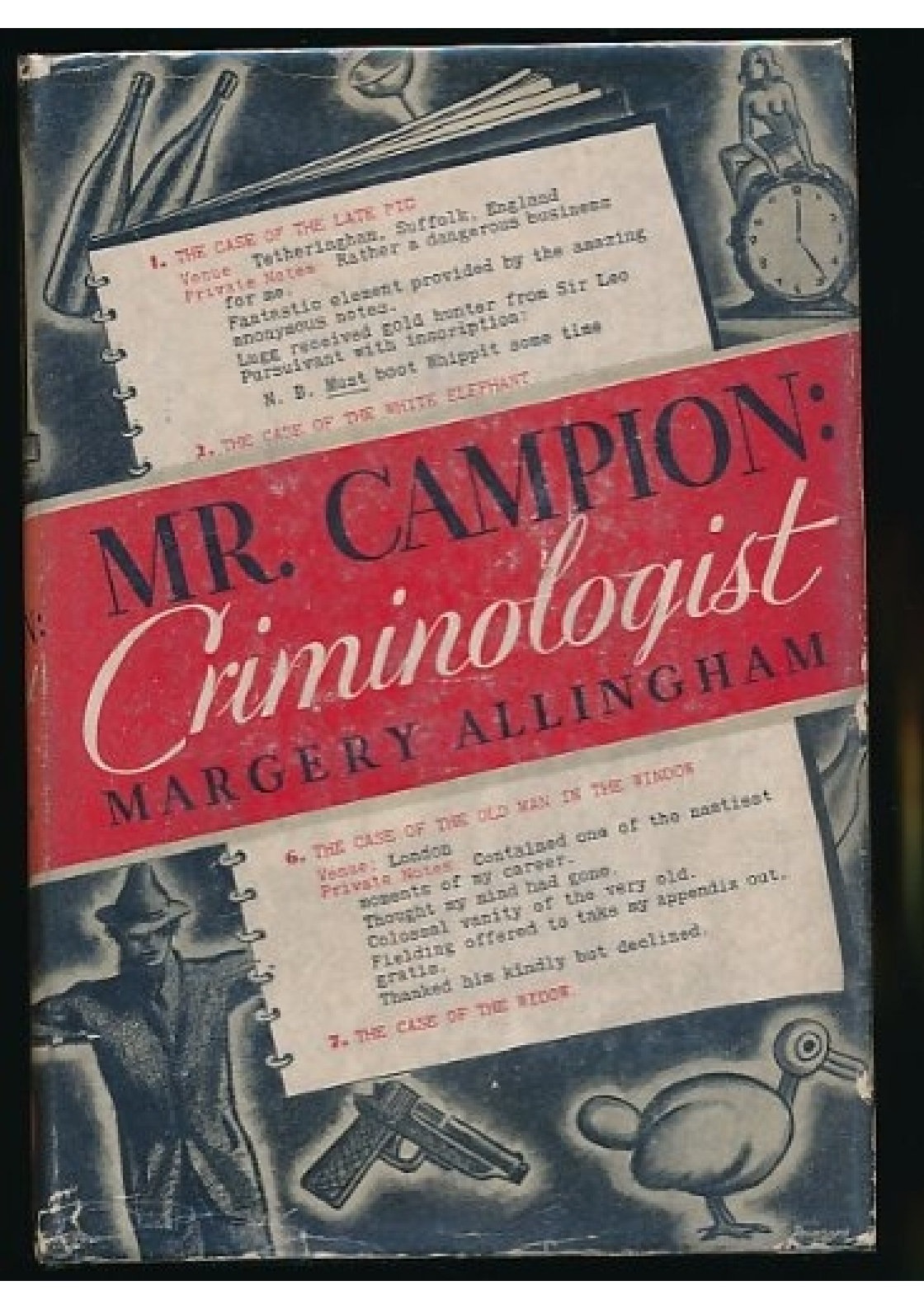
1. THE CASE OF THE LATE PIG
Venue: Tetheringham, Suffolk, England
Private Notes: Rather a dangerous business for me.
Fantastic element provided by the amazing anonymous notes.
Last received gold hunter from Sir Leo Pursuivant with inscription:
N. B. Must boot Whipple some time
2. THE CASE OF THE WHITE ELEPHANT
MR. CAMPION:
Criminologist
MARGERY ALLINGHAM
6. THE CASE OF THE OLD MAN IN THE WINDOW
Venue: London
Private Notes: Contained one of the nastiest moments of my career.
Thought my mind had gone.
Colossal vanity of the very old.
Fielding offered to take my appendix out.
Gratis.
Thanked him kindly but declined.
7. THE CASE OF THE WIDOW

*Title:* Mr. Campion: Criminologist
*Author:* Allingham, Margery [Youngman Carter, Margery Louise] (1904-1966)
*Date of first publication:* 1937
*Edition used as base for this ebook:* New York: Manor Books, 1977
*Date first posted:* June 29, 2018
*Date last updated:* November 14, 2021
Faded Page eBook #20181027

This eBook was produced by Al Haines

**Publisher's Note:**

As part of the conversion of the book to its new digital format, we have made certain minor adjustments in its layout.

The printed edition used to create this eBook contained seven cases, one of which was The Case of the Late Pig. However, that story was already available from Project Gutenberg Canada as a separate etext based on the 1937 Heinemann edition, and has been omitted from this eBook. The Note following the Contents has been retained as printed.

Margery
Allingham

# Mr. Campion: Criminologist

***Contents***



***Note***

These seven cases have been chosen from Mr Campion's personal records of his successes as it has been thought that they represent a fair survey of his detective work.

In the matter of The Late Pig Mr Campion has been persuaded to tell the story in his own words, as for purely private reasons he was against including it unless the personal aspect of the case was handled with the delicacy it deserved. The lady in question has now seen the report and has consented to its admission.

The remainder of the histories have been set down by his private secretary, Miss Margery Allingham, who has hitherto enjoyed the sole rights of chronicling his activities.

ALBERT CAMPION'S CASEBOOK
VOL. 6. P. 1 ET SEQ.

## THE CASE OF THE WHITE ELEPHANT

DATE: May 20-25, 1935.

VENUE: London and Paris.

OFFICIALS: Superintendent Stanislaus Oates of the Central Branch of the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard.

PRIVATE NOTES: Very ingenious method of communication first used by Meyer gang. Memo: Look out for this; it will be used again.
Dangers of international charitable organizations.

Sent Juliet Graysby Copenhagen-porcelain fish (wedding present). Expensive case for me.

## The Case of the White Elephant

Mr Campion, piloting his companion through the crowded courtyard at Burlington House, became aware of the old lady in the Daimler partly because her chauffeur almost ran over him and partly because she gave him a stare of such vigorous and personal disapproval that he felt she must either know him very well indeed or have mistaken him for someone else entirely.

Juliet Fysher-Sprigge, who was leaning on his arm with all the weariness of a two-hour trek round the academy's Summer Exhibition, enlightened him.

"We were not amused, were we?" she said. "Old-fashioned people have minds that are just too prurient, my dear. After all, I have known you for years, haven't I, and I'm not even married to Philip. Besides, the academy is so respectable. It isn't as though she'd seen me sneaking out of the National Gallery."

Mr Campion handed her into a taxicab.

"Who was she?" he enquired, hoisting his lank form in after her.

Juliet laughed. Her laughter was one of her most charming attributes, for it wiped the sophistication from her débutante's face and left her the schoolgirl he had known three years before.

"My dear, didn't you recognize her? That would have been the last straw for the poor darling! That's Florence, Dowager Countess of Marie. Philip's Auntie Flo."

Mr Campion's pale blue eyes grew momentarily more intelligent behind his horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Ah, hence the disgust," he said. "You'll have to explain me away. The police are always doing it."

Juliet turned to him with the wide-eyed ingenuousness of one who perceives a long-awaited opening.

"You still dabble in police and detection and things, then?" she said breathlessly and not very tactfully, since his reputation as a criminologist was considerable. "Do tell me, what is the low-down on these terribly exciting burglaries? Are the police really beaten or are they being bribed? No one talks of anything else these days. I just had to see you and find out."

Her companion leant back in the leathery depths of the cab and sighed regretfully.

"When you phoned me and demanded to be taken to this execrable exhibition I was vain enough to think it was my companionship you were after," he said. "Now it turns out to be merely a vulgar pursuit of the material for gossip. Well,

my girl, you're going to be disappointed. The clever gentleman doesn't know a thing and, what's more, he doesn't care. Have you lost anything yourself?"

"Me?" Juliet's gratification at the implied compliment all but outweighed her disappointment. "Of course I haven't. It's only the really worth-while collections that have gone. That's why it's so interesting. The De Breuil diamonds went first. Then the Denver woman lost her emeralds and the glorious Napoleon necklace. Josephine Pharoah had her house burgled and just lost her tiara, which was the one really good thing she had, and now poor old Mrs Dacre has had her diamonds and rubies pinched, including the famous dog collar. Forty-two diamonds, my dear!—each one quite as big as a pea. They say it's a cat burglar and the police know him quite well but they can't find him—at least, that's one story. The other one is that it's all being done for the insurance and the police are in it. What do you think?"

Mr Campion glanced at her affectionately and noted that the gold hair under her small black hat curled as naturally as ever.

"Both stories are equally good," he announced placidly. "Come and have some tea, or has Philip's Auntie Flo got spies everywhere?"

Miss Fysher-Sprigge blushed. "I don't care if she has," she said. "I've quarrelled with Philip, anyway."

It took Mr Campion several minutes, until they were seated at a table on the edge of the Hotel Monde's smaller

dance floor, in fact, before he fully digested this piece of information. Juliet was leaning back in her chair, her eyes roving over the gathering in a frank search for old acquaintances, when he spoke again.

"Seriously?" he enquired.

Juliet met his eyes and again he saw her sophistication vanish.

"I hope not," she said soberly. "I've been rather an ass. Can I tell you about it?"

Mr Campion smiled ruefully. It was a sign of the end of the thirties, he supposed, when one submitted cheerfully to the indignity of taking a young woman out only to hear about her hopes and fears concerning a younger man. Juliet went on blissfully, lowering her voice so that the heart searchings of the balalaika orchestra across the floor concealed it from adjoining tables.

"Philip is a dear, but he has to be so filthily careful about the stupidest things," she said, accepting a rhum-baba. "The P.O. casts a sort of white light over people, have you noticed? His relations are like it, too, only worse. You can't talk of anything without getting warned off. The aunt we saw today bit my head off the other evening for merely mentioning these cat burglaries, which, after all, are terribly exciting. 'My child,' she said, 'we can't afford to know about such things,' and went on talking about her old White Elephant until I nearly wept."

"White Elephant?" Mr Campion looked blank. "The charity?"

Juliet nodded. "'Send your white elephant to Florence Countess of Marie, and she will find it a home where it will be the pet of the family,'" she quoted. "It's quite an important affair, patronised by royalty and blessed by every archbishop in the world. I pointed out it was only a glorified jumble sale and she nearly had a fit. She works herself to death for it. I go and help pack up parcels sometimes—or I did before this row with Philip. I've been rather silly. I've done something infuriating. Philip's livid with me now and I don't know what's going to happen when he finds out everything. I must tell somebody. Can I tell you?"

A faint smile passed over Mr Campion's thin face.

"You're quite a nice girl," he said, "but you won't stay twenty-one for ever. Stop treating me as though I was a maiden uncle."

"You must be thirty-six at least," said Miss Fysher-Sprigge brutally, "and I'm rather glad, because presumably you're sensible. Look here, if a man has a criminal record it doesn't mean he's always going to be stealing things, does it? Not if he promises to go straight?"

Her companion frowned. "I don't quite follow," he said. "Age is stopping the brain from functioning. I thought we were talking about Philip Graysby, Auntie Flo's nephew?"

"So we are," said Juliet. "He hasn't got the record, of course, but Henry Swan has. Henry Swan is—or, rather, was—Philip's man. He'd been with Philip for eighteen months and been perfectly good, and then this came out about him. Philip said he was awfully sorry but he'd have to go. Philip couldn't help it, I suppose—I do see that now—but at the time I was furious. It seemed so unfair, and we had a quarrel. I said some beastly things and so did he, but he wouldn't give in and Swan went."

She paused and eyed her companion dubiously. Mr Campion shrugged his shoulders.

"It doesn't seem very serious," he said.

Juliet accepted the cigarette he offered her and seemed engrossed in the tip of it.

"No," she agreed. "That part isn't. But you see, I'm a very impulsive person and I was stupidly cross at the time and so when I had a wonderful idea for getting my own back I acted on it. I got Swan a job with the most respectable person I knew and, in order to do it, I gave him a reference. To make it a good reference I didn't say anything about the record. How's that?"

"Not so good," he admitted. "Who's the most respectable person harbouring this human bomb?"

Juliet avoided his eyes. "Philip's Auntie Flo," she said. "She's the stiffest, thorniest, most conventional of them all. Philip doesn't go there often so he hasn't seen Swan yet, but

when he does and makes enquiries and hears about me—well, it's going to be awkward. D'you think he'll ever forgive me? He stands to get a fortune from Auntie Flo if he doesn't annoy her. It was a silly thing of me to do, wasn't it?"

"Not bright," agreed Mr Campion. "Are you in love with Philip?"

"Horribly," said Juliet Fysher-Sprigge and looked away across the dance floor.

Mr Campion had spent some time expounding a wise course of action, in which a clean breast to all concerned figured largely, when he became aware that he was not being heard. Juliet was still staring across the room, her eyes puzzled.

"I say," she said unexpectedly, "this place is wildly expensive, isn't it?"

"I hope not," said Mr Campion mildly.

Juliet did not smile. Her cheeks were faintly flushed and her eyes questioning.

"Don't be a fool. You know what I mean. This is probably the most expensive place in London, isn't it? How queer! It looks as though Auntie Flo really has got her spies everywhere. That's her manicurist over there, having tea alone.

He glanced casually across the room.

"The woman sitting directly under the orchestra?" he enquired. "The one who looks like a little bull in a navy hat? She's an interesting type, isn't she? Not very nice."

Juliet's eyes were still thoughtful.

"That's her. Miss Matisse. A visiting manicurist," she said. "She goes to dozens of people I know. I believe she's very good. How funny for her to come to tea alone, here of all places..."

Mr Campion's casual interest in the small square figure who managed somehow to look flamboyant in spite of her sober clothes showed signs of waning.

"She may be waiting for someone," he suggested.

"But she's ordered her tea and started it."

"Oh well, perhaps she just felt like eating."

"Rubbish!" said Juliet. "You pay ten and sixpence just to sit in this room because you can dance if you want to."

Her host laughed. "Auntie Flo has a pretty turn of speed if she tracked us down here and then whipped round and set her manicuring bloodhound on us, all in half an hour," he said.

Juliet ignored him. Her attention had wandered once again.

"I say," she murmured, "can you see through that mirror over there? See that man eating alone? I thought at first he

was watching Miss Matisse, but I believe it's you he's most interested in."

Her companion turned his head and his eyes widened.

"Apologies," he said. "I underestimated you. That's Detective Sergeant Blower, one of the best men in the public-school and night-club tradition. I wonder who he's tailing. Don't watch him—it's unkind."

Juliet laughed. "You're a most exciting person to have tea with," she said. "I do believe..."

The remainder of her remark was lost as, in common with all but one visitor in the room, she was silenced by what was, for the Hotel Monde, a rather extraordinary incident.

The balalaika orchestra had ceased to play for a moment or so and the dance floor was practically deserted when, as though taking advantage of the lull, the woman in the navy hat rose from her chair and shouted down the whole length of the long room, in an effort, apparently, to attract the attention of a second woman who had just entered.

"Mrs Gregory!" Her voice was powerful and well articulated. "Mrs Gregory! Mrs Gregory!"

The newcomer halted as all eyes were turned upon her, and her escort expostulated angrily to the excited maître d'hotel who hurried forward.

Miss Matisse sat down, and in the silence Mr Campion heard her explaining in a curiously flat voice to the waiter

who came up to her.

"I am sorry. I thought I recognised a friend. I was mistaken. Bring me my bill, please."

Juliet stared across the table, her young face shocked.

"What a very extraordinary thing to do," she said.

Mr Campion did not reply. From his place of vantage he could see in the mirror that Detective Sergeant Blower had also called for his bill and was preparing to leave.

Some little time later, when Mr Campion deposited Juliet on her Mount Street doorstep, she was in a more cheerful mood.

"Then you think if I go to Philip and tell him the worst and say that I'm sorry he'll forgive me?" she said as they parted.

"If he's human he'll forgive you anything," Mr Campion assured her gallantly.

Juliet sighed. "Age does improve the manners," she said unnecessarily, "I'll forgive you for disappointing me about the burglaries. I really had hoped to get all the dirt. Good-bye."

"Damn the burglaries!" said Mr Campion and took a taxi home.

Three days later he said the same thing again but for a different reason. This reason arrived by post. It came in a

fragrant green box designed to contain a large flask of familiar perfume and it lay upon his breakfast table winking at him with evil amusement. It was Mrs Dacre's ruby-and-diamond dog collar and it was not alone. In a nest of cotton wool beneath it were five diamond rings of considerable value, a pair of exquisite ruby ear clips, and a small hooped bracelet set with large alternate stones.

