didn't happen to

notice—and Mr. Budd would have to stand all the time and he would get exhausted and his attention would relax and then—

After all, Mr. Budd wasn't called upon to arrest the man himself. "Information leading to arrest"—those were the words. He would be able to tell them the wanted man had been there, that he would now have dark brown hair and moustache and no beard. He might even shadow him when he left. He—might even . . .

It was at this moment that the Great Inspiration came to Mr. Budd.

As he fetched a bottle from the glass-fronted case he remembered, with odd vividness, an old-fashioned wooden paper-knife that had belonged to his mother. Between sprigs of blue forget-me-not, hand-painted, it bore the inscription *Knowledge is Power.*

A strange freedom and confidence were vouchsafed to Mr. Budd. His mind was alert, he removed the razors with an easy, natural movement and made nonchalant conversation as he skilfully applied the dark-brown tint.

The streets were less crowded when Mr. Budd let his customer out. He watched the tall figure cross Grosvenor Place and climb on to a 24 bus.

"But that was only his artfulness," said Mr. Budd as he put on his hat and coat and extinguished the lights carefully. "He'll take another at Victoria, like as not, and be making tracks from Charing Cross or Waterloo. He's a cute one."

He closed the shop door, shook it as was his wont, to make sure that the lock had caught properly, and in his turn made his way, by means of a 24, to the top of Whitehall.

The policeman was a little condescending at first when Mr. Budd demanded to see "somebody very high up." But finding the little barber insisted so earnestly that he had news of the Manchester murder and that there wasn't any time to lose, he consented to pass him through.

Mr. Budd was interviewed first by an important-looking Inspector in uniform, who listened very politely to his story and made him repeat very carefully about the gold tooth and the thumbnail and the hair which had been black before it was grey or red and was now dark-brown.

The inspector then touched a bell and said, "Perkins, I think Sir Andrew would like to see this gentleman at once." He was taken to another room, where sat a very shrewd genial gentleman in mufti, who heard him with even greater attention and called in another Inspector to listen too and to take down a very exact description of the—yes, surely the undoubted William Strickland as he now appeared.

"But there's one thing more," said Mr. Budd, "and I'm sure to goodness," he added, "I hope, sir, it is the right man."

He crushed his soft hat into an agitated ball as he leant across the table, breathlessly uttering the story of his great professional betrayal.

The fingers of the wireless operator on the packet *Miranda,* bound for Ostend, moved swiftly as they jotted down the messages of the buzzing wireless mosquito-swarms.

Tzee—z—z—z—tzee—z—z—tzee—z—z—

Dzoo—dz—dz—dz—dzoo—dz—dzoo—dzoo—dz—

Tzee—z—z.

One of them made him laugh.

"The Old Man'd better have this, I suppose," he said.

The Old Man scratched his head when he read it and rang a little bell for the steward. The steward ran down to the little round office where the purser was counting out his money and checking it before he locked it away for the night. On receiving the Old Man's message the purser put the money quickly into the safe, picked up the passenger list and departed aft. There was a short consultation and the bell was rung again—this time to summon the head steward.

Tzee—z—z—tzee—z—z—z—tzee—z—tzee.

All down the Channel, all over the North Sea, up to the Mersey Docks, out into the Atlantic, soared the busy mosquito-swarms. In ship after ship the wireless operator sent his message to the captain, the captain sent for the purser, the purser sent for the head steward and the head steward called his staff about him.

Huge liners, little packets, destroyers, sumptuous private yachts—every floating thing that carried aerials—every port in England, France, Holland, Germany, Denmark, Norway—every police center that could interpret the mosquito message, heard, between laughter and excitement, the tale of Mr. Budd's betrayal. Two Boy Scouts at Croydon, practising their Morse with a homemade valve set, decoded it laboriously into an exercise book.

"Cripes," said Jim to George, "what a joke! D'you think they'll get the beggar?"

The *Miranda* docked at Ostend at 7 A.M. A man burst hurriedly into the cabin where the wireless operator was just taking off his headphones.

"Here!" he cried. "This is to go. There's something up and the Old Man's sent over for the police. The Consul's coming on board."

The wireless operator groaned, and switched on his valves.

Tzee—z—tzee, a message to the English police.

"Man on board answering to description. Ticket booked name of Watson. Has locked self in cabin. Refuses to come out. Insists on having hairdresser sent out to him. Have communicated Ostend police. Await instructions."

The Old Man, with sharp words and authoritative gestures, cleared a way through the excited little knot of people gathered about First Class Cabin No. 36. Several passengers had got wind of "something up."

Magnificently he herded them away to the gangway with their bags and suitcases. Sternly he bade the stewards and the boy, who stood

gaping with his hands full of breakfast dishes, to stand away from the door. Terribly he commanded them to hold their tongues. Four or five sailors stood watchfully at his side. In the restored silence the passenger in No. 36 could be heard pacing up and down the narrow cabin, moving things, clattering, splashing water.

Presently came steps overhead. Somebody arrived with a message. The Old Man nodded. Six pairs of Belgian police boots came tiptoeing down the companion. The Old Man glanced at the official paper held out to him and nodded again. He looked at the officers.

"Ready?"

"Yes."

The Old Man knocked at the door of No. 36.

"Who is it?" cried a harsh voice from within.

"The barber is here, sir, that you sent for."

"Ah!" There was relief in the tone, "send him in alone if you please. I—I have had an accident."

"Yes, sir."

At the sound of the bolt being cautiously withdrawn the Old Man stepped forward. The door opened a chink, and was slammed to again but the Old Man's boot was firmly wedged against the jamb. The policeman surged forward. There was a yelp and a shot, which smashed harmlessly through the window of the first-class saloon, and the passenger was brought out.

"Strike me pink!" shrieked the boy, "strike me pink if he ain't gone green in the night!"

Green!

Not for nothing had Mr. Budd studied the intricate mutual reactions of chemical dyes. In the pride of his knowledge he had set a mark on his man, to mark him out from all the billions of this over-populated world. Was there a port in all Christendom where a murderer might slip away, with every hair on him green as a parrot—green mustache, green eyebrows and that thick springing shock of hair, vivid flaring midsummer green?

Mr. Budd got his £500. The *Evening Messenger* published the full story of his great betrayal. He trembled, fearing this sinister fame. Surely no one would ever come to him again.

On the next morning an enormous blue limousine rolled up to his door, to the immense admiration of Wilton Street. A lady, magnificent in mink and diamonds, swept into the little saloon.

"You *are* Mr. Budd, aren't you?" she cried. "The *great* Mr. Budd? Isn't it *too* wonderful? And now, *dear* Mr. Budd, you *must* do me a favor. You must dye my hair green *at once—Now!* I want to be able to say I'm the *very first* to be done by *you*. I'm the Duchess of Winchester and that awful Melcaster woman is chasing me—the cat!"

If you want it done, I can give you the number of Mr. Budd's parlors in Bond Street. But I understand it is terribly expensive.

three murders for osco

by . . . Leonard J. Guardino

Freedom has brought all sorts of chaos to the Philippines. But no other chaos compares to that in Bogado Ramu's snug little nest.

MY OLD FRIEND Bogado Ramu one day kicked his wife, of which he had six, for dropping hot rice on his head at the supper table. Ramu was so shocked from the hot stuff burning his skin he did not realize what he had done. Before this he had never kicked any of his wives—not in the head, anyway.

He used to kick them where Filipino kids get spanked for doing things which they ought to get kicked in the head for. Ramu was an old Filipino, an old *compañero* of mine of many years standing. I had never known him to lose his temper so completely before.

Ramu wasn't worried. He looked at the prone still figure on the floor and shrugged his shoulders. What was one wife less? But he got to wondering what his remaining five wives would say when they came in from the ricefield.

A minute later Melana, the most beautiful of his spouses, entered the room. She stopped when she saw the body on the bamboo floor and then, quite poker-faced, bent down to examine the body.

"Water—quick, husband!" she cried. "There is a small breath that still comes from her mouth!"

Over the decades crime-fiction has gradually become compartmentalized like one of those old Pelmanism advertisements. We have the straight detective story, the romantic mystery melodrama, the novel of suspense and so on, which thoroughly cover the entire field. But once in a great while a crime story comes along that stubbornly refuses to be catalogued. This is more than just a new story—it's unique!

At this moment the four other women came in. They all had emotionless faces. They merely looked at Ramu and then riveted their attention on Melana, raising the victim to a sitting position. Someone finally brought water but it was too late.

"She is dead," said Melana.

Sudden realization of the brutality he had committed dawned on Ramu. *"No!"* he cried. "She was alive only a minute ago!"

Then he began to talk crazily to himself, walking up and down the room. His wives tried to console him but when he continued to pace the floor, ignoring them, they lifted the body gently and carried it outside.

Ramu followed the women out and stopped on the porch. He remained, watching them from there, as they made their way toward the ricefield. He knew they were going to bury the body in the mud.