Mr Campion, who was familiar with the "stolen" list which the police send round to their local stations and circularise to the jewellers and pawnbrokers of the kingdom, had no difficulty in recognising the collection as the haul of the last cat burglary.

The sender of so dubious a gift might have been harder to identify had it not been for the familiarity of the perfume and the presence of a small card on which was printed in shaky, ill-disguised characters a simple request and a specious promise:

*Get these back where they belong and I'll love you for ever, darling.*

Mr Campion had a considerable respect for the law but he spent some time that morning in acquiring a box of similar design but different and more powerful perfume, and it was not until the jewelry was freshly housed and the card burned that he carried his responsibility to Scotland Yard and laid it

with a sigh of relief on the desk of Chief Detective Inspector Stanislaus Oates, his friend and partner in many adventures.

The original wrapping he decided to retain. Its ill-written address might have been scrawled by anyone and the fact that it was grossly overfranked showed that it had been dropped into a public box and not passed over a post-office counter.

He let the chief, who was a tall, disconsolate personage with a grey face and dyspepsia, recover from his first transports of mingled relief and suspicion before regretting his inability to help him further. Oates regarded him.

"It's my duty to warn you that you're under suspicion," he said with the portentous solemnity which passed with him for wit.

Campion laughed. "My cat-burglary days are over," he said. "Or am I the fence?"

"That's more like it." The chief passed his cigarette case. "I can't tell you how glad I am to see this lot. But it doesn't help us very much unless we know where it came from. These cat jobs are done by The Sparrow. We knew that as soon as we saw the first one. You remember him, Campion?—a sleek, handsome chap with an insufferable manner. These jobs have his trademarks all over them. Pane cut out with a diamond and the glass removed with a sucker—no fingerprints, no noise, no mistakes." He paused and caressed his ear sadly. "It's getting on my nerves," he said. "The commissioner is sarcastic and the papers are just libellous. It's hard on us. We

know who and where the fellow is but we can't get him. We've held him as long as we dared, three separate times this summer, but we haven't got a thing we can fix on him. I've been trusting the stuff would turn up somewhere so that we could work back on him from that angle, but frankly this is the first scrap of it I've seen. Where's all the early swag? This was only pinched five days ago."

Mr Campion remained unhelpful. "I got it this morning," he said. "It just came out of the air. Ask the postman."

"Oh, I know..." The chief waved the suggestion aside. "You'll help us just as much as you can, which means as much as you care to. Some society bit is mixed up in this somewhere, I'm sure of it. Look here, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll put my cards on the table. This isn't official; this is the truth. Edward Borringer, alias The Sparrow, is living with his wife in digs in Kilburn. They're very respectable at the moment, just a quiet hard-working couple. He takes classes in the local gym and she does visiting manicure work."

"Under the name of Matisse?"

"Exactly!" The inspector was jubilant. "Now you've given yourself away, my lad. What do you know about Margot Matisse?"

"Not much," his visitor confessed affably. "She was pointed out to me as a manicurist at a thé dansant at the Hotel Monde on Tuesday. Looking round, I saw Blower on her trail, so naturally when you mentioned manicurists I put two and two together."

"Who pointed her out to you?"

"A lady who had seen her at work in a relation's house."

"All right." The policeman became depressed again. "Well, there you are. It's quite obvious how they're working it. She goes round to the big houses and spots the stuff and the lie of the land, and then he calls one night and does the job. It's the old game worked very neatly. Too neatly, if you ask me. What we can't fathom is how they're disposing of the stuff. They certainly haven't got it about them, and their acquaintance just now is so respectable, not to say aristocratic, that we can barely approach it. Besides, to make this big stuff worth the risk they must be using an expert. Most of these stones are so well known that they must go to a first-class fellow to be recut."

Mr Campion hesitated. "I seem to remember that Edward Borringer was once associated with our old friend Bertrand Meyer and his ménage," he ventured. "Are they still functioning?"

"Not in England." The chief was emphatic. "And if these two are getting their stuff out of the country I'll eat my hat. The customs are co-operating with us. We thought a maid in one of the houses which the Matisse woman visits might be in it and so if you've heard a squawk from your society pals about severity at the ports, that's our work. I don't mind telling you it's all very difficult. You can see for yourself. These are the Matisse clients."

Mr Campion scanned the typewritten page and his sympathy for his friend deepened.

"Oh yes, Caesar's wives," he agreed. "Every one of 'em. Servants been in the families for years, I suppose?"

"Unto the third and fourth generations," said the chief bitterly.

His visitor considered the situation.

"I suppose they've got alibis fixed up for the nights of the crimes?" he enquired.

"Fixed up?" The chief's tone was eloquent. "The alibis are so good that we ought to be able to arrest 'em on suspicion alone. An alibi these days doesn't mean anything except that the fellow knows his job. Borringer does, too, and so does his wife. We've had them both on the carpet for hours without getting a glimmer from them. No, it's no use, Campion; we've got to spot the middleman and then the fence, and pin it on to them that way. Personally, I think the woman actually passes the stuff, but we've had Blower on her for weeks and he swears she doesn't speak to a soul except these superior clients of hers. Also, of course, neither of them post anything. We thought we'd got something once and got the postal authorities to help us, but all we got for our trouble was a p.c. to a viscountess about an appointment for chiropody."

Mr Campion was silent for some time.

"It was funny, her shouting out like that in the Hotel Monde," he said at last.

The chief grunted. "Mrs Gregory," he said. "Yes, I heard about that. A little show for Blower's benefit, if you ask me. Thought she'd give him something to think about. The Borringers are like that, cocky as hell."

Once again there was thoughtful silence in the light airy office and this time it was Stanislaus Oates who spoke first.

"Look here, Campion," he said, "you and I know one another. Let this be a word of friendly warning. If you suspect anyone you know of getting mixed up in this—for a bit of fun, perhaps—see that she's careful. If The Sparrow and his wife are still tied up with the Meyer lot, and they very well may be, the Meyer crowd aren't a pretty bunch. In fact, you know as well as I do, they're dirty and they're dangerous."

His visitor picked up the list again. Philip Graysby's aunt's name headed the second column. He made up his mind.

"I don't know anything," he said. "I'm speaking entirely from guesswork and I rely on you to go into this in stockinged feet and with your discretion wrapping you like a blanket. But if I were you I should have a little chat with one Henry Swan, employed by Florence, Dowager Countess of Marie."

"Ah," said the chief with relief, "that's where the wind blows, does it? I thought you'd come across."

"I don't promise anything," Campion protested.

"Who does?" said Stanislaus Oates and pulled a pad towards him....

Mr Campion kept late hours. He was sitting up by the open window of his flat in Bottle Street, the cul-de-sac off Piccadilly, when the chief detective inspector called upon him just after midnight on the evening of his visit to Scotland Yard. The policeman was unusually fidgety. He accepted a drink and sat down before mentioning the purpose of his visit, which was, in fact, to gossip.

Campion, who knew him, let him take his time.

"We pulled that chap Swan in this afternoon," he volunteered at last. "He's a poor weedy little beggar who did a stretch for larceny in twenty-three and seems to have gone straight since. We had quite a time with him. He wouldn't open his mouth at first. Fainted when he thought we were going to jug him. Finally, of course, out it came, and a very funny story it was. Know anything about the White Elephant Society, Campion?"

His host blinked. "Nothing against it," he admitted. "Ordinary charity stunt. Very decently run, I believe. The dowager does it herself."

"I know." There was a note of mystification in the chief's voice. "See this?"

From his wallet he took a small green stick-on label. It was an ornate product embellished with a design of angels in

the worst artistic taste. Across the top was a printed heading:

*This is a gift from the White Elephant Society (Secy, Florence, Countess of Marie) and contains——* A blank space had been filled up with the legend *Two Pairs of Fancy Woollen Gloves* in ink. The address, which was also in ink, was that of a well-known orphanage and the addressee was the matron.

"That's how they send the white elephants out," Oates explained. "There's a word or two inside in the countess's own handwriting. This is a specimen label. See what it means? It's as good as a diplomatic pass with that old woman's name on it."

"Who to?" demanded Mr Campion dubiously.

"Anyone," declared the chief triumphantly. "Especially the poor chap in the customs office who's tired of opening parcels. Even if he does open 'em he's not going to examine 'em. Now here's Swan's story. He admits he found the jewelry, which he passed on to a friend whose name he will not divulge. That friend must have sent it to you. It sounds like a woman to me but I'm not interested in her at the moment."

"Thank God for that," murmured his host devoutly. "Go on. Where did he find the stuff?"

"In a woollen duck inside one of these White Elephant parcels," said the chief unexpectedly. "We've got the duck; homemade toy with little chamois pockets under its wings.

The odd thing is that Swan swears the old lady gave the parcel to him herself, told him to post it, and made such a fuss about it that he became suspicious and opened it up."

"Do you believe that?" Mr Campion was grinning and Oates frowned.

"I do," he said slowly. "Curiously enough I do, in the main. In the first place, this chap honestly wants to go straight. One dose of clink has put him in terror of it for life. Secondly, if he was in on the theft why give the whole game away? Why produce the duck? What I do think is that he recognised the address. He says he can't remember anything about it except that it was somewhere abroad, but that's just what he would say if he recognised it and thought it was dangerous and was keeping quiet for fear of reprisals. Anyway, I believed him sufficiently to go down and interview the old lady."

"Did you, by Jove!" murmured Mr Campion with respect.

Stanislaus Oates smiled wryly and ran his finger round the inside of his collar.

"Not a homely woman," he observed. "Ever met someone who made you feel you wanted a haircut, Campion? I was very careful, of course. Kid gloves all the way. Had to. I tell you one funny thing, though: she was rattled."

Mr Campion sat up. He knew his friend to be one of the soberest judges of humanity in the police force, where humanity is deeply studied.

"Sure?" he demanded incredulously.

"Take my dying oath on it," said the chief. "Scared blue, if you ask me."

The young man in the horn-rimmed spectacles made polite but depreciating noises. The chief shook his head.

"It's the truth. I gave her the facts—well, most of them. I didn't explain how we came to open the parcel, since that part of the business wasn't strictly orthodox. But I gave her the rest of the story just as I've given it to you, and instead of being helpful she tried to send me about my business with a flea in my ear. She insisted that she had directed each outgoing parcel during the last four weeks herself and swore that the Matisse woman could never have had access to any of them. Also, which is significant, she would not give me a definite reply about the duck. She was not sure if she'd ever seen it before. I ask you!—a badly made yellow duck in a blue pullover. Anyone 'd know it again."

Mr Campion grinned. "What was the upshot of this embarrassing interview?" he enquired.

The chief coughed. "When she started talking about her son in the Upper House I came away," he said briefly. "I thought I'd let her rest for a day or two. Meanwhile, we shall keep a wary eye on Swan and the Borringers, although if those three are working together I'll resign."

He was silent for a moment.

"She certainly was rattled," he repeated at last. "I'd swear it. Under that magnificent manner of hers she was scared. She had that set look about the eyes. You can't mistake it. What d'you make of that, my lad?"

"I don't," said Campion discreetly. "It's absurd."

Oates sighed. "Of course it is," he agreed. "And so what?"

"Sleep on it," his host suggested and the chief took the hint....

It was unfortunate for everyone concerned that Mr Campion should have gone into the country early the following morning on a purely personal matter concerning a horse which he was thinking of buying and should not have returned to his flat until the evening. When he did get back he found Juliet and the dark, good-looking Philip Graysby, with whom she had presumably made up her differences, waiting for him. To Mr Campion they both seemed very young and very distressed. Juliet appeared to have been crying and it was she who broke the news.

"It's Auntie Flo," she said in a small tragic voice. "She's bunked, Albert."

It took Mr Campion some seconds to assimilate this interesting development, and by that time young Graysby had launched into hurried explanation.

"That's putting it very crudely," he said. "My aunt caught the Paris plane this morning. Certainly she travelled alone, which was unusual, but that may not mean anything.

Unfortunately, she did not leave an address, and although we've got into touch with the Crillon she doesn't seem to have arrived there."

He hesitated and his dark face became suddenly ingenuous.

"It's so ridiculously awkward, her going off like this without telling anyone just after Detective Inspector Oates called on her last night. I don't know what the interview was about, of course—nobody does—but there's an absurd feeling in the household that it wasn't very pleasant. Anyway, the inspector was very interested to hear that she had gone away when he called round this afternoon. It was embarrassing not being able to give him any real information about her return, and precious little about her departure. You see, we shouldn't have known she'd taken the plane if the chauffeur hadn't driven her to Croydon. She simply walked out of the house this morning and ordered the car. She didn't even take a suitcase, which looks as though she meant to come back tonight, and, of course, there's every possibility that she will."

Mr Campion perched himself on the table and his eyes were grave.

"Tell me," he said quietly, "had Lady Florence an appointment with her manicurist today?"

"Miss Matisse?" Juliet looked up. "Why, yes, she had, as a matter of fact. I went round there quite early this morning.

Swan phoned me and told me Aunt had left rather hurriedly so I—er—I went to see him."

She shot an appealing glance at Philip, who grimaced at her, and she hurried on.

"While I was there Miss Matisse arrived and Bennett, Aunt's maid, told her all the gossip before I could stop her. Oh my dear, you don't think...?"

Instead of replying Mr Campion reached for the telephone and dialled a famous Whitehall number. Chief Detective Inspector Oates was glad to hear his voice. He said so. He was also interested to know if Mr Campion had heard of the recent developments in The Sparrow case.

"No," he said in reply to Mr Campion's sharp question. "The two Borringers are behaving just as usual. Blower's had the girl under his eye all day.... No, she hasn't communicated with anyone.... What? ... Wait a minute. I've got notes on Blower's telephoned report here. Here we are. 'On leaving the Dowager Countess of Marie's house Miss Matisse went to the Venetian Cinema in Regent Street for the luncheon programme.' Nothing happened there except that she pulled Blower's leg again."

"Did she shout to someone?" Mr Campion's tone was urgent.

"Yes. Called to a woman named Mattie, who she said she thought was in the circle. Same silly stunt as last time. What's the matter?"

Campion checked his exasperation. He was desperately in earnest and his face as he bent over the instrument was frighteningly grave.

"Oates," he said quietly, "I'm going to ring you again in ten minutes and then you've got to get busy. Remember our little talk about the Meyers? This may be life or death."

"Good..." began the chief and was cut off.

Mr Campion hustled his visitors out of the flat.

"We're going down to see Swan," he said, "and the quicker we get there the better."

Henry Swan proved to be a small frightened man who was inclined to be more than diffident until he had had matters explained to him very thoroughly. Then he was almost pathetically anxious to help.

"The address on the duck parcel, sir?" he said, echoing Mr Campion's question nervously. "I daren't tell the police that. It might have been more than my life was worth. But if you think her ladyship——"

"Let's have it," cut in Graysby irritably.

"Please," murmured Juliet.

Mr Swan came across. "Nineteen A, Rue Robespierre, Lyons, France," he blurted out. "I've burned the label but I remember the address. In fact, to tell you the truth, it was

because of the address I opened the box in the first place. I never had such a fright in all my life, sir, really."

"I see. Who was the parcel sent to?" Mr Campion's manner was comfortingly reassuring.

Henry Swan hesitated. "Maurice Bonnet," he said at last, "and I once met a man who called himself that."

Mr Campion's eyes flickered. "On those occasions when he wasn't calling himself Meyer, I suppose?" he remarked.

The small man turned a shade or so paler and dropped his eyes.

"I shouldn't like to say, sir," he murmured.

"Very wise," Campion agreed, "But you've got nothing to worry about now. We've got the address and that's all that matters. You run along. Graysby, you and I have got to hurry. I'll just have a word with Oates on the phone and then we'll nip down to Croydon and charter a plane."

Juliet caught his arm. "You don't mean Philip's aunt might be in danger?" she said.

Mr Campion smiled down at her. "Some people do resent interference so, my dear," he said, "especially when they have quite a considerable amount to lose...."

The Rue Robespierre is not in the most affluent quarter of Lyons and just before midnight on a warm spring evening it is not seen at its best. There silent figures loll in the dark

doorways of houses which have come down in the world, and the night life has nothing to do with gaiety.

From Scotland Yard the wires had been busy and Campion and Graysby were not alone as they hurried down the centre of the wide street. A military little capitaine and four gendarmes accompanied them, but even so they were not overstaffed.

As their small company came to a stop before the crumbling façade of number nineteen A an upper window was thrown open and a shot spat down upon them. The capitaine drew his own gun and fired back, while the others put their shoulders to the door.

As they pitched into the dark musty hall a rain of fire met them from the staircase. A bullet took Mr Campion's hat from his head, and one of the gendarmes stepped back swearing, his left hand clasping a shattered right elbow.

The raiding party defended itself. For three minutes the darkness was streaked with fire, while the air became heavy with the smell of cordite.

The end came suddenly. There was a scream from the landing and a figure pitched over the balustrade onto the flags below, dragging another with it in its flight, while pattering footsteps flying up to the top story testified to the presence of a fugitive.

Mr Campion plunged forward, the others at his heels. They found Florence, Dowager Countess of Marie, at last in

a locked bedroom on the third floor. She had defended herself and had suffered for it. Her black silk was torn and dusty and her coiffure dishevelled. But her spirit was unbroken and the French police listened to her tirade with a respect all the more remarkable since they could not understand one word of it.