"It will sink deep," he told himself. "Not even the blade of my plow will touch it."

When the women came back they washed their hands with a wine called Tuba. Tuba is an ancient Filipino drink made from coconut stalks and potent enough to make American jeeps run when their drivers run out of gas.

Now his wives looked at Ramu, and there was no mistaking their sorrowful expressions. The old man's eyes filled with tears and he went to sit in a corner of the room with a bottle of Tuba, mumbling many foolish and crazy things.

"Sanfronia," he muttered, "you are asleep. Wake up and take my kick off your head!"

The five women stared at one another worriedly.

"You are well, Sanfronia," he went on. "Get up and shut up like I told you many times before you were buried!"

Many words like this followed. Poor Bogado Ramu! Then he drank himself to sleep with the tears still wet upon his face.

His wives gathered round him on tiptoe. One gave his guilty foot a massage with Tuba. It is an old Filipino custom which, I am sorry to say, does not work. It is supposed to wash off the evil of the deed and restore peace of mind in a murderer.

So Ramu slept on with his five faithful wives lying nearby, comforting him even in his depth of uneasy subconsciousness.

One month later who would visit Bogado Ramu? I, Osco Brono, Detective-Guerrilla, or Guerrilla-Detective, depending upon which occasion for action greeted me first. I have not been a Guerrilla since 1945 but no man likes to give up an honorable title.

If someone else were telling this story I would be written of in this way—"Osco is a brave rugged Filipino, young and somewhat handsome. He is also a strong man, five foot six in his American shoes, which he bought at a bargain in Mindinao for only 400 pesos. He is also a detective with a knife in his belt and a pleasant smile on his strong, good-looking face."

This is the way a writer would write of me—if I gave him a few hundred pesos no doubt—but it is true biographical material at any rate, no matter who writes it.

I came upon Bogado Ramu leaning dejectedly against a coconut palm tree near a road. When he saw me he held up two fingers and hollered, "Hello, Osco Brono." Then he used the same two fingers to blow his nose and said nothing.

Jocularly, I inquired, "My esteemed *compañero,* why do you lean on this mute tree when you have six wives to lean on more comfortably?"

"It is five now, Osco, my friend," he said mournfully.

I was surprised. I asked in the Visayan language something of a personal nature and he shook his head. "No, no. She did not run away with a Filipino Constabulary. I murder her!"

I could say nothing but stared at him, unbelievingly.

"Come, let's sit on the porch," said Ramu. "It is very dusty here by the road."

We sat on the porch. Bogado Ramu looked strangely bewildered at a bottle of Tuba on the table. Then I said, gently, "Unfold your troubles, *compañero*—and I will wrap them up and dispose of them for you." I stated this in the Luzon language of Lucano, which puts it more eloquently.

"Don't make a package of hope, my friend," Ramu began in Tagalog and ended in the Pangasinan language with, "for I hold not any."

I said in effective American lingo, "Let's stop all this digressing bullshoot and get down to brass tacks. I want to help you."

The old boy looked sad and shook his head. I looked irately away and up at the heavens, where a fleet of American planes sped toward the creeping twilight of the skies. There were six, reminding me instantly of the five wives Ramu said he had left.

"You smile less, my friend, in five minutes," I said, "than in the twenty years I've known you."

Ramu snapped his fingers. His wives appeared on the porch. "Dance," he commanded them. And they began to trip the light fantastic on the rickety porch's floorboards.

I watched with great interest for a while. Then I said, "They dance well, like the many other times I've watched—but there seems to be something missing, my friend."

I looked slyly at Ramu, who put down his bottle of Tuba hard after a swallow. "My God, Osco! All I did was kick her on the head and she fell murdered—by me!"

And he began to cry. I was going to say something consoling when a flurry of shrieks numbed my ears. I turned in time to see one of the dancing women slump to the floor!

Melana was there again to pick the woman up. "Ramu—water, *quick!*" she cried.

Ramu was too slow to get it, so I gave him a drink of Tuba, instead. "As for the victim," I said, "anyone can tell she is a dead duck from the

look on her face. Which one of you girls did it?"

Melana arose from her squatting position. "She fainted. No one did it," she said.

Ramu, looking pale, said, "She is dead. They will bury her too but I did not kill her, I swear, my friend!" And he began to walk up and down the porch like a crazy man.

He disappeared into the house and I warned the women, "Don't bury this one, whatever you do."

I ran into the house and told Ramu, "Sit down and relax, *compañero*. I see how this wife died. You are innocent, I think."

He looked thunderstruck. "Then how did the first die?"

"Simple," I answered. "You kicked her in the head! But I do not think she died from that." I asked him many questions.

When I went back to the porch there were no wives to be found around. The corpse was missing too. This was getting interesting.

I went back into the house to calm the dazed Ramu down.

It was getting dark when the wives came back. Ramu saw them and gave an animal cry. He ran outside with seven bottles of Tuba. My curiosity was aroused. I followed him. From a clever hiding place I could see he was burying the Tuba.

When he came back into the house I asked him, "My friend, why did you hide your stock of Tuba?"

"Because my wives will wash their hands in it, that's why!"

I understood. Tuba was precious liquor in this part of Leyte.

Then the women went out to wash their hands with water that came from an artesian well in the backyard. As is the ancient Filipino custom, they re-entered the house to dry their hands on Ramu's shirt.

When they had seated themselves on the bamboo floor I gave each of the wives very disapproving looks. "You did not obey my instructions," I told them. "You went ahead and buried another body. This is an atrocity to the laws of justice."

Not having anything more to say I suggested to Ramu that poker will help ease his heavy sorrow. We sat at a table and I shuffled the cards. I said, "Ramu, I do not believe you murdered your wives. I have clues swimming in my head."

The old man looked strangely hopeful and said, "I tell you, Osco, even my foot did not feel the kick. Sanfronia had cushiony hair which must have withstood the shock a bit. I can't understand it. Maybe they buried her alive!"

"Nonsense, Bogado. She was dead, all right."

"I grieve very much," whimpered Ramu.

"Place your grief, my friend, on your second wife, who died without a kick."

I dealt, through this conversation, a bum hand to Ramu and cleaned up some six pesos. Poker is interesting to play when someone like Ramu is not interested in playing it at the moment.

"Why did you tell them not to

bury the second dead wife?" asked Ramu.

"I was thinking of the police," I answered.

"But there are no police here in this town since the Liberation."

"Nevertheless," I said, "a good detective thinks of the police always." We kept playing. Ramu put down a full-house he held. "Too bad," I said. "My straight beats your three threes and two deuces, my friend." I raked in another six pesos.

I was about to deal myself a fourth ace when a terrible scream shattered the silence of the house. It was followed by the noise of a woman falling on the stairs. When she fell and lay still on the bottom step Ramu gave his forehead a resounding slap, rolled his eyes and passed out!

I was surprised to see three women coming down the stairs, as they had been sitting in the same room with me when I and Ramu had started to play poker. It was through my cheating that they had given me the slip and had gone upstairs!

I felt ashamed and pocketed three aces. Then I saw Melana raising the body of the third victim halfway from the floor.

"Water, quick!" she cried.

One wife got the idea and ran out to the porch. She brought back a half-drunk bottle which she placed on the lips of the unconscious Ramu.

Ramu came around and leaped to his feet. "My God, another one!"

I bent down and examined the body. I lifted the dead woman's eyelids and they came down quick like elastic. "A burial job too," I said. "Tell me, Ramu. Was this third unfortunate wife of yours a schoolteacher at one time?"

"Why, yes!" he exclaimed, amazed. "How could you know?"

Ramu did not get the joke when I answered with, "Very simple. I looked at the pupils in her eyes!" It was a typical American joke and I am a sucker for them. I laughed for a brief while, and then the old man shook his head fearfully.

"I am afraid this house is haunted, Osco."

"Did it ever strike you as strange," I put in, "how these deaths occur one after the other, Ramu?"

He looked dumb and shrugged. I went on. "Did you ever stop to think what main peculiar thing exists conspicuously about these sudden deaths? And that main peculiar thing is that these women seem to be dying in a hurry in my presence.

"Who knows that before this night ends we shall all be dead—except the murderer—the clever killer who is here in this very room now!"

Ramu turned pale. "You mean someone in this house is the murderer?"

I looked at the three poker-faced remaining wives. "Exactly. But I fail to find the motive. Very strange."

I went out into the yard and brought back the seven bottles of Tuba Ramu had hidden. I poured out a drink and swallowed it. Then

I swung around and faced the old man. "But you are suspect number one, my friend!"

Ramu began to weep and I felt sorry. I caught the three women attempting to sneak out. "Not so soon, please! Come back!"

They came back in and I ordered them to be seated on the floor. "Do not cry, Ramu. I will try to solve this case now."