Graysby took his aunt back to her hotel in a police car and Mr Campion remained to assist in the cleaning up.

Bertrand Meyer himself actually succeeded in getting out onto the roof, but he was brought back finally and the little capitaine had the satisfaction of putting the handcuffs on him.

One of the gang had been killed outright when his head had met the flagstones of the hall, and the remaining member was hurried off to a prison hospital with a broken thigh.

Mr Campion looked at Meyer with interest. He was an oldish man, square and powerful, with strong sensitive hands and the hot angry eyes of a fanatic. His workroom revealed many treasures. A jeweller's bench, exquisitely fitted with all the latest appliances, contained also a drawer which revealed the dismembered fragments of the proceeds of the first three London burglaries, together with some French stones in particular request by the Sûreté.

Campion looked round him. "Ah," he said with satisfaction, "and there's the wireless set. I wondered when some of you fellows were going to make use of the outside broadcasting programmes. How did you work it? Had

someone listening to the first part of the first programme to be broadcast from a London public place each day, I suppose? It really is amazing how clearly those asides come, her voice quite fearless and yet so natural that it wasn't until some time afterwards that I realised she had been standing just below the orchestra's live microphone."

Meyer did not answer. His face was sullen and his eyes were fixed on the stones which the Frenchmen were turning out of little chamois leather bags onto the baize surface of the bench....

It was some days later, back in the flat in Bottle Street, when Chief Detective Inspector Oates sipped a whisky and soda and beamed upon his friend.

"I take off my hat to the old girl," he said disrespectfully. "She's got courage and a great sense of justice. She says she'll go into the witness box if we need her and she apologised handsomely to me for taking the law into her own hands."

"Good," said Mr Campion. "You've got the Borringers, of course?"

The chief grinned. "We've got 'em as safe as a couple of ferrets in a box," he declared. "The man's an expert, but the woman's a genius. The story she told the old lady, for instance. That was more than brains. After she'd got her ladyship interested in her she broke down one day and told a pretty little yarn about her cruel husband in France who had framed a divorce and got the custody of the kid. She told a

harrowing story about the little presents she had made for it herself and had had sent back to her pronto. It didn't take her long to get the old woman to offer to send them as though they'd come from the White Elephant Society. Every woman has a streak of sentimentality in her somewhere. So all the Borringer—alias Matisse—girl had to do was to bring along the toys in her manicure case from time to time and have 'em despatched free, gratis, with a label which almost guaranteed 'em a free pass. Very nice, eh?"

"Very," Campion agreed. "Almost simple."

The chief nodded. "She did it well," he said; "so well that even after I'd given the old lady the facts she didn't trust me. She believed so strongly in this fictitious kid that she went roaring over to Lyons to find out the truth for herself before she gave the girl away. Unfortunately, the Borringers had that means of wireless communication with Meyer and so when she arrived the gang was ready for her. It's a good thing you got there, Campion. They're a hot lot. I wonder what they'd have done with her."

"Neat," muttered Mr Campion. "That wireless stunt, I mean."

"It was." Oates was still impressed. "The use of the names made it sound so natural. What was the code exactly? Do you know?"

His host pulled a dictionary from a shelf at his side and turned over the leaves until he came to a small section at the end.

"It's childish," he said. "Funny how these people never do any inventing if they can help it. Look it all up."

The chief took the book and read the heading aloud.

"*The More Common British Christian Names and Their Meanings*."

He ran his eyes down the columns.

"*Gregory*," he read. "*A watcher*. Good Lord, that was to tell 'em Blower was on their track, I suppose. And Mattie ... what's Mattie?"

He paused. "*Diminutive of Matilda*," he said at last "*Mighty Battle Maid*. I don't get that."

"Dangerous, indignant and female," translated Mr Campion. "It rather sums up Philip Graysby's Auntie Flo, don't you think?"

It was after the chief had gone and he was alone that Juliet phoned. She was jubilant and her clear voice bubbled over the wire.

"I can't thank you," she said. "I don't know what to say. Aunt Florence is perfectly marvellous about everything. And I say, Albert..."

"Yes?"

"Philip says we can keep Swan if we have him at the country house. We're going to be married quite soon, you

know. Our reconciliation rather hurried things along.... Oh, what did you say?"

Mr Campion smiled. "I said I'll have to send you a wedding present then," he lied.

There was a fraction of silence at the other end of the wire.

"Well, darling ... it would be just too terribly sweet if you really *wanted* to," said Miss Fysher-Sprigge.

ALBERT CAMPION'S CASEBOOK
VOL 6. P. 203 ET SEQ.

## THE CASE OF THE MAN WITH THE SACK

DATE: Dec. 24,1935.

VENUE: Pharoah's Field, near Chelmsworth, Suffolk, England.

OFFICIALS: None.

PRIVATE NOTES: Interesting idiosyncrasies of professional thieves as opposed to ingenuity of amateurs.
"The sins of the mothers..."
Shall keep eye on Welkin. Certain to get busy again.
George insisted I took the clock!

## The Case of the Man with the Sack

*Pharoah's Court*
*Pharoah's Field*
*nr. Chelmsworth*
*Suffolk*

ALBERT DEAR,

*We are going to have a quiet family party at home here for the holiday, just ourselves and the dear village. It would be such fun to have you with us. There is a train at 10.45 from Liverpool Street which will get you to Chelmsworth in time for us to pick you up for lunch on Christmas Eve. You really must not refuse me. Sheila is being rather difficult and I have the Welkins coming. Ada Welkin is a dear woman, although her jewelry is such a responsibility in a house. She will bring it. Sheila has invited such an undesirable boy, the son in the Peters' crash, absolutely penniless, my dear, and probably quite desperate. As her mother I am naturally anxious. Remember I rely on you.*

*Affectionately yours,*
*MAE TURRETT.*

*P.S. Don't bring a car unless you must. The Welkins seem to be bringing two.*

Mr Albert Campion, whom most people described as the celebrated amateur criminologist, and who used to refer to himself somewhat sadly as a universal uncle, read the letter a second time before he expressed himself vulgarly but explicitly and pitched it into the wastepaper basket. Then, sitting down at the bureau in the corner of the breakfast room, he pulled a sheet of notepaper towards him.

MY DEAR MAE [he wrote briefly], *I can't make it. You must forgive me. My love to Sheila and George*.

*Yours ever, ...*
ALBERT.

*P.S. My sympathy in your predicament. I think I can put you on to just the man you need: P. Richards, 13 Acacia Border, Chiswick. He is late of the Metropolitan Police and, like myself, is clean, honest and presentable. Your guests' valuables will be perfectly safe while he is in the house and you will find his fee very reasonable.*

He folded the note, sealed it and addressed it to Lady Turrett, Pharoah's Court.

"In other words, my dear Mae," he said aloud as he set it on the mantelpiece, "if you want a private dick in the house employ one. We are not high-hat but we have our pride."

He wandered back to the breakfast table and the rest of his correspondence. There was another personal letter under the pile of greeting cards sent off a week too soon by earnest citizens who had taken the postmaster general's annual warning a shade too seriously, a large blue envelope addressed in a near-printing hand which proclaimed that the writer had gone to her first school in the early nineteen-twenties.

Mr. Campion tore it open and a cry from Sheila Turrett's heart fell out.

MY DARLING ALBERT,

*Please, please come for Christmas. It's going to be poisonous. Mother has some queer ideas in her head and the Welkins are frightful. Mike is a dear. At least, I like him and you will too. He is Mike Peters, the son of the Ripley Peters who had to go to jail when the firm crashed. But it's not Mike's fault, is it? After all, a good many fathers ought to go to jail only they don't get caught. I don't mean George, of course, bless him. (You ought to come if only for his sake. He's like a depression leaving the Azores. It's the thought of the Welkins, poor pet.) I don't like to ask you to waste your time on our troubles, but Ada Welkin is lousy with diamonds and Mother seems to think that Mike might pinch them, his father having been to jail. Darling, if you are faintly decent do come and back us up. After all, it is Christmas.*

*Yours always* (*if you come*),
SHEILA.

*P.S. I'm in love with Mike.*

For a moment or so, Mr Campion sat regarding the letter and its pathetic postscript. Then, rather regretfully, but comforted by a deep sense of virtue, he crossed the room and, tearing up the note he had written to Lady Turrett, settled himself to compose another....

On Christmas Eve the weather decided to be seasonable, according to modern standpoints at any rate; that is to say, a freezing overhead fog turned the city into night and the illuminated shop fronts had the traditional festive appearance even in the morning. It was more than just cold. The damp, soot-laden atmosphere soaked into the bones relentlessly and Mr Campion's recollection of Pharoah's Court, rising gaunt and bleak amid three hundred acres of ploughed clay and barren salting, all as flat as the estuary beyond, was not enhanced by the chill.

The thought of Sheila and her father cheered him a little, almost but not quite offsetting the prospect of Lady Mae in anxious mood. Buttoning himself into his thickest overcoat, he hoped for the best.

The railway station was a happy pandemonium. Everybody who could not visit the East Coast for the holiday was, it seemed, sending presents there, and Mr Campion,

reminded of the custom, glanced anxiously at his suitcase, wondering if the box of cigars for George was too large or the casket of perfume for Mae too modest, if Sheila was still young enough to eat chocolates, and if there would be hordes of unexpected children who would hang round his room wistfully, their mute glances resting upon his barren luggage.

He caught the train with ease, no great feat since it was three quarters of an hour late, and was sitting in his corner idly watching the excited throng on the platform when he caught sight of Charlie Spring. He recognised the face instantly but the name came to him slowly from the sittings of his memory.

Jail had done Mr Spring a certain amount of good, Mr Campion reflected as his glance took in the other man's square shoulders and developed chest. He had been a weedy wreck six months ago standing in the big dock at the Old Bailey, the light from the roof shining down upon his small features and his low forehead, beneath which there peered out the stupidest eyes in the world.

At the moment he seemed very pleased with himself, a bad omen for the rest of the community, but Mr Campion was not interested. It was Christmas and he had troubles of his own.

However, from force of habit he made a careful mental note of the man and observed that he had been "out" for some little time, since he had lost all trace of jail shyness, that temporary fit of nerves which even the most experienced exhibit for a week or so after their release. He saw also that

Mr Spring looked about him with the same peculiar brainless cunning which he had exhibited in the dock.

He boarded the train a little lower down and Mr Campion frowned. There was something about Charlie Spring which he had known and which now eluded him. He tried to remember the last and only time he had seen him. He himself had been in court as an expert witness and had heard Mr Spring sentenced for breaking and entering just before his own case had been called. He remembered that it was breaking and entering and he remembered the flat official voice of the police detective who gave evidence.

But there was something else, something definite and personal which kept bobbing about in the back of his mind, escaping him completely whenever he tried to pin it down. It worried him vaguely, as such things do, all the way to Chelmsworth.

Charlie left the train at Ipswich in the company of one hundred and fifty joyous fellow travellers. Mr Campion spotted him as he passed the window, walking swiftly, his head bent and a large new fibre suitcase in his hand.

It occurred to Campion that the man was not dressed in character. He seemed to remember him as a dilapidated but somewhat gaudy figure in a dirty check suit and a pink shirt, whereas at the moment his newish navy greatcoat was a model of sobriety and unobtrusiveness. Still, it was no sartorial peculiarity that haunted his memory. It was something odd, something slightly funny.

Still faintly irritated, Mr Campion travelled a further ten miles to Chelmsworth. Few country railway stations present a rustic picturesqueness, even in summer, but at any time in the year Chelmsworth was remarkable for its wind-swept desolation. Mr Campion alighted onto a narrow slab of concrete, artificially raised above the level of the small town in the valley, and drew a draught of heady rain- and brine-soaked air into his lungs. He was experiencing the first shock of finding it not unattractive when there was a clatter of brogues on the concrete and a small russet-clad figure appeared before him. He was aware of honey-brown eyes, red cheeks, white teeth and a stray curl of red hair escaping from a rakish little tweed cap in which a sprig of holly had been pinned.

"Bless you," said Sheila Turrett. "Come on. We're hours late for lunch and they'll be champing like boardinghouse pests."

She linked her arm through his and dragged him along.

"You're more than a hero to come. I am so grateful and so is George. Perhaps it'll start being Christmas now you're here, which it hasn't been so far, in spite of the weather. Isn't it glorious?"

Mr Campion was forced to admit that there was a certain exhilaration in the air, a certain indefinable charm in the grey-brown shadows chasing in endless succession over the flat landscape.

"There'll be snow tonight." The girl glanced up at the feather-bed sky. "Isn't it grand? Christmas always makes me feel so excited. I've got you a present. Remember to bring one for me?"

"I'm your guest," said Mr Campion with dignity. "I have a small packet of plain chocolate for you on Christmas morning but I wished it to be a surprise."

Sheila climbed into the car. "Anything will be welcome except diamonds," she said cheerfully. "Ada's getting diamonds, twelve thousand pounds' worth, all to hang round a neck that would disgrace a crocodile. I'm sorry to sound so catty but we've had these diamonds all through every meal since she came down."

Mr Campion clambered into the car beside her.

"Dear me," he said, "I had hoped for a merry Christmas, peace and goodwill and all that. Village children bursting their little lungs and everybody else's eardrums in their attempts at religious song, while I listened replete with vast quantities of indigestible food."

Miss Turrett laughed. "You're going to get your dear little village kids all right," she said. "Two hundred and fifty of 'em. Not even Ada Welkin could dissuade Mother from the Pharoah's Court annual Christmas Eve party. You'll have just time to sleep off your lunch, swallow a cup of tea, and then it's all hands needed in the music room. There's the mothers to entertain, too, of course."

Mr Campion stirred and sighed gently as he adjusted his spectacles.

"I remember now," he murmured. "George said something about it once. It's a traditional function, isn't it?"

"More or less." Sheila spoke absently. "Mother revived it with modern improvements some years ago. They have a tea and a Christmas tree and a Santa Claus to hand round the presents."

The prospect seemed to depress her and she relapsed into gloomy silence as the little car shot over the dry wind-swept roads.

Mr Campion regarded her covertly. She had grown into a very pretty girl indeed, he decided, but he hoped the "son in the Peters' crash" was worth the worry he saw in her forehead.

"What about the young gentleman with the erring father?" he ventured diffidently. "Is he at Pharoah's Court now?"

"Mike?" She brightened visibly. "Oh yes, rather. He's been there for the best part of a week. George honestly likes him and I thought for one heavenly moment that he was going to cut the ice with Mother, but that was before the Welkins came. Since then, of course, it hasn't been so easy. They came a day early, too, which is typical of them. They've been here two days already. The son is the nastiest, the old man runs him close, and Ada is horrible."

"Horrid for them," said Mr Campion mildly.

Sheila did not smile.

"You'll spot it at once when you see Ada," she said, "so I may as well tell you. They're fantastically rich and Mother has been goat-touting. It's got to be faced."

"Goat-touting?"

Sheila nodded earnestly.

"Yes. Lots of society women do it. You must have seen the little ads in the personal columns: 'Lady of title will chaperone young girl or arrange parties for an older woman.' Or 'Lady X. would entertain suitable guest for the London season.' In other words, Lady X. will tout around any socially ambitious goat in exchange for a nice large ladylike fee. It's horrid, but I'm afraid that is how Mother got hold of Ada in the first place. She had some pretty heavy bridge losses at one time. George doesn't know a thing about it, of course, poor darling—and mustn't. He'd be so shocked. I don't know how he accounts for the Welkins."

Mr Campion said nothing. It was like Mae Turrett, he reflected, to visit her sins upon her family.

Sheila was hurrying on.

"We've never seen the others before," she said breathlessly. "Mother gave two parties for Ada in the season and they had a box at the opera to show some of the diamonds. I couldn't understand why they wanted to drag the men-folk into it until they got here. Then it was rather disgustingly plain."

Mr Campion pricked up his ears.

"So nice for the dear children to get to know each other?" he suggested.

Miss Turrett blushed fiercely. "Something like that," she said briefly and added after a pause, "Have you ever met the sort of young man who's been thrust into a responsible position in a business because, and only because, he's Poppa's son? A lordly, blasé, sulky young man who's been kow-towed to by subordinates who are fifty times as intelligent as he is himself? The sort of young man you want to kick on sight?"

Mr Campion sighed deeply. "I have."

Sheila negotiated a right-angle turn. Her forehead was wrinkled and her eyes thoughtful.

"This'll show you the sort of man he is," she said. "It's so petty and stupid that I'm almost ashamed to mention it, but it does show you. We've had a rather difficult time amusing the Welkins. They don't ride or shoot or read or even play patience, so this morning, when Mike and I were putting the final touches to the decorations, we asked Kenneth to help us. There was a stupid business over some mistletoe. Kenneth had been laying down the law about where it was to hang and we were a bit tired of him already when he started a lot of silly horseplay. I don't mind being kissed under the mistletoe, of course, but—well, it's the way you do these things, isn't it?"

She stamped on the accelerator to emphasise her point, and Mr Campion, not a nervous man, clutched the side of the car.

"Sorry," said Sheila and went on with her story. "I tried to wriggle away after a bit and when he wouldn't let me go Mike suddenly lost his temper and told him to behave himself or he'd damned well knock his head off. It was awfully melodramatic and stupid but it might have passed off and been forgotten if Kenneth hadn't made a scene. First he said he wouldn't be talked to like that and then he made a reference to Mike's father, which was unforgivable. I thought they were going to have a fight. Then, right in the middle of it, Mother fluttered in with a Santa Claus costume. She looked at Mike and said, 'You'd better try it on, dear. I want you to be most realistic this afternoon.' Before he could reply Kenneth butted in. He looked like a spoilt kid, all pink and furious. 'I didn't know you were going to be Father Christmas,' he said."

Miss Turrett paused for breath, her eyes wide.

"Well, can you imagine anything so idiotic?" she said. "Mike had offered to do the job when he first came down because he wanted to make himself useful. Like everyone else he regarded it as a fatigue. It never dawned on him that anyone would want to do it. Mother was surprised, too, I think. However, she just laughed and said, 'You must fight it out between you,' and fluttered away again, leaving us all three standing there. Kenneth picked up the costume. 'It's Harridge's,' he said. 'My mother was with Lady Mae when

she ordered it. I thought it was fixed up then that I was to wear it.'"

Mr Campion laughed. He felt very old.

"I suppose Master Michael stepped aside like a little gent and Master Kenneth appears as St Nicholas?" he said.

"Well no, not exactly." Sheila sounded a little embarrassed. "Mike was still angry, you see, because Kenneth really had been infernally casual. He suddenly decided to be obstinate. Mother had asked him to do the job, he said, and he was going to do it. Kenneth got sulky and the whole thing became quite too childish. I thought they were going to have an open row about it, which would have been quite too absurd, but at that moment the most idiotic thing of all happened. Old Mr Welkin, who had been prowling about listening, as usual, came in and told Kenneth he was to 'give way' to Mike—literally, in so many words! It all sounds perfectly mad now I've told it to you, yet Mike is really rather a darling."

Mr Campion detected a certain wistfulness in her final phrase and frowned....

Pharoah's Court looked unexpectedly mellow and inviting as they came up the drive some minutes later. The old house had captured the spirit of the season and Mr Campion stepped out of a cold grey world into an enormous entrance hall where the blaze from the nine-foot hearth flickered on the glossy leaves of the ivy and holly festooned along the carved beams of the ceiling.

George Turrett, grey haired and cherubic, was waiting for them. He grasped the visitor's hand with fervour.

"So glad you've come," he murmured. "Devilish glad to see you, Campion."

His extreme earnestness was apparent and Sheila put an arm round his neck.

"It's a human face in the wilderness, isn't it, darling?" she murmured.

Sir George's guilty protest was cut short by the first luncheon bell, a reminder that the train had arrived late, and Mr Campion was rushed upstairs to his room by a harassed manservant.

He saw the clock as he came down again a moment or so later. It burst upon him as he turned a corner in the corridor and came upon it standing on a console table. Even in his haste it arrested him. Mae Turrett had something of a reputation for interior decoration, but large country houses have a way of collecting furnishing oddities, however rigorous their owner's taste may be.

Although he was not, as a rule, oversensitive to artistic monstrosities Mr Campion paused in respectful astonishment before this example of the mid-Victorian baroque. A bewildered-looking bronze lady, clad in a pink marble nightgown, was seated upon a gilt ormolu log, one end of which had been replaced by a blue-and-white enamel clock

face. Even as he stared the contraption chimed loudly and aggressively, while downstairs a second luncheon bell rang.

He passed on and forgot all about the clock as soon as he entered the dining room. Mae Turrett sprang at him with little affected cries which he took to indicate a hostess's delight.

"Albert *dear*!" she said breathlessly. "How marvelous to see you! Aren't we wonderfully festive? The gardener assures me it's going to snow tonight; in fact, he's virtually promised it. I do love a real old family party at Christmas, don't you? Just our very own selves ... too lovely! Let me introduce you to a very dear friend of mine: Mrs Welkin—Mr Campion."

Campion was aware of a large middle-aged woman with drooping cheeks and stupid eyes who sniggered at him and looked away again.

The other introductions were sketchily performed and they sat down to lunch. It was not a jolly meal by any means. Even Lady Turrett's cultivated chatter died down every now and again. However, Mr Campion had ample opportunity to observe the strangers of whom he had heard so much.

Mike Peters was a surprise to him. He had expected a nervy, highly strung young man, afflicted, probably, with a generous dose of self-pity as the innocent victim of his father's misdeeds or misfortunes, but found instead a sturdy silent youngster with a brief smile and a determined chin. It

was obvious that he knew what he wanted and was going for it steadily. Mr Campion found himself wishing him luck.

Since much criticism before a meeting may easily defeat its own ends, Mr Campion had been prepared to find the Welkin family pleasant but misunderstood people, round pegs in a very square hole. But here again he was mistaken. Kenneth Welkin, a fresh-faced, angry-eyed young man in clothes which managed to look expensive while intending to appear nonchalant, sat next to Sheila and sulked throughout the meal. The only remark he addressed to Mr Campion was to ask him what make of car he drove and to disapprove strongly of the answer to his question.

A closer inspection of Mrs Welkin did not dispel Mr Campion's first impression, but her husband interested him. Edward Welkin was a large man with a face that would have been distinguished had it not been for the eyes, which were too shrewd, and the mouth, which was too coarse. His attitude towards his hostess was conspicuously different from his wife's, which was ingratiating, and his son's, which was uneasy and unnecessarily defensive. The most obvious thing about him was that he was complacently alien. George he regarded quite clearly as a nincompoop and Lady Turrett as a woman who so far had given his wife value for her money. Of everyone else he was sublimely unconscious.

His plus fours, of the best Savile Row old-gentleman variety, had their effect ruined by the astonishing quantity of jewelry he chose to display at the same time. He wore two signet rings, one with an agate and one with a sapphire, and an immense jewelled tiepin, while out of his waistcoat

pocket peeped a gold-and-onyx pen with a pencil to match, strapped together in a bright green leather case. They were both of them as thick round as his forefinger and looked at first glance like the insignia of some obscure order.

Just before they rose from the table Mrs Welkin cleared her throat.

"As you're going to have a crowd of *tenants* this evening, Mae dear, I don't think I'll wear it; would you?" she said with a giggle and a glance at Mr Campion.

"Wear what, dear?" Lady Turrett spoke absently and Mrs Welkin looked hurt.

"The necklace," she said reverently.

"Your diamonds? Good heavens no! Most unsuitable." The words escaped her ladyship involuntarily but in a moment she was mistress of herself and the situation. "Wear something very simple," she said with a mechanical smile. "I'm afraid it's going to be very hard work for us all. Mike, you do know exactly what to do, don't you? At the end of the evening, just before they go home, you put on the costume and come into the little anteroom which leads off the platform. You go straight up to the tree and cut the presents off, while all the rest of us stand round to receive them and pass them on to the children."

Mrs Welkin bridled. "I should have liked to have worn them," she said irritatingly. "Still, if you say it's not safe..."

"Mother didn't say it wasn't safe, Mrs Welkin," said Sheila, who was fond of the village and resented bitterly any aspersions on its honesty. "She said it wasn't suitable."

Mrs Welkin blushed angrily and forgot herself.

"You're not very polite, young lady," she said, "and if it's a question of suitability, where's the suitability in Mr Peters playing Santa Claus when it was promised to Kenneth?"

The mixture of muddled logic and resentment startled everyone. Mike and Sheila grew scarlet, Sir George looked helplessly at his wife, Kenneth Welkin turned savagely on his mother, and Edward Welkin settled rather than saved the situation.

"That'll do," he said in a voice of thunder. "That's all been fixed, Ada. I don't want to hear any more from either of you on the subject."

It was altogether a very awkward moment and the table broke up with relief. Sir George tugged Campion's arm.

"Cigar—library," he murmured and faded quietly away.

Campion followed him.

There were Christmas decorations in the big book-filled study, and, as he settled himself in a wing chair before a fire of logs and attended to the tip of a Romeo y Julieta, Mr Campion felt once more the return of the Christmas spirit.

Sir George was anxious about his daughter's happiness.

"I like young Peters," he said earnestly. "Fellow can't help his father's troubles. Mae objects he hasn't any money, but, between you and me, Campion, I'd rather see her in rags tied to a decent fellow than sittin' up in a Rolls-Royce beside that little Welkin bounder in the next room."

Mr Campion agreed with him and he went on.

"The boy Mike's an engineer," he said, "and makin' good at his job slowly, and Sheila seems fond of him but Mae talks about hereditary dishonesty. Taint may be there. What do you think?"

Mr Campion had no time to reply to this somewhat unlikely theory. There was a flutter and a rustle outside the door and a moment later Mr Welkin, Sr, came in with a flustered lady. George got up and held out his hand.

"Ah, Miss Hare," he said. "Glad to see you. Come on your annual visit of mercy?"

Miss Hare, who was large and inclined to be hearty, laughed.

"I've come cadging again, if that's what you mean, Sir George," she said cheerfully and went on, nodding to Mr Campion as if they had just been introduced: "Every Christmas Eve I come round collecting for my old women. There are four of 'em in the almshouse by the church. I only ask for a shilling or two to buy them some little extra for the Christmas dinner. I don't want much. Just a shilling or two."

She glanced at a little notebook in her hand.

"You gave me ten shillings last year, Sir George."

The squire produced the required sum and Mr Campion felt in his pocket.

"Half-a-crown would be ample," said Miss Hare encouragingly. "Oh, that's very nice of you. I assure you it won't be wasted."

She took the coin and was turning to Welkin when he stepped forward.

"I'd like to do the thing properly," he said. "Anybody got a pen?"

He took out a checkbook and sat down at George's desk uninvited.

Miss Hare protested. "Oh no, really," she said, "you don't understand. This is just for an extra treat. I collect it nearly all in sixpences."

"Anybody got a pen?" repeated Mr Welkin.

Campion glanced at the elaborate display in the man's waistcoat pocket but before he could mention it George had meekly handed over his own fountain.

Mr Welkin wrote a check and handed it to Miss Hare without troubling to blot it.

"Ten pounds?" said the startled lady. "Oh but really...!"

"Nonsense. Run along." Mr Welkin clapped her familiarly on the shoulder. "It's Christmas time," he said, glancing at George and Campion. "I believe in doing a bit of good at Christmas time—if you can afford it."

Miss Hare glanced round her helplessly.

"It's very—very kind of you," she murmured, "but half-a-crown would have been ample."

She fled. Welkin threw George's pen on the desk.

"That's the way I like to do it," he said.

George coughed and there was a far-away expression in his eyes.

"Yes, I—er—I see you do," he said and sat down. Welkin went out.

Neither Mr Campion nor his host mentioned the incident. Campion frowned. Now he had two minor problems on his conscience. One was the old matter of the little piece of information concerning Charlie Spring which he had forgotten, the other was a peculiarity of Mr Welkin's which puzzled him mightily.

The Pharoah's Court children's party had been in full swing for what seemed to Mr Campion at least to be the best part of a fortnight. It was half-past seven in the evening and the relics of an enormous tea had been cleared away, leaving the music room full of replete but still-energetic children and their mothers, dancing and playing games with enthusiasm,

but their eyes never straying for long from the next sensation of the evening, the fourteen-foot tree ablaze with coloured lights and tinsel.

Mr Campion, who had danced, buttled, and even performed a few conjuring tricks, bethought him of a box of his favourite cigarettes in his suitcase upstairs and, feeling only a little guilty at leaving George still working like a hero, he stole away and hurried up the deserted staircase to his room.

The main body of the house was deserted. Even the Welkins were at work in the music room; while the entire staff was concentrated in the kitchen washing up.

Mr Campion found his cigarettes, lit one and pottered for a moment or two, reflecting that the Christmases of his youth were much the same as those of today but not so long from hour to hour. He felt virtuous and happy and positively oozing with goodwill. The promised snow was falling, great soft flakes plopping softly against his window.

At last, when his conscience decreed that he could absent himself no longer, he switched off the light and stepped into the corridor, to come face to face with Father Christmas. The saint looked as weary as he himself had been and was stooping under the great sack on his shoulders. Mr Campion admired Harridge's costume. The boots were glossy, the tunic with its wool border satisfyingly red, while the benevolent mask with its cotton-wool beard was almost lifelike.

He stepped aside to let the venerable figure pass and, because it seemed the moment for jocularity, said lightly:

"What have you got in the bag, Guv'nor?"

Had he uttered a spell of high enchantment the simple words could not have had a more astonishing effect. The figure uttered an inarticulate cry, dropped the sack, which fell with a crash at Mr Campion's feet, and fled like a shadow.

For a moment Mr Campion stood paralysed. By the time he had pulled himself together the crimson figure had disappeared down the staircase. He bent over the sack and thrust in his hand. Something hard and heavy met his fingers and he brought it out. It was the pink marble, bronze and ormolu clock.

He stood looking at his find and a sigh of satisfaction escaped him. One of the problems that had been worrying him all day had been solved at last.

It was twenty minutes later before he reappeared in the music room.

No one saw him come in, for the attention of the entire room was focussed upon the platform. There, surrounded by enthusiastic assistants, was Father Christmas again, peacefully snipping presents off the tree.

Campion took careful stock of him. The costume, he decided, was identical—the same high boots, the same tunic, the same mask. He tried to remember the fleeting figure in

the corridor upstairs but the costume was a deceptive one and he found it difficult.

After a time he found a secluded chair and sat down to await developments. They came.

As the last of the visitors departed, tired and smiling, their coats buttoned against the snow, and Lady Turrett threw herself into an armchair with a sigh of happy exhaustion, Pouter, the Pharoah's Court butler, came quietly into the room and murmured a few words in his master's ear. From where he sat Mr Campion heard George's astonished "God bless my soul!" and rose immediately to join him. But although he moved swiftly, Mr Welkin was before him and, as Campion reached the group, his voice resounded round the room.

"A burglary? While we've been playing the fool in here? What's gone, man? What's gone?"

Pouter, who for some obscure reason objected to the form of address, regarded his master's guest coldly.

"A clock from the first-floor west corridor, a silver-plated salver, a copper loving cup from the hall, and a brass Buddha and a gilt pomander box from the first-floor landing, as far as we can ascertain, sir," he said.

"God bless my soul!" said George again. "How extraordinary!"

"Extraordinary be damned!" ejaculated Welkin. "We've got valuables here. Ada!"

"The necklace!" shrieked Mrs Welkin, consternation suddenly welling up in her stupid eyes. "My necklace!"

She scuttled out of the room and Sheila came forward with Santa Claus, who had taken off his mask and pushed back his hood, revealing the stolid not unhandsome features of Mike Peters.

Lady Turrett did not stir from her chair and Kenneth Welkin, white faced and bewildered, stared down at her.

"There's been a burglary," he said. "Here, in this house."

Mae Turrett smiled at him vaguely. "George and Pouter will see to it," she said. "I'm so tired."

"Tired!" shouted Edward Welkin. "If my wife's diamonds..."

He got no further. Ada Welkin tottered into the room, an empty steel dispatch case in her trembling hands.

"They've gone," she said, her voice rising in hysteria. "They've gone. My diamonds ... My room's been turned upside down. They've been taken. The necklace has gone."

It was Mike who had sufficient presence of mind to support her to a chair before she collapsed. Her husband shot a shrewd, preoccupied glance at her, shouted to his son to "Look after your mother, boy!" and took command of the situation.

"Now this is serious. You, Pigeon; whatever your name is, get all the servants, every one who's in this house, to come here in double-quick time, see? I've been robbed."

Pouter looked at his master in mute appeal and George coughed.

"In a moment, Mr Welkin," he said. "In a moment. Let us find out what we can first. Pouter, go and find out if any stranger has been seen about the house or grounds this evening, will you, please?"

The manservant went out instantly and Welkin raged.

"You may think you know what you're doing," he said, "but my way was the best. You're giving the thief time to get away, and time's precious, let me tell you. I've got to get the police up here."

"The police?" Sheila was aghast

He snapped at her. "Of course, young woman. Do you think I'm going to lose twelve thousand pounds? The stones were insured, of course, but what company would pay up if I hadn't called in the police? I'll go and phone up now."

"Wait a moment, please," said George, his quiet voice only a little ruffled. "Here's Pouter again. Well?"

The butler looked profoundly uncomfortable.

"Two maids, sir," he said, "the undermaid and Miss Sheila's maid, Lucy, were waiting in the hall to tell me that

they saw a man running down the drive just before the Christmas tree was begun." He hesitated. "They—they say, sir, he was dressed as Father Christmas. They both say it, sir."

Everyone looked at Mike, and Sheila's cheeks flamed.

"Well?" she demanded.

Mr Welkin suddenly laughed. "So that's how it was done," he said. "The young blackguard was clever but he was seen. You weren't so clever as you thought you were, my lad."

Mike moved forward. His face was pale and his eyes were dangerous. George laid a hand upon his arm.

"Wait," he commanded. "Pouter, you may go. Now," he continued as the door closed behind the man, "you, Mr Welkin, you'll have to explain, you know."

Mr Welkin kept his temper. He seemed almost amused.

"Well, it's perfectly simple, isn't it?" he said. "This fellow has been wandering about in this disguise all the evening. He couldn't come in here because her ladyship wanted him to be a surprise to the children, but he had the rest of the house to himself. He went round lifting anything he fancied, including my diamonds. Suppose he had been met? No one would think anything of it. Father Christmas always carries a sack. Then he went off down the drive, where he met a confederate in a car, handed over the stuff and came back to the party."

Mike began to speak but Sheila interrupted him.

"What makes you think Mike would do such a thing, Mr Welkin?" she demanded, her voice shaking with fury.

Edward Welkin's heavy mouth widened in a grin.

"Dishonesty's in the family, isn't it?" he said.

Mike sprang but George clung to him. "Hold on, my boy, hold on," he said breathlessly. "Don't strike a man old enough to be your..."

He boggled at the unfortunate simile and substituted the word "grandfather" with ludicrous effect.

Mr Campion decided it was time to interfere.

"I say, George," he said "if you and Mr Welkin would come along to the library I've got a suggestion I'd like to make."

Welkin wavered. "Keep an eye on him then, Ken," he said over his shoulder to his son. "I'll listen to you, Campion, but I want my diamonds back and I want the police. I'll give you five minutes, no longer."

The library was in darkness when the three men entered, and Campion waited until they were well in the room before he switched on the main light. There was a moment of bewildered silence. One corner of the room looked like a stall in the Caledonian Market. There the entire contents of the sack, which had come so unexpectedly into Mr Campion's possession, were neatly spread out. George's cherubic face darkened.

"What's this?" he demanded. "A damned silly joke?"

Mr Campion shook his head. "I'm afraid not," he said. "What would you say, Mr Welkin?"

The man stared at him doggedly. "Where are my diamonds? That's my only interest. I don't care about this junk."

Campion smiled faintly. "He's right, you know, George," he said. "Junk's the word. It came back to me as soon as I saw it. Poor Charlie Spring never had a successful coup in his life because he can't help stealing gaudy junk."

Edward Welkin stood stiffly by the desk.

"I don't understand you," he said. "My diamonds have been stolen and I want to call the police."

Mr Campion took off his spectacles. "I shouldn't if I were you," he said. "No you don't!"

On the last words Mr Campion leapt forward and there was a brief struggle. When it was over Mr Welkin was lying on the floor beside the marble-and-ormolu clock and Mr Campion was grasping the gold pen and pencil in the leather holder which until a moment before had rested in the man's waistcoat pocket.

Welkin scrambled to his feet. His face was purple and his eyes a little frightened. He attempted to bluster.

"You'll find yourself in court for assault," he said. "Give me my property."

"Certainly. All of it," agreed Mr Campion obligingly. "Your dummy pen, your dummy pencil, and, in the little receptacle which they conceal, your wife's diamonds."

On the last word he drew the case apart and a glittering string fell out in his hand. There was a long long pause. Welkin stood sullenly in the middle of the room.

"Well?" he said at last. "What are you two going to do about it?"

Mr Campion glanced at George, who was sitting by the desk, an expression of incredulity amounting almost to stupefaction upon his mild face.

"If I might suggest," he murmured, "I think he might take his family and spend a jolly Christmas somewhere else, don't you? It would save a lot of trouble."

Welkin held out his hand.

"Very well. I'll take my diamonds."

Mr Campion shook his head. "As you go out of the house," he said with a faint smile. "I shouldn't like them to be —lost again."

Welkin shrugged his shoulders. "You win," he said briefly. "I'll go and tell Ada to pack."

He went out of the room and as the door closed behind him George bounced to his feet.

"Hanged if I understand it..." he began. "D'you mean to say the feller put up this amazing cock-and-bull story so that he could get Mike accused of the theft?"

Mr Campion remained serious. "Oh no," he said. "That was an artistic afterthought, I imagine. The cock-and-bull story, as you call it, was a very neat little swindle devised by our unpleasant friend before he came down here at all. It was very simple to stage a burglary here on Christmas Eve, especially when he had heard from his wife that Mae always had a Santa Claus costume from Harridge's. All he had to do was to go and order one too. Then, armed with the perfect disguise, he enlisted the services of a genuine burglar, to whom he gave the costume. The man simply had to walk into the house, pick up a few things at random, and go off with them. I think you'll find if you go into it that he hired a car at Ipswich and drove out here, changing somewhere along the road."

George was still puzzled. "But his own son Kenneth was going to play Santa Claus," he said. "Or at least he seemed to expect it."

Campion nodded. "I know," he said. "Welkin had foreseen that difficulty and prepared for it. If Kenneth had been playing Father Christmas and the same thing had happened I think you would have found that the young man had a pretty convincing alibi established for him. You must remember the burglar was not meant to be seen. He was only furnished

with the costume in case he was. As it happened, of course, when Welkin père saw that Mike was not too unlike his burglar friend in build he encouraged the change-over and killed two birds with one stone—or tried to."

His host took the diamonds and turned them over. He was slow of comprehension.

"Why steal his own property?" he demanded.

Mr Campion sighed. "You have such a blameless mind, George, that the wickedness of some of your fellow men must be a constant source of astonishment to you," he murmured. "Did you hear our friend Welkin say that he had insured this necklace?"

George's eyebrows rose.

"God bless my soul!" he said. "The bounder! ... In our house too," he added as an afterthought. "Miracle you spotted it, Campion. God bless my soul! Draw the insurance and keep the diamonds ... Damnable trick."

He was still wrathful when the door burst open and Mae Turrett came in, followed by Mike and Sheila.

"The Welkins are going. They've ordered their cars. What on earth's happened, George?"

Her ladyship was startled but obviously relieved.

Mr Campion explained. "It had been worrying me all day," he said after the main part of the story had been told. "I knew

Charlie Spring had a peculiarity but I couldn't think what it was until I pulled that clock out of the bag. Then I remembered his penchant for the baroque and his sad habit of mistaking it for the valuable. That ruled out the diamonds instantly. They wouldn't be big enough for Charlie. When that came back to me I recollected his other failing. He never works alone. When Mr Spring appears on a job it always means he has a confederate in the house, usually an employer, and with these facts in my hand the rest was fairly obvious."

Mike moved forward. "You've done me a pretty good turn, anyway," he said.

George looked up. "Not really, my boy," he said. "We're not utter fools, you know; are we, Mae?"

Lady Turrett blushed. "Of course not, Mike my dear," she said and her smile could be very charming. "Take Sheila away and cheer her up. I really don't think you need wait about to say good-bye to the Welkins. Dear me, I seem to have been very silly!"

Before she went out Sheila put her hand into Mr Campion's.

"I told you I was glad to see you," she said.

As the two cars containing the Welkins, their diamonds and all that was theirs disappeared down the white drive George linked his arm through Mr Campion's and led him back to the library.

"I've been thinking," he said. "You spotted that pen was a dummy when Miss Hare came in this afternoon."

Mr Campion grinned. "Well, it was odd the man didn't use his own pen, wasn't it?" he said, settling himself before the fire. "When he ignored it I guessed. That kind of cache is fairly common, especially in the States. They're made for carrying valuables and are usually shabby bakelite things which no one would steal in the ordinary way. However, there was nothing shabby about Mr Welkin except his behaviour."

George leant back in his chair and puffed contentedly.

"Difficult feller," he observed. "Didn't like him from the first. No conversation. I started him on shootin' but he wasn't interested, mentioned huntin' and he gaped at me, went on to fishin' and he yawned. Couldn't think of anything to talk to him about. Feller hadn't any conversation at all."

He smiled and there was a faintly shamefaced expression in his eyes.

"Campion," he said softly.

"Yes?"

"Made a wonderful discovery last week." George had lowered his voice to a conspiratorial rumble. "Went down to the cellar and found a single bottle of Coburn '68—'68, my boy! My father must have missed it. I was saving it for tomorrow, don't you know, but whenever I looked at that

feller Welkin I couldn't feel hospitable. Such a devilish waste. However, now he's gone..." His voice trailed away.

"A very merry Christmas indeed," supplemented Mr Campion.

ALBERT CAMPION'S CASEBOOK
VOL. 4. P. 32 ET SEQ.

## THE BORDER-LINE CASE

DATE: Aug. 8, 1933.

VENUE: London.

OFFICIALS: Chief Detective Inspector Stanislaus Oates of the Central Division of the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard.

PRIVATE NOTES: My first "armchair" investigation.
Extraordinary blind spot in Oates's mentality where women are concerned.
Sorry for the girl.

It was so hot in London that night we slept with the wide skylight in our city studio open and let the soot-blacks fall in on us willingly, so long as they brought with them a single stirring breath to move the stifling air. Heat hung on the dark horizons and beneath our particular bowl of sky the city fidgeted, breathless and uncomfortable.

The early editions of the evening papers carried the story of the murder. I read it when they came along about three o'clock on the following afternoon. My mind took in the details lazily, for my eyelids were sticky and the printed words seemed remote and unrelated to reality.

It was a straightforward little incident, or so I thought it, and when I had read the guarded half-column I threw the paper over to Albert Campion, who had drifted in to lunch and stayed to sit quietly in a corner, blinking behind his spectacles, existing merely, in the sweltering day.

The newspapers called the murder the "Coal Court Shooting Case", and the facts were simple.

At one o'clock in the morning, when Vacation Street, N.E., had been a deserted lane of odoriferous heat, a policeman on the beat had seen a man stumble and fall to the pavement. The intense discomfort of the night being uppermost in his mind, he had not unnaturally diagnosed a case of ordinary collapse and, after loosening the stranger's collar, had summoned the ambulance.

When the authorities arrived, however, the man was pronounced to be dead and the body was taken to the

mortuary, where it was discovered that death had been due to a bullet wound neatly placed between the shoulder blades. The bullet had made a small hole and, after perforating the left lung, had furrowed the heart itself, finally coming to rest in the bony structure of the chest.

Since this was so, and the fact that the police constable had heard no untoward sound, it had been reasonable to believe that the shot had been fired at some little distance from a gun with a silencer.

Mr Campion was only politely interested. The afternoon certainly was hot and the story as it then appeared was hardly original or exciting. He sat on the floor reading it patiently, his long thin legs stretched out in front of him.

"Someone died at any rate," he remarked at last and added after a pause: "poor chap! Out of the frying pan... Dear me, I suppose it's the locality which predisposes one to think of that. Ever seen Vacation Street, Margery?"

I did not answer him. I was thinking how odd it was that a general irritant like the heat should make the dozens of situations arising all round one in the great city seem suddenly almost personal. I found I was desperately sorry for the man who had been shot, whoever he was.

It was Stanislaus Oates who told us the real story behind the half column in the evening paper. He came in just after four looking for Campion. He was a detective inspector in those days and had just begun to develop the habit of chatting over his problems with the pale young man in the

horn-rimmed spectacles. Theirs was an odd relationship. It was certainly not a case of the clever amateur and the humble policeman: rather the irritable and pugnacious policeman taking it out of the inoffensive, friendly representative of the general public.

On this occasion Oates was rattled.

"It's a case right down your street," he said briefly to Campion as he sat down. "Seems to be a miracle, for one thing."

He explained after a while, having salved his conscience by pointing out that he had no business to discuss the case and excusing himself most illogically on grounds of the heat.

"It's 'low-class' crime," he went on briskly. "Practically gang shooting. And probably quite uninteresting to all of you, who like romance in your crimes. However, it's got me right down on two counts: the first because the man who shot the fellow who died couldn't possibly have done so, and second because I was wrong about the girl. They're so true to type, these girls, that you can't even rely on the proverbial exception."

He sighed as if the discovery had really grieved him.

We heard the story of Josephine as we sat round in the paralysingly hot studio and, although I never saw the girl then or afterwards, I shall not forget the scene; the three of us listening, breathing rather heavily, while the inspector talked.

She had been Donovan's girl, so Oates said, and he painted a picture of her for us: slender and flat chested, with black hair and eyes like a Russian madonna's in a transparent face. She wore blouses, he said, with lace on them and gold ornaments, little chains and crosses and frail brooches whose security was reinforced by gilt safety pins. She was only twenty, Oates said, and added enigmatically that he would have betted on her but that it served him right and showed him there was no fool like an old one.

He went on to talk about Donovan, who, it seemed, was thirty-five and had spent ten years of his life in jail. The inspector did not seem to think any the less of him for that. The fact seemed to put the man in a definite category in his mind and that was all.

"Robbery with violence and the R.O. boys," he said with a wave of his hand and smiled contentedly as though he had made everything clear. "She was sixteen when he found her and he's given her hell ever since."

While he still held our interest he mentioned Johnny Gilchick. Johnny Gilchick was the man who was dead.

Oates, who was never more sentimental than was strictly reasonable in the circumstances, let himself go about Josephine and Johnny Gilchick. It was love, he said—love, sudden, painful and ludicrous; and he admitted that he liked to see it.

"I had an aunt once who used to talk about the Real Thing," he explained, "and embarrassingly silly the old lady

sounded, but after seeing those two youngsters meet and flame and go on until they were a single fiery entity—youngsters who were pretty ordinary tawdry material without it—I find myself sympathising with her if not condoning the phrase."

He hesitated and his smooth grey face cracked into a depreciating smile.

"Well, we were both wrong, anyway," he murmured, "my aunt and I. Josephine let her Johnny down just as you'd expect her to and after he got what was coming to him and was lying in the mortuary he was born to lie in she upped and perjured her immortal soul to swear his murderer an alibi. Not that her testimony is of much value as evidence. That's beside the point. The fact remains that she's certainly done her best. You may think me sentimental, but it depresses me. I thought that girl was genuine and my judgment was out."

Mr Campion stirred.

"Could we have the details?" he asked politely. "We've only seen the evening paper. It wasn't very helpful."

Oates glared at him balefully.

"Frankly, the facts are exasperating," he said. "There's little catch in them somewhere. It must be something so simple that I missed it altogether. That's really why I've come to look for you. I thought you might care to come along and take a glance at the place. What about it?"

There was no general movement. It was too hot to stir. Finally the inspector took up a piece of chalk and sketched a rough diagram on the bare boards of the model's throne.

## Vacation St., Coal Court

"This is Vacation Street," he said, edging the chalk along a crack. "It's the best part of a mile long. Up this end, here by the chair, it's nearly all wholesale houses. This sand bin I'm sketching in now marks the boundary of two police divisions. We'll take that as the starting point. Well, here, ten yards to the left, is the entrance to Coal Court, which is a cul-de-sac composed of two blank backs of warehouse buildings and a café at the far end. The café is open all night. It serves the printers from the two big presses further down the road. That's its legitimate trade. But it is also a sort of unofficial headquarters for Donovan's mob. Josephine sits at the desk downstairs and keeps an eye on the door. God knows what hours she keeps. She always seems to be there."

He paused and there came into my mind a recollection of the breathless night through which we had all passed, and I could imagine the girl sitting there in the stuffy shop with her thin chest and her great black eyes.

The inspector was still speaking.

"Now," he said, "there's an upstairs room in the café. It's on the second floor. That's where our friend Donovan spent most of his evening. I expect he had a good few friends with him and we shall locate them all in time."

He bent over the diagram.

"Johnny Gilchick died here," he said, drawing a circle about a foot beyond the square which indicated the sand bin. "Although the bobby was right down the road, he saw him pause under the lamppost, stagger and fall. He called the constable from the other division and they got the ambulance. All that is plain sailing. There's just one difficulty. Where was Donovan when he fired the shot? There were two policemen in the street at the time, remember. At the moment of the actual shooting one of them, the Never Street man, was making a round of a warehouse yard, but the other, the Phyllis Court chap, was there on the spot, not forty yards away, and it was he who actually saw Johnny Gilchick fall, although he heard no shot. Now I tell you, Campion, there's not an ounce of cover in the whole of that street. How did Donovan get out of the café, where did he stand to shoot Johnny neatly through the back, and how did he get back again without being seen? The side walls of the cul-de-sac are solid concrete backs of warehouses, there is no way round from the back of the café, nor could he possibly have gone over the roofs. The warehouses tower over the café like liners over a tug. Had he come out down the road one or other of the bobbies must have been certain to have seen him. How did he do it?"

"Perhaps Donovan didn't do it," I ventured and received a pitying glance for my temerity.

"That's the one fact," said the inspector heavily. "That's the only thing I do know. I know Donovan. He's one of the few English mob boys who carry guns. He served five years with

the gangs in New York before Repeal and he has the misfortune to take his liquor in bouts. After each bout he has a period of black depression, during which he may do anything. Johnny Gilchick used to be one of Donovan's mob and when Johnny fell for the girl he turned in the gang, which was adding insult to injury where Donovan was concerned."

He paused and smiled.

"Donovan was bound to get Johnny in the end," he said. "It was never anything but a question of time. The whole mob expected it. The neighbourhood was waiting for it. Donovan had said openly that the next time Johnny dropped into the café would be his final appearance there. Johnny called last night, was ordered out of the place by the terrified girl, and finally walked out of the cul-de-sac. He turned the corner and strolled down the road. Then he was shot by Donovan. There's no way round it, Campion. The doctors say that death was as near instantaneous as may be. Johnny Gilchick could not have walked three paces with that bullet in his back. As for the gun, that was pretty obviously Donovan's too. We haven't actually picked it up yet, but we know he had one of the type we are after. It's a clear case, a straightforward case, if only we knew where Donovan stood when he fired the shot."

Mr Campion looked up. His eyes were thoughtful behind his spectacles.

"The girl gave Donovan an alibi?" he enquired.

Oates shrugged his shoulders. "Rather," he said. "She was passionate about it. He was there the whole time, every minute of the time, never left the upper room once in the whole evening. I could kill her and she would not alter her story; she'd take her dying oath on it and so on and so on. It didn't mean anything either way. Still, I was sorry to see her doing it, with her boy friend barely cold. She was sucking up to the mob, of course; probably had excellent reasons for doing so. Yet, as I say, I was sorry to hear her volunteering the alibi before she was asked."

"Ah! She volunteered it, did she?" Campion was interested.

Oates nodded and his small grey eyes widened expressively.

"Forced it on us. Came roaring round to the police station with it. Threw it off her chest as if she were doing something fine. I'm not usually squeamish about that sort of thing but it gave me a distinct sense of distaste, I don't mind telling you. Frankly, I gave her a piece of my mind. Told her to go and look at the body, for one thing."

"Not kind of you," observed Mr Campion mildly. "And what did she do?"

"Oh, blubbered herself sick, like the rest of 'em." Oates was still disgruntled. "Still, that's not of interest. What girls like Josephine do or don't do doesn't really matter. She was saving her own skin. If she hadn't been so enthusiastic about

it I'd have forgiven her. It's Donovan who is important. Where was Donovan when he fired?"

The shrill chatter of the telephone answered him and he glanced at me apologetically.

"I'm afraid that's mine," he said. "You didn't mind, did you? I left the number with the sergeant."

He took off the receiver and as he bent his head to listen his face changed. We watched him with an interest it was far too hot to dissemble.

"Oh," he said flatly after a long pause. "Really? Well, it doesn't matter either way, does it? ... Still, what did she do it for? ... What? ... I suppose so.... Yes? ... Really?"

He seemed suddenly astounded as his informant at the other end of the wire evidently came out with a second piece of information more important than the first.

"You can't be certain... you are? ... What?"

The faraway voice explained busily. We could hear its steady drone, inspector Oates's exasperation grew.

"Oh all right, all right," he said at last "I'm crackers ... we're all crackers ... have it your own damned way!"

With which vulgar outburst he rang off.

"Alibi sustained?" enquired Mr Campion.

"Yes." The inspector grunted out the word. "A couple of printers who were in the downstairs room swear he did not go through the shop all the evening. They're sound fellows. Make good witnesses. Yet Donovan shot Johnny. I'm certain of it. He shot him clean through the concrete angle of a piano warehouse as far as I can see." He turned to Campion almost angrily. "Explain that, can you?"

Mr Campion coughed. He seemed a little embarrassed.

"I say, you know," he ventured, "there are just two things that occur to me."

"Then out with them, son." The inspector lit a cigarette and wiped his face. "Out with them. I'm not proud."

Mr Campion coughed. "Well, the—er—heat, for one thing, don't you know," he said with profound uneasiness. "The heat and one of your concrete walls."

The inspector swore a little and apologised.

"If anyone could forget this heat he's welcome," he said. "What's the matter with the wall too?"

Mr Campion bent over the diagram on the boards of the throne. He was very apologetic.

"Here is the angle of the warehouse," he said, "and here is the sand bin. Here to the left is the lamppost where Johnny Gilchick was found. Further on to the left is the P.C. from Never Street examining a courtyard and temporarily off the scene, while to the right, on the other side of the entrance to

Coal Court, is another constable, P.C. someone-or-other, of Phyllis Court. One is apt to—er—think of the problem as though it were contained in four solid walls, two concrete walls, two policemen."

He hesitated and glanced timidly at the inspector.

"When is a policeman not a concrete wall, Oates? In—er—well, in just such heat ... do you think, or don't you?"

Oates was staring at him, his eyes narrowed.

"Damn it!" he said explosively. "Damn it, Campion, I believe you're right. I knew it was something so simple that it was staring me in the face."

They stood together looking down at the diagram. Oates stooped to put a chalk cross at the entrance to the cul-de-sac.

"It was *that* lamppost," he said. "Give me that telephone. Wait till I get hold of that fellow."

While he was carrying on an excited conversation we demanded an explanation from Mr Campion and he gave it to us at last, mild and apologetic as usual.

"Well, you see," he said, "there's the sand bin. The sand bin marks the boundary of two police divisions. Policeman A, very hot and tired, sees a man collapse from the heat under a lamppost on his own territory. The man is a little fellow and it occurs to Policeman A that it would be a simple matter to move him to the next lamppost on the other side of the sand bin, where he would automatically become the

responsibility of Policeman B, who is even now approaching. Policeman A achieves the change and is bending over the prostate figure when his colleague comes up. Since he knows nothing of the bullet wound, the entrance to the cul-de-sac, with its clear view to the café second-floor room, has no significance in his mind. Today, when its full importance must have dawned upon him, he evidently thinks it best to hold his tongue."

Oates came back from the phone triumphant.

"The first bobby went on leave this morning," he said. "He was an old hand. He must have spotted the chap was dead, took it for granted it was the heat, and didn't want to be held up here by the inquest. Funny I didn't see that in the beginning."

We were all silent for some moments.

"Then—the girl?" I began at last.

The inspector frowned and made a little grimace of regret.

"A pity about the girl," he said. "Of course it was probably an accident. Our man who saw it happen said he couldn't be sure."

I stared at him and he explained, albeit a little hurriedly.

"Didn't I tell you? When my sergeant phoned about the alibi he told me. As Josephine crossed the road after visiting the mortuary this morning she stepped under a bus ... Oh yes, instantly."

He shook his head. He seemed uncomfortable.

"She thought she was making a gesture when she came down to the station, don't you see. The mob must have told her to swear that no one had been in the upstairs room; that must have been their first story until they saw how the luck lay. So when she came beetling down to us she must have thought she was risking her life to give her Johnny's murderer away, while instead of that she was simply giving the fellow an alibi.... Funny the way things happen, isn't it?"

He glanced at Campion affectionately.

"It's because you don't get your mind cluttered up with the human element that you see these things so quickly," he said. "You see everything in terms of A and B. It makes all the difference."

Mr Campion, the most gentle of men, made no comment at all.

ALBERT CAMPION'S CASEBOOK
VOL 7. P. 1 ET SEQ.

## THE CASE OF THE WIDOW

DATE: Feb. 1, 20, 25 and 26, 1936

VENUE: London and Norfolk coast.

OFFICIALS: Superintendent Stanislaus Oates of the Central Branch, Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard.

PRIVATE NOTES: Audacity of the fellow. Curiously attractive.
Demonstration utterly convincing.
Remarkable brandy.
Thistledown gave me seven bottles of Imperial Tokay.
Probably priceless. Very handsome of him (incredible stuff).

## The Case of the Widow

The second prettiest girl in Mayfair was thanking Superintendent Stanislaus Oates for the recovery of her diamond bracelet and the ring with the square-cut emerald in it, and Mr Campion, who had accompanied her to the ceremony, was admiring her technique.

She was doing it very charmingly; so charmingly, in fact, that the superintendent's depressing little office had taken on an air of garden-party gaiety which it certainly did not possess in the ordinary way, while the superintendent himself had undergone an even more sensational change.

His long dyspeptic face was transformed by a blush of smug satisfaction and he quite forgot the short lecture he had prepared for his visitor on The Carelessness Which Tempts

the Criminal, or its blunter version, Stupidity Which Earns Its Own Reward.

It was altogether a most gratifying scene, and Mr Campion, seated in the visitor's chairs his long thin legs crossed and his pale eyes amused behind his horn-rimmed spectacles, enjoyed it to the full.

Miss Leonie Peterhouse-Vaughn raised her remarkable eyes to the superintendent's slightly sheepish face and spoke with deep earnestness.

"I honestly think you're wonderful," she said.

Realising that too much butter can have a disastrous effect on any dish, and not being at all certain of his old friend's digestive capabilities, Mr Campion coughed.

"He has his failures too," he ventured. "He's not omnipotent, you know. Just an ordinary man."

"Really?" said Miss Peterhouse-Vaughn with gratifying surprise.

"Oh yes; well, we're only human, miss." The superintendent granted Mr Campion a reproachful look. "Sometimes we have our little disappointments. Of course on those occasions we call in Mr Campion here," he added with a flash of malice.

Leonie laughed prettily and Mr Oates's ruffled fur subsided like a wave.

"Sometimes even he can't help us," he went on, encouraged, and, inspired, no doubt, by the theory that the greater the enemy the greater the honour, launched into an explanation perhaps not altogether discreet. "Sometimes we come up against a man who slips through our fingers every time. There's a man in London today who's been responsible for more trouble than I can mention. We know him, we know where he lives, we could put our hands on him any moment of the day or night, but have we any proof against him? Could we hold him for ten minutes without getting into serious trouble for molesting a respectable citizen? Could we? Well, we couldn't."

Miss Peterhouse-Vaughn's expression of mystified interest was very flattering.

"This is incredibly exciting," she said. "Who is he?—or mustn't you tell?"

The superintendent shook his head.

"Entirely against the regulations," he said regretfully, and then, on seeing her disappointment and feeling, no doubt, that his portentous declaration had fallen a little flat, he relented and made a compromise between his conscience and a latent vanity which Mr Campion had never before suspected. "Well, I'll show you this," he conceded. "It's a very curious thing."

With Leonie's fascinated eyes upon him, he opened a drawer in his desk and took out a single sheet torn from a week-old London evening paper. A small advertisement in

the Situations Vacant column was ringed with blue pencil. Miss Peterhouse-Vaughn took it eagerly and Mr Campion got up lazily to read it over her shoulder.

WANTED: *Entertainer suitable for children's party. Good money offered to right man. Apply in person any evening. Widow, 13 Blakenham Gardens, W.1.*

Leonie read the lines three times and looked up.

"But it seems quite ordinary," she said.

The superintendent nodded. "That's what any member of the public would think," he agreed, gracefully keeping all hint of condescension out of his tone. "And it would have escaped our notice too except for one thing, and that's the name and address. You see, the man I was telling you about happens to live at 13 Blakenham Gardens."

"Is his name Widow? How queer!"

"No, miss, it's not." Oates looked uncomfortable, seeing the pitfall too late. "I ought not to be telling you this," he went on severely. "This gentleman—and we've got nothing we can pin on him, remember—is known as 'The Widow' to the criminal classes. That's why this paragraph interested us. As it stands it's an ad for a crook, and the fellow has the impudence to use his own address! Doesn't even hide it under a box number."

Mr Campion eyed his old friend. He seemed mildly interested.

"Did you send someone along to answer it?" he enquired.

"We did." The superintendent spoke heavily. "Poor young Billings was kept there singing comic songs for three quarters of an hour while W——I mean this fellow—watched him without a smile. Then he told him he'd go down better at a police concert."

Miss Peterhouse-Vaughn looked sympathetic.

"What a shame!" she said gravely, and Mr Campion never admired her more.

"We sent another man," continued the superintendent, "but when he got there the servant told him the vacancy had been filled. We kept an eye on the place, too, but it wasn't easy. The whole crescent was a seething mass of would-be child entertainers."

"So you haven't an idea what he's up to?" Mr Campion seemed amused.

"Not the faintest," Oates admitted. "We shall in the end, though; I'll lay my bottom dollar. He was the moving spirit in that cussed Featherstone case, you know, and we're pretty certain it was he who slipped through the police net in the Barking business."

Mr Campion raised his eyebrows. "Blackmail and smuggling?" he said. "He seems to be a versatile soul,

doesn't he?"

"He's up to anything," Oates declared. "Absolutely anything. I'd give a packet to get my hands on him. But what he wants with a kids' entertainer—if it is an entertainer he's after—I do not know."

"Perhaps he just wants to give a children's party?" suggested Miss Peterhouse-Vaughn and while the policeman was considering this possibility, evidently the one explanation which had not crossed his mind, she took her leave.

"I must thank you once again, Mr Oates," she said. "I can't tell you how terribly, terribly clever I think you are, and how awfully grateful I am, and how frightfully careful I'll be in future not to give you any more dreadful trouble."

It was a charming little speech in spite of her catastrophic adjectives and the superintendent beamed.

"It's been a pleasure, miss," he said.

As Mr Campion handed her into her mother's Daimler he regarded her coldly.

"A pretty performance," he remarked. "Tell me, what do you say when a spark of genuine gratitude warms your nasty little heart? My poor Oates!"

Miss Peterhouse-Vaughn grinned.

"I did do it well, didn't I," she said complacently. "He's rather a dear old goat."

Mr Campion was shocked and said so.

"The superintendent is a distinguished officer. I always knew that, of course, but this afternoon I discovered a broad streak of chivalry in him. In his place I think I might have permitted myself a few comments on the type of young woman who leaves a diamond bracelet and an emerald ring in the soap dish at a public restaurant and then goes smiling to Scotland Yard to ask for it back. The wretched man had performed a miracle for you and you call him a dear old goat."

Leonie was young enough to look abashed without losing her charm.

"Oh, but I am grateful," she said. "I think he's wonderful. But not so absolutely brilliant as somebody else."

"That's very nice of you, my child," Mr Campion prepared to unbend.

"Oh, not you, darling." Leonie squeezed his arm. "I was talking about the other man—The Widow. He's got real nerve, don't you think?—using his own address and making the detective sing and all that... So amusing!"

Her companion looked down at her severely.

"Don't make a hero out of *him*," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because, my dear little hideous, he's a crook. It's only while he remains uncaught that he's faintly interesting. Sooner or later your elderly admirer, the superintendent, is going to clap him under lock and key and then he'll just be an ordinary convict, who is anything but romantic, believe me."

Miss Peterhouse-Vaughn shook her head.

"He won't get caught," she said. "Or if he does—forgive me, darling—it'll be by someone much cleverer than you or Mr Oates."

Mr Campion's professional pride rebelled.

"What'll you bet?"

"Anything you like," said Leonie. "Up to two pounds," she added prudently.

Campion laughed. "The girl's learning caution at last!" he said. "I may hold you to that."

The conversation changed to the charity matinee of the day before, wherein Miss Peterhouse-Vaughn had appeared as Wisdom, and continued its easy course, gravitating naturally to the most important pending event in the Peterhouse-Vaughn family, the christening of Master Brian Desmond Peterhouse-Vaughn, nephew to Leonie, son to her elder brother, Desmond Brian, and godson to Mr Albert Campion.

It was his new responsibility as a godfather which led Mr Campion to take part in yet another elegant little ceremony some few days after the christening and nearly three weeks after Leonie's sensational conquest of Superintendent Oates's susceptible heart.

Mr Campion called to see Mr Thistledown in Cheese Street, E.C., and they went reverently to the cellars together.

Mr Thistledown was a small man, elderly and dignified. His white hair was inclined to flow a little and his figure was more suited, perhaps, to his vocation than to his name. As head of the small but distinguished firm of Thistledown, Friend and Son, Wine Importers since 1798, he very seldom permitted himself a personal interview with any client under the age of sixty-five, for at that year he openly believed the genus homo sapiens, considered solely as a connoisseur of vintage wine, alone attained full maturity.

Mr Campion, however, was an exception. Mr Thistledown thought of him as a lad still, but a promising one. He took his client's errand with all the gravity he felt it to deserve.

"Twelve dozen of port to be laid down for Master Brian Desmond Peterhouse-Vaughn," he said, rolling the words round his tongue as though they, too, had their flavour. "Let me see, it is now the end of '36. It will have to be a '27 wine. Then by the time your godson is forty—he won't want to drink it before that age, surely?—there should be a very fine fifty-year-old vintage awaiting him."

A long and somewhat heated discussion, or, rather, monologue, for Mr Campion was sufficiently experienced to offer no opinion, followed. The relative merits of Croft, Taylor, Da Silva, Noval and Fonseca were considered at length, and in the end Mr Campion followed his mentor through the sacred tunnels and personally affixed his seal upon a bin of Taylor, 1927.

Mr Thistledown was to favour of a stipulation to provide that Master Peterhouse-Vaughn should not attain full control over his vinous inheritance until he attained the age of thirty, whereas Mr Campion preferred the more conventional twenty-one. Finally a compromise of twenty-five was agreed upon and the two gentlemen retired to Mr Thistledown's consulting room glowing with the conscious virtue of men who had conferred a benefit upon posterity.

The consulting room was comfortable. It was really no more than an arbour of bottles constructed in the vault of the largest cellar and was furnished with a table and chairs of solid ship's timber. Mr Thistledown paused by the table and hesitated before speaking. There was clearly something on his mind and Campion, who had always considered him slightly inhuman, a sort of living port crust, was interested.

When at last the old gentleman unburdened himself it was to make a short speech.

"It takes an elderly man to judge a port or a claret," he said, "but spirits are definitely in another category. Some men may live to be a hundred without ever realising the subtle differences of the finest rums. To judge a spirit one

must be born with a certain kind of palate. Mr Campion, would you taste a brandy for me?"

His visitor was startled. Always a modest soul, he made no pretensions to connoisseurship and now he said so firmly.

"I don't know." Mr Thistledown regarded him seriously. "I have watched your taste for some years now and I am inclined to put you down as one of the few really knowledgeable younger men. Wait for me a moment."

He went out, and through the arbour's doorway Campion saw him conferring with the oldest and most cobwebby of the troglodyte persons who lurked about the vaults.

Considerably flattered in spite of himself, he sat back and awaited developments. Presently one of the younger myrmidons, a mere youth of fifty or so, appeared with a tray and a small selection of balloon glasses. He was followed by an elder with two bottles, and at the rear of the procession came Mr Thistledown himself with something covered by a large silk handkerchief. Not until they were alone did he remove the veil. Then, whipping the handkerchief aside, he produced a partly full half bottle with a new cork and no label. He held it up to the light and Mr Campion saw that the liquid within was of the true dark amber.

Still with the ritualistic air, Mr Thistledown polished a glass and poured a tablespoonful of the spirit, afterwards handing it to his client.

Feeling like a man with his honour at stake, Campion warmed the glass in his hand, sniffed at it intelligently, and finally allowed a little of the stuff to touch his tongue.

Mr Thistledown watched him earnestly. Campion tasted again and inhaled once more. Finally he set down his glass and grinned.

"I may be wrong," he said, "but it tastes like the real McKay."

Mr Thistledown frowned at the vulgarism. He seemed satisfied, however, and there was a curious mixture of pleasure and discomfort on his face.

"I put it down as a Champagne Fine, 1835," he said. "It has not, perhaps, quite the superb caress of the true Napoleon —but a brave, yes, a brave, brandy! The third best I have ever tasted in my life. And that, let me tell you, Mr Campion, is a very extraordinary thing."

He paused, looking like some old white cockatoo standing at the end of the table.

"I wonder if I might take you into my confidence?" he ventured at last. "Ah—a great many people do take you into their confidence, I believe? Forgive me for putting it that way."

Campion smiled. "I'm as secret as the grave," he said, "and if there's anything I can do I shall be delighted."

Mr Thistledown sighed with relief and became almost human.

"This confounded bottle was sent to me some little time ago," he said. "With it was a letter from a man called Gervaise Papulous; I don't suppose you've ever heard of him, but he wrote a very fine monograph on brandies some years ago which was greatly appreciated by connoisseurs. I had an idea he lived a hermit's life somewhere in Scotland, but that's neither here nor there. The fact remains that when I had this note from an address in Half Moon Street I recognised the name immediately. It was a very civil letter, asking me if I'd mind, as an expert, giving my opinion of the age and quality of the sample."

He paused and smiled faintly.

"I was a little flattered, perhaps," he said. "After all, the man is a well-known authority himself. Anyway, I made the usual tests, tasted it and compared it with the oldest and finest stuff we have in stock. We have a few bottles of 1848 and one or two of the 1835. I made the most careful comparisons and at last I decided that the sample was a '35 brandy, but not the same blend as our own. I wrote him; I said I did not care to commit myself, but I gave him my opinion for what it was worth and I appended my reasons for forming it."

Mr Thistledown's precise voice ceased and his colour heightened.

"By return I received a letter thanking me for mine and asking me whether I would care to consider an arrangement whereby I could buy the identical spirit in any quantity I cared to name at a hundred and twenty shillings a dozen, excluding duty—or in other words, ten shillings per bottle."

Mr Campion sat up. "Ten shillings?" he said.

"Ten shillings," repeated Mr Thistledown. "The price of a wireless licence," he added with contempt. "Well, as you can imagine, Mr Campion, I thought there must be some mistake. Our own '35 is listed at sixty shillings a bottle and you cannot get finer value anywhere in London. The stuff is rare. In a year or two it will be priceless. I considered this sample again and reaffirmed my own first opinion. Then I reread the letter and noticed the peculiar phrase—'an arrangement whereby you will be able to purchase.' I thought about it all day and finally I put on my hat and went down to see the man."

He glanced at his visitor almost timidly. Campion was reassuring.

"If it was genuine it was not a chance to be missed," he murmured.

"Exactly." Mr Thistledown smiled. "Well, I saw him, a younger man than I had imagined but well informed, and I received quite a pleasant impression. I asked him frankly where he got the brandy and he came out with an extraordinary suggestion. He asked me first if I was satisfied with the sample, and I said I was or I should hardly have

come to see him. Then he said the whole matter was a secret at the moment, but that he was asking certain well-informed persons to a private conference and something he called a scientific experiment. Finally he offered me an invitation. It is to take place next Monday evening in a little hotel on the Norfolk coast where Mr Papulous says the ideal conditions for his experiment exist."

Mr Campion's interest was thoroughly aroused.

"I should go," he said.

Mr Thistledown spread out his hands.

"I had thought of it," he admitted. "As I came out of the flat at Half Moon Street I passed a man I knew on the stairs. I won't mention his name and I won't say his firm is exactly a rival of ours, but—well, you know how it is. Two or three old firms get the reputation for supplying certain rare vintages. Their names are equally good and naturally there is a certain competition between them. If this fellow has happened on a whole cellar full of this brandy I should like to have as good a chance of buying it as the next man, especially at the price. But in my opinion and in my experience that is too much to hope for, and that is why I have ventured to mention the matter to you."

A light dawned upon his client.

"You want me to attend the conference and make certain everything's aboveboard?"

"I hardly dared to suggest it," he said, "but since you are such an excellent judge, and since your reputation as an investigator—if I may be forgiven the term—is so great, I admit the thought did go through my mind."

Campion picked up his glass and sniffed its fragrance.

"My dear man, I'd jump at it," he said. "Do I pass myself off as a member of the firm?"

Mr Thistledown looked owlish.

"In the circumstances I think we might connive at that little inexactitude," he murmured. "Don't you?"

"I think we'll have to," said Mr Campion.

When he saw the "little hotel on the Norfolk coast" at half-past six on the following Monday afternoon the thought came to him that it was extremely fortunate for the proprietor that it should be so suitable for Mr Papulous's experiment, for it was certainly not designed to be of much interest to any ordinary winter visitor. It was a large country public house, not old enough to be picturesque, standing by itself at the end of a lane some little distance from a cold and sleepy village. In the summer, no doubt, it provided a headquarters for a great many picnic parties, but in winter it was deserted.

Inside it was warm and comfortable enough, however, and Campion found a curious little company seated round the fire in the lounge. His host rose to greet him and he was aware at once of a considerable personality.

He saw a tall man with a shy ingratiating manner, whose clothes were elegant and whose face was remarkable. His deep-set eyes were dark and intelligent and his wide mouth could smile disarmingly, but the feature which was most distinctive was the way in which his iron-grey hair drew into a clean-cut peak in the centre of his high forehead, giving him an odd, Mephistophelean appearance.

"Mr Fellowes?" he said, using the alias Campion and Mr Thistledown had agreed upon. "I heard from your firm this morning. Of course I'm very sorry not to have Mr Thistledown here. He says in his note that I am to regard you as his second self. You handle the French side, I understand?"

"Yes. It was only by chance that I was in England yesterday when Mr Thistledown asked me to come."

"I see." Mr Papulous seemed contented with the explanation. Campion looked a mild, inoffensive young man, even a little foolish.

He was introduced to the rest of the company round the fire and was interested to see that Mr Thistledown had been right in his guess. Half a dozen of the best-known smaller and older wine firms were represented, in most cases by their senior partners.

Conversation, however, was not as general as might have been expected among men of such similar interests. On the contrary, there was a distinct atmosphere of restraint, and it

occurred to Mr Campion that they were all close rivals and each man had not expected to see the others.

Mr Papulous alone seemed happily unconscious of any discomfort. He stood behind his chair at the head of the group and glanced round him with satisfaction.

"It's really very kind of you all to have come," he said in his deep musical voice. "Very kind indeed. I felt we must have experts, the finest experts in the world, to test this thing, because it's revolutionary—absolutely revolutionary."

A large old gentleman with a hint of superciliousness in his manner glanced up.

"When are we going to come to the horses, Mr Papulous?"

His host turned to him with a depreciatory smile.

"Not until after dinner, I'm afraid, Mr Jerome. I'm sorry to seem so secretive, but the whole nature of the discovery is so extraordinary that I want you to see the demonstration with your own eyes."

Mr Jerome, whose name Campion recognised as belonging to the moving spirit of Bolitho Brothers, of St Mary Axe, seemed only partly mollified. He laughed.

"Is it the salubrious air of this particular hotel that you need for your experiment, may I ask?" he enquired.

"Oh no, my dear sir. It's the stillness." Mr Papulous appeared to be completely oblivious of any suggestion of a

sneer. "It's the utter quiet. At night, round about ten o'clock, there is a lack of vibration here, so complete that you can almost feel it, if I may use such a contradiction in terms. Now, Mr Fellowes, dinner's at seven-thirty. Perhaps you'd care to see your room?"

Campion was puzzled. As he changed for the meal, a gesture which seemed to be expected of him, he surveyed the situation with growing curiosity. Papulous was no ordinary customer. He managed to convey an air of conspiracy and mystery while appearing himself as open and simple as the day. Whatever he was up to he was certainly a good salesman.

The dinner was simple and well cooked and was served by Papulous's own man. There was no alcohol and the dishes were not highly seasoned, out of deference, their host explained, to the test that was to be put to their palates later on.

When it was over and the mahogany had been cleared of dessert, a glass of clear water was set before each guest and from the head of the table Mr Papulous addressed his guests. He made a very distinguished figure, leaning forward across the polished wood, the candlelight flickering on his deeply lined face and high heart-shaped forehead.

"First of all let me recapitulate," he said. "You all know my name and you have all been kind enough to say that you have read my little book... I mention this because I want you to realise that by asking you down here to witness a most extraordinary demonstration I am taking my reputation in my

hands. Having made that point, let me remind you that you have each of you, with the single exception of Mr Fellowes, been kind enough to give me your considered views on a sample of brandy which I sent you. In every case, I need hardly mention, opinion was the same—a Champagne Fine of 1835."

A murmur of satisfaction not untinged with relief ran round the table and Mr Papulous smiled.

"Well," he said, "frankly that would have been my own opinion had I not known—mark you, I say 'known'—that the brandy I sent you was a raw cognac of nearly a hundred years later—to be exact, of 1932."

There was a moment of bewilderment, followed by an explosion from Mr Jerome.

"I hope you're not trying to make fools of us, sir," he said severely. "I'm not going to sit here, and——"

"One moment, one moment." Papulous spoke soothingly. "You really must forgive me. I know you all too well by repute to dare to make such a statement without following it immediately by the explanation to which you are entitled. As you're all aware, the doctoring of brandy is an old game. Such dreadful additions as vanilla and burnt sugar have all been used in their time and will, no doubt, be used again, but such crude deceptions are instantly detected by the cultured palate. This is something different."

Mr Jerome began to seethe.

"Are you trying to interest us in a fake, sir?" he demanded. "Because, if so, let me tell you I for one am not interested."

There was a chorus of hasty assent in which Mr Campion virtuously joined.

Gervaise Papulous smiled faintly.

"But of course not," he said. "We are all experts. The true expert knows that no fake can be successful, even should we so far forget ourselves as to countenance its existence. I am bringing you a discovery—not a trick, not a clever fraud, but a genuine discovery which may revolutionise the whole market. As you know, time is the principal factor in the maturing of spirits. Until now time has been the one factor which could not be artificially replaced. An old brandy, therefore, is quite a different thing from a new one."

Mr Campion blinked. A light was beginning to dawn upon him.

Mr Papulous continued. There seemed to be no stopping him. At the risk of boring his audience he displayed a great knowledge of technical detail and went through the life history of an old liqueur brandy from the time it was an unripe grapeskin on a vine outside Cognac.

When he had finished he paused dramatically, adding softly:

"What I hope to introduce to you tonight, gentlemen, is the latest discovery of science, a method of speeding up this long and wearisome process so that the whole business of

maturing the spirit takes place in a few minutes instead of a hundred years. You have all examined the first fruits of this method already and have been interested enough to come down here. Shall we go on?"

The effect of his announcement was naturally considerable. Everybody began to talk at once save Mr Campion, who sat silent and thoughtful. It occurred to him that his temporary colleagues were not only interested in making a great deal of money but very much alarmed at the prospect of losing a considerable quantity also.

"If it's true it'll upset the whole damned trade," murmured his next-door neighbour, a little thin man with wispy straw-coloured hair.

Papulous rose. "In the next room the inventor, Mr. Philippe Jessant, is waiting to demonstrate," he said. "He began work on the idea during the period of prohibition in America and his researches were assisted there by one of the richest men in the world, but when the country was restored to sanity his patron lost interest in the work and he was left to perfect it unassisted. You will find him a simple, uneducated, unbusinesslike man, like many inventors. He came to me for help because he had read my little book and I am doing what I can for him by introducing him to you. Conditions are now ideal. The house is perfectly still. Will you come with me?"

The sceptical but excited little company filed into the large "commercial" room on the other side of the passage. The place had been stripped of furniture save for a half circle of chairs and a large deal table. On the table was a curious

contraption, vaguely resembling two or three of those complicated coffee percolators which seemed to be designed solely for the wedding-present trade.

An excitable little man in a long brown overall was standing behind the table. If not an impressive figure, he was certainly an odd one, with his longish hair and gold-rimmed pince-nez.

"Quiet, please. I must beg of you quiet," he commanded, holding up his hand as they appeared. "We must have no vibration, no vibration at all, if I am to succeed."

He had a harsh voice and a curious foreign accent, which Campion could not instantly trace, but his manner was authoritative and the experts tiptoed gently to their seats.

"Now," said Mr Jessant, his small eyes flashing, "I leave all explanations to my friend here. For me, I am only interested in the demonstration. You understand?"

He glared at them and Papulous hastened to explain.

"Mr Jessant does not mean the human voice, of course," he murmured. "It is vibration, sudden movement, of which he is afraid."

"Quiet," cut in the inventor impatiently. "When a spirit matures in the ordinary way what does it have?—quiet, darkness, peace. These conditions are essential. Now we will begin, if you please."

It was a simple business. A clear-glass decanter of brandy was produced and duly smelt and sampled by each guest. Papulous himself handed round the glasses and poured the liquid. By unanimous consent it was voted a raw spirit. The years 1932 and 1934 were both mentioned.

Then the same decanter was emptied into the contraption on the table and its progress watched through a system of glass tubes and a filter into a large retort-shaped vessel at the foot of the apparatus.

M. Jessant looked up.

"Now," he said softly. "You will come, one at a time, please, and examine my invention. Walk softly."

The inspection was made and the man in the brown overall covered the retort with a hood composed of something that looked like black rubber. For a while he busied himself with thermometers and a little electric battery.

"It's going on now," he explained, suppressed excitement in his voice. "Every second roughly corresponds to a year—a long, dark, dismal year. Now—we shall see."

The hood was removed, fresh glasses brought, and the retort itself carefully detached from the rest of the apparatus.

Mr Jerome was the first to examine the liquid it contained and his expression was ludicrous in its astonishment.

"It's incredible!" he said at last. "Incredible! I can't believe it.... There are certain tests I should like to make, of course,

but I could swear this is an 1835 brandy."

The others were of the same opinion and even Mr Campion was impressed. The inventor was persuaded to do his experiment again. To do him justice he complied willingly.

"It is the only disadvantage," he said, "So little can be treated at the one time. I tell my friend I should like to make my invention foolproof and sell the machines and the instructions to the public, but he tells me no."

"No indeed!" ejaculated Mr Campion's neighbour. "Good heavens! it would knock the bottom out of half my trade..."

When at last the gathering broke up in excitement it was after midnight. Mr Papulous addressed his guests.

"It is late," he said. "Let us go to bed now and consider the whole matter in the morning when M. Jessant can explain the theory of his process. Meanwhile, I am sure you will agree with me that we all have something to think about."

A somewhat subdued company trooped off upstairs. There was little conversation. A man does not discuss a revolutionary discovery with his nearest rival.

Campion came down in the morning to find Mr Jerome already up. He was pacing the lounge and turned on the young man almost angrily.

"I like to get up at six," he said without preamble, "but there were no servants in the place. A woman, her husband

and a maid came along at seven. It seems Papulous made them sleep out. Afraid of vibration, I suppose. Well, it's an extraordinary discovery, isn't it? If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes I should never have believed it. I suppose one's got to be prepared for progress, but I can't say I like it. Never did."

He lowered his voice and came closer.

"We shall have to get together and suppress it, you know," he said. "Only thing to do. We can't have a thing like this blurted out to the public and we can't have any single firm owning the secret. Anyway, that's my opinion."

Campion murmured that he did not care to express his own without first consulting Mr Thistledown.

"Quite, quite. There'll be a good many conferences in the City this afternoon," said Mr Jerome gloomily. "And that's another thing. D'you know there isn't a telephone in this confounded pub?"

Campion's eyes narrowed.

"Is that so?" he said softly. "That's very interesting."

Mr Jerome shot him a suspicious glance.

"In my opinion..." he began heavily but got no further. The door was thrust open and the small wispy-baked man, who had been Campion's neighbour at dinner, came bursting into the room.

"I say," he said, "a frightful thing! The little inventor chap has been attacked in the night. His machine is smashed and the plans and formula are stolen. Poor old Papulous is nearly off his head."

Both Campion and Jerome started for the doorway and a moment later joined the startled group on the landing. Gervaise Papulous, an impressive figure in a long black dressing gown, was standing with his back to the inventor's door.

"This is terrible, terrible!" he was saying. "I beseech you all, go downstairs and wait until I see what is best to be done. My poor friend has only just regained consciousness."

Jerome pushed his way through the group.

"But this is outrageous," he began.

Papulous towered over him, his eyes dark and angry.

"It is just as you say, outrageous," he said, and Mr Jerome quailed before the suppressed fury in his voice.

"Look here," he began, "you surely don't think ... you're not insinuating..."

"I am only thinking of my poor friend," said Mr Papulous.

Campion went quietly downstairs.

"What on earth does this mean?" demanded the small wispy-haired gentleman, who had remained in the lounge.

Campion grinned. "I rather fancy we shall all find that out pretty clearly in about an hour," he said.

He was right. Mr Gervaise Papulous put the whole matter to them in the bluntest possible way as they sat dejectedly looking at the remains of what had proved a very unsatisfactory breakfast.

M. Jessant, his head in bandages and his face pale with exhaustion, had told a heartbreaking story. He had awakened to find a pad of chloroform across his mouth and nose. It was dark and he could not see his assailant, who also struck him repeatedly. His efforts to give the alarm were futile and in the end the anaesthetic had overpowered him.

When at last he had come to himself his apparatus had been smashed and his precious black pocketbook, which held his calculations and which he always kept under his pillow, had gone.

At this point he had broken down completely and had been led away by Papulous's man. Mr Gervaise Papulous then took the floor. He looked pale and nervous and there was an underlying suggestion of righteous anger and indignation in his manner which was very impressive.

"I won't waste time by telling you how appalled I am by this monstrous attack," he began, his fine voice trembling. "I can only tell you the facts. We were alone in this house last night. Even my own man slept out in the village. I arranged this to ensure ideal conditions for the experiment. The landlady reports that the doors were locked this morning and

the house had not been entered from the outside. Now you see what this means? Until last night only the inventor and I knew of the existence of a secret which is of such great importance to all of you here. Last night we told you, we took you into your confidence, and now..." he shrugged his shoulders. "Well, we have been robbed and my friend assaulted. Need I say more?"

An excited babble of protest arose and Mr Jerome seemed in danger of apoplexy. Papulous remained calm and a little contemptuous.

"There is only one thing to do," he said, "but I hesitated before calling in the police, because, of course, only one of you can be guilty and the secret must still be in the house, whereas I know the publicity which cannot be avoided will be detrimental to you all. And not only to yourselves personally, but to the firms you represent."

He paused and frowned.

"The Press is so ignorant," he said. "I am so afraid you may all be represented as having come here to see some sort of faking process—new brandy into old. It doesn't sound convincing, does it?"

His announcement burst like a bomb in the quiet room. Mr Jerome sat very still, his mouth partly open. Somebody began to speak but thought better of it. A long unhappy silence supervened.

Gervaise Papulous cleared his throat.

"I am sorry," he said. "I must either have my friend's notebook back and full compensation, or I must send for the police. What else can I do?"

Mr Jerome pulled himself together.

"Wait," he said in a smothered voice. "Before you do anything rash we must have a conference. I've been thinking over this discovery of yours, Mr Papulous, and in my opinion it raises very serious considerations for the whole trade."

There was a murmur of agreement in the room and he went on.

"The one thing none of us can afford is publicity. In the first place, even if the thing becomes generally known it certainly won't become generally believed. The public doesn't rely on its palate; it relies on our labels, and that puts us in a very awkward position. This final development precipitates everything. We must clear up this mystery in private and then decide what is best to be done."

There was a vigorous chorus of assent, but Mr Papulous shook his head.

"I'm afraid I can't agree," he said coldly. "In the ordinary way M. Jessant and I would have been glad to meet you in any way, but this outrage alters everything. I insist on a public examination unless, of course," he added deliberately, "unless you care to take the whole matter out of our hands."

"What do you mean?" Mr Jerome's voice was faint.

The tall man with the deeply lined face regarded him steadily.

"Unless you care to club together and buy us out," said Mr Papulous. "Then you can settle the matter as you like. The sum M. Jessant had in mind was fifteen thousand pounds, a very reasonable price for such a secret."

There was silence after he had spoken.

"Blackmail," said Mr Campion under his breath and at the same moment his glance lighted on Mr Papulous's most outstanding feature. His eyebrows rose and an expression of incredulity, followed by amazement, passed over his face. Then he kicked himself gently under the breakfast table. He rose.

"I must send a wire to my principal," he said. "You'll understand I'm in an impossible position and must get in touch with Mr Thistledown at once."

Papulous regarded him.

"If you will write your message my man will despatch it from the village," he said politely and there was no mistaking the implied threat.

Campion understood he was not to be allowed to make any private communication with the outside world. He looked blank.

"Thank you," he said and took out a pencil and a loose-leaf notebook.

"Unexpected development," he wrote. "Come down immediately. Inform Charlie and George cannot lunch Tuesday. A. C. Fellowes."

Papulous took the message, read it and went out with it, leaving a horrified group behind him.

Mr Thistledown received Mr Campion's wire at eleven o'clock and read it carefully. The signature particularly interested him. Shutting himself in his private room, he rang up Scotland Yard and was fortunate in discovering Superintendent Oates at his desk. He dictated the wire carefully and added with a depreciatory cough:

"Mr Campion told me to send on to you any message from him signed with his own initials. I don't know if you can make much of this. It seems very ordinary to me."

"Leave all that to us, sir." Oates sounded cheerful. "Where is he, by the way?"

Mr Thistledown gave the address and hung up the receiver. At the other end of the wire the superintendent unlocked a drawer in his desk and took out a small red manuscript book. Each page was ruled with double columns and filled with Mr Campion's own elegant handwriting. Oates ran a forefinger down the left-hand column on the third page.

"Carrie ... Catherine ... Charles..."

His eye ran across the page

"Someone you want," he read and looked on down the list.

The legend against the word "George" was brief. "Two" it said simply.

Oates turned to the back of the book. There were several messages under the useful word "lunch." "Come to lunch" meant "Send two men." "Lunch with me" was translated "Send men armed," and "Cannot lunch" was "Come yourself."

"Tuesday" was on another page. The superintendent did not trouble to look it up. He knew its meaning. It was "hurry."

He wrote the whole message out on a pad.

"Unexpected developments. Come down immediately. Someone you want (two). Come yourself. Hurry. Campion."

He sighed. "Energetic chap," he commented and pressed a bell for Sergeant Bloom.

As it happened, it was Mr Gervaise Papulous himself who caught the first glimpse of the police car which pulled up outside the lonely little hotel. He was standing by the window in an upper room whose floor was so flimsily constructed that he could listen with ease to the discussion taking place in the lounge below. There the unfortunate experts were still arguing. The only point on which they all agreed was the absolute necessity of avoiding a scandal.

As the car stopped and the superintendent sprang out and made for the door Papulous caught a glimpse of his official-looking figure. He swung round savagely to the forlorn little figure who sat hunched up on the bed.

"You peached, damn you!" he whispered.

"Me?" The man who had been calling himself "Jessant" sat up in indignation. "Me peach?" he repeated, his foreign accent fading into honest South London. "Don't be silly. And you pay up, my lad. I'm fed up with this. First I do me stuff, then you chloroform me, then you bandage me, then you keep me shut up 'ere, and now you accuse me of splitting. What you playing at?"

"You're lying, you little rat." Papulous's voice was dangerously soft and he strode swiftly across the room towards the man on the bed, who shrank back in sudden alarm.

"Here—that'll do, that'll do. What's going on here?"

It was Oates who spoke. Followed by Campion and the sergeant he strode across the room.

"Let the fellow go," he commanded. "Good heavens, man, you're choking him."

Doubling his fist, he brought it up under the other man's wrists with a blow which not only loosed their hold but sent their owner staggering back across the room.

The man on the bed let out a howl and stumbled towards the door into the waiting arms of Sergeant Bloom, but Oates did not notice him. His eyes were fixed upon the face of the tall man on the other side of the room.

"The Widow!" he ejaculated. "Well I'll be damned!"

The other smiled.

"More than probably, my dear Inspector. Or have they promoted you?" he said. "But at the moment I'm afraid you're trespassing."

The superintendent glanced enquiringly at the mild and elegant figure at his side.

"False pretences is the charge," murmured Mr Campion affably. "There are certain rather unpleasant traces of blackmail in the matter, but false pretences will do. There are six witnesses and myself."

The man whose alias was The Widow stared at his accuser.

"Who are you?" he demanded, and then, as the answer dawned upon him, he swore softly. "Campion," he said. "Albert Campion ... I ought to have recognised you from your description."

Campion grinned. "That's where I had the advantage of you," he said.

Mr Campion and the superintendent drove back to London together, leaving a very relieved company of experts to travel

home in their own ways. Oates was jubilant.

"Got him," he said. "Got him at last. And a clear case. A pretty little swindle too. Just like him. If you hadn't been there all those poor devils would have paid up something. They're the kind of people he goes for, folk whose business depends on their absolute integrity. They all represent small firms, you see, with old, conservative clients. When did you realise that he wasn't the real Gervaise Papulous?"

"As soon as I saw him I thought it unlikely." Campion grinned as he spoke. "Before I left town I rang up the publishers of the Papulous monograph. They had lost sight of him, they said, but from their publicity department I learned that Papulous was born in '72. So as soon as I saw our friend The Widow I realised that he was a good deal younger than the real man. However, like a fool I didn't get on to the swindle until this morning. It was when he was putting on that brilliant final act of his. I suddenly recognised him and of course the whole thing came to me in a flash."

"Recognised him?" Oates looked blank, "I never described him to you."

Mr Campion looked modest. "D'you remember showing off to a very pretty girl I brought up to your office, and so far forgetting yourself as to produce an advertisement from an evening paper?" he enquired.

"I remember the ad," Oates said doggedly. "The fellow advertised for a kids' entertainer. But I don't remember him including a photograph of himself."

"He printed his name," Campion persisted. "It's a funny nickname. The significance didn't occur to me until I looked at him this morning, knowing that he was a crook. I realised that he was tricking us but I couldn't see how. Then his face gave him away."

"His face?"

"My dear fellow, you haven't spotted it yet. I'm glad of that. It didn't come to me for a bit. Consider that face. How do crooks get their names? How did Beaky Doyle get his name? Why was Cauliflower Edwards so called? Think of his forehead, man. Think of his hair."

"Peak," said the superintendent suddenly. "Of course, a widow's peak! Funny I didn't think of that before. It's obvious when it comes to you. But even so," he added more seriously, "I wonder you cared to risk sending for me on that alone. Plenty of people have a widow's peak. You'd have looked silly if he'd been on the level."

"Oh, but I had the advertisement as well," Campion objected. "Taken in conjunction, the two things are obvious. That demonstration last night was masterly. Young brandy went in at one end of the apparatus and old brandy came out at the other, and we saw, or thought we saw, the spirit the whole time. There was only one type of man who could have done it—a children's party entertainer."

Oates shook his head.

"I'm only a poor demented policeman," he said derisively. "My mind doesn't work. I'll buy it."

Campion turned to him. "My good Oates, have you ever been to a children's party?"

"No."

"Well, you've been a child, I suppose?"

"I seem to remember something like it."

"Well, when you were a child what entertained you? Singing? Dancing? *The Wreck of the Hesperus*? No, my dear friend, there's only one kind of performer who goes down well with children and that is a member of the brotherhood of which Jessant is hardly an ornament. A magician, Oates. In other words, a conjurer. And a damned good trick he showed us all last night!"

He trod on the accelerator and the car rushed on again.

The superintendent sat silent for a long time. Then he glanced up.

"That *was* a pretty girl," he said. "Nice manners too."

"Leonie?" Campion nodded. "That reminds me, I must phone her when we get back to town."

"Oh?" The superintendent was interested. "Nothing I can do for you, I suppose?" he enquired archly.

Campion smiled. "Hardly," he said. "I want to tell her she owes me two pounds."

ALBERT CAMPION'S CASEBOOK
VOL 7. P. 177 ET SEQ.

## THE CASE OF THE PRO AND THE CON

DATE: Jan. 12-16, 1937.

VENUE: Monte Carlo and Swallows Hall, Suffolk, England.

OFFICIALS: Superintendent Stanislaus Oates and Chief Detective Inspector Baker, both of the Central Branch, Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard.

PRIVATE NOTES: Astounding gullibility of middle-aged gentlewomen.
Strength of the man worth remembering should we meet again.
Would he have risked killing me? Rather afraid he would.

### The Case of the Pro and the Con

Mr Campion, stepping out of the cold sunlight of the Monte Carlo square into the dim warmth of the casino

vestibule, saw a plain good-tempered female face which reminded him, for some reason he could not instantly trace, of beautiful food.

He glanced at the woman curiously. She was square and respectable and would have been a natural part of the landscape at any country church fete, but here, among a cosmopolitan crowd on a late afternoon in the height of the Cote d'Azur season, she was as out of place as a real dandelion in a bouquet of wax orchids.

She did not see him and he moved on, completed the usual formalities, and wandered into the grand salle. He did not cross to the tables but stood watching for a moment, his long thin figure half hidden in the shadow of the columns. It was a scene he knew well but one which never failed to thrill him. Apart from the usual large percentage of tourists, wealthy regular visitors and a sprinkling of gilded youth from the yachts in the harbour, there were the professional gamblers, earnest folk with systems, and, of course, the strange and rather terrible old ladies, avid behind their veils.

However, it was not at these that Mr Campion gazed with such benevolent interest. Here and there among the throng he saw a face he recognised. A woman with grey hair and the carriage of a duchess caught his attention and he raised his eyebrows. He had not known that Mrs Marie Peeler, alias Edna Marie James, alias the Comtesse de Richechamps Lisieux, was out of Holloway already.

There were others to interest him also. At one of the chemin tables he noticed a large man with very blue eyes and

the stamp of the navy about him sitting beside a very pretty girl and her father. Mr Campion eyed father and daughter sympathetically and hoped they could afford so expensive an acquaintance.

He had been playing his private game of "spot the crook" for some minutes before he saw Digby Sellers. The man came lounging across the room, his hands in his pockets, his sharp bright eyes peering inquisitively from beneath carefully lowered lids. Considered dispassionately, Mr Campion decided, even for a third-rate con man his technique was bad. In spite of his unobtrusive clothes he looked at first glance exactly what he was, a fishy little person—untrustworthy, to put it mildly. Campion marvelled at his success in an overcrowded profession and glanced round for the other figure who should have accompanied him.

Tubby Bream had been Digby Sellers' partner in crime for so many years that the police of two continents had come to regard them as inseparable. Bream, Mr Campion knew, was generally considered to have the brains of the act. At the moment he was nowhere to be seen and Campion missed that solid, respectable figure with the unctuous manner and the fatherly smile.

Suddenly he succumbed to an urge to observe Mr Sellers more closely. Moving quietly from his position in the shadow he followed the man out into the vestibule and arrived through the double doors just in time to see him snubbed by the female with the plain sensible face. Campion came upon the scene at the moment when the woman's

plump countenance was burning with maidenly resentment and Mr Sellers was hurrying away abashed.

"I don't know you and I don't want to—nasty foreigner," the lady observed to his retreating figure.

The voice and the blush recalled her to Mr Campion's bewildered mind. On their previous meeting, however, the colour in her face had been occasioned by the heat rather than by embarrassment.

"Why, it's Rose, isn't it?" he said.

She turned and stared at him.

"Oh, good afternoon, sir." There was relief in her tone. "It's very foreign here, sir, isn't it?"

"Very," he agreed and hesitated, remembering just in time that while he might find the presence of Margaret Buntingworth's invaluable Suffolk cook alone in the casino at Monte Carlo unexpected, he could hardly say so without the risk of giving offence.

Rose was disposed to chat.

"Alice is coming for me in five minutes," she remarked confidentially. "I didn't go right inside because you have to pay, but I thought I'd come into the building because then I can say I have when we get home."

Mr Campion's astonishment increased.

"Alice? That's the housemaid, isn't it?" he said. "Dear me, is she here too?"

"Oh yes sir. We're all here." Rose spoke placidly. "Me, Alice, the Missus and Miss Jane. Lucy could have come if she'd liked but she said she'd rather go to Eastbourne because she have an aunt live there."

"Really? Who's Lucy?" Mr Campion felt he could conceal his surprise no longer.

"The betweenmaid, sir." Rose hesitated and added with a boldness based on twelve years' blameless service, "We're all staying at the Hotel Mimosita, sir. I'm sure the Missus would be very pleased to see you if you cared to call."

His curiosity thoroughly aroused, Mr Campion went down to the hotel Mimosita without more ado.

Margaret Buntingworth met him with open arms in the literal as well as figurative sense of the term. Rising from her basket chair on the terrace with a vigour which imperilled both the vermouth cassis at her plump elbow and the American seated directly behind her, she welcomed him like a mother.

"Oh, my dear boy!" Her words tumbled over one another as they always did. "Oh, Albert! Oh, my dear! Do sit down. Do have a drink. What a fantastic place! How on earth did you get here? Isn't it all too absurd? Come into the lounge. It's cooler; the flies aren't so filthy and there aren't such hordes of people."

The solid American, the only person in sight at this siesta hour, glanced up in mild reproach, but Mr Campion was whisked away.

Margaret was forty-five, a natural blonde, plump, vivacious, and essentially a countrywoman. As he glanced at her across the small table in the Mimosita's florid lounge Mr Campion wondered if she had ever grown up. Her china-blue eyes danced with childlike excitement and the ruffles on her ample bosom were fastened with one of the little coral trinkets which are sold to the tourists all along the coast.

"It's exciting," she said. "I've always wanted to come here but I've never had enough money. Morty and I used to talk about Monte Carlo years ago." She paused and frowned. "I wish Morty were here now," she added as the thought occurred to her. "He'd tell me what to do in an instant