At the point of the murderous-looking dagger I'd once bought cheap from an American war surplus store for 300 pesos I ordered each of the women to drink up a bottle of Tuba. They did so and quickly!

I could not blame them for getting scared as I looked and threatened them much like a madman would. I was not surprised when two of the wives passed out like a light—only Melana remained conscious and eyeing me like I was a dirty rat!

I ignored her look and asked the first wife, "What is your name?" She was sleeping and gave no answer. The second was also asleep. I asked Melana, "Your name, please?"

"Mind your—*!!*!!! business!" she snapped.

"Ah," I said, "you learned and remembered words from the Yank soldiers haven't you? Melana, why did you push the third wife from the top stair?"

I thought this would serve as a bombshell but she didn't bat an eyelash!

"We'll find out, Malana." I smiled. "Ramu, please take your shoe off." Ramu looked bewildered but soon took it off and threw it to me.

I said, "This is Exhibit A. Exhibit B is the fatal dance. Exhibit C is a push from the stairs which killed another wife and which Melana herself did the pushing!"

I pointed an accusing finger in her beautiful face. She screamed like a siren. "You are a big liar, sir!"

"On the contrary," I said. "I saw you do it, Melana!"

She turned green from her original peach-brown color, then from green she turned pale. Ramu said, heatedly, "On the contrary to you, Osco! You were playing cards with me. We did not see anyone kill anybody!"

I ignored him. "Melana, why is that long six-inch needle hanging from the hem of your dress?" She gave a frightened scream but I was too fast for her. I had the damning evidence before she could get it!

I said, "Very clever. Let's see—first wife falls from the kick Ramu dealt her. Melana bends down, picks body halfway from floor and runs this almost invisible weapon through her spine, piercing her heart!"

Melana smirked. "How'd I kill the second wife?"

"The fainting part of it has me puzzled, I admit. But you bent down the same way and ran the needle through her while hollering for water, like you did the first one!"

Ramu slumped in a chair and drank a long draught from a bottle.

I asked Melana, "Why did you push the third wife from the stairs?"

She shook her head.

"Why did you kill three innocent people who never done you any harm?" I asked.

"Nuts to you, sir. You are a liar!"

"Ramu," I exclaimed, "the motive—the motive! If we could only think of the motive. Haven't you any idea, Ramu?"

"Search me." The old man shrugged listlessly.

"Ah!" I vociferated. "You give me an idea already, my friend! Can I go through Melana's personal belongings?"

"She has no belongings, Osco. All she owns is on her back."

I was stumped for a long two minutes. "Ramu," I pleaded, "think. Hasn't she something more besides a dress and the dirt on her feet and conscience? A secret diary, perhaps?"

"I do not know, *compañero*. Honestly."

"I do not write anyway," grinned Melana triumphantly and with malevolence.

"But you cannot deny that you can read, can you, Melana?"

Ramu cried, "Ah yes! That she does, my friend, even as I! She has, in fact, been reading one book for the last six months!"

"What kind of book, Ramu?"

"It's got a strange title." Ramu scratched his head hard, trying to think of it. "Let me see—ah! I got it! It is called *Live Alone and Like It* by Herman Herwitt, psychiatrist!"

Melana ran out!

Ramu yelled, "Don't let her escape, Osco! She is the murderer!"

"Let her go, my friend," I said. "Besides, there are no police in this little old bombed-out town. I have solved the mystery and that's all that counts."

"She will come back, I know," said Ramu, "and try to kill me. But I will be ready for her with a knife. I will kill her instead. I must."

"Exactly, my *compañero*. Now let us resume our poker business."

"I will kick her," said Ramu, "like I didn't kill my first wife, thanks to you, my great detective!"

When I won another six pesos, Ramu said, "It's funny how my foot still feels guilty."

When I pocketed another easy six pesos my pockets began to entertain the same feeling.

— Continued from back cover

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Mason picks up the phone. A voice says: "See Carlin tonight. Tell him to get another partner. *Matter of life and death!*" But Carlin never HAD a partner! Yet he's MURDERED!

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Belle Adrain, Mason's client, is pale as a ghost. A witness SWEARS he saw her at the scene of the murder. And Exhibit "A" — the *murder* weapon — is Belle's OWN GUN!

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Mason sees a girl escaping from George Alder's estate. She hands him a letter. "Alder will do ANYTHING to get this letter!" she says. "You *must* stop him!" But someone else beats Mason to it — *by killing Alder!*

6 The Case of the FIERY FINGERS

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— Continued on inside cover

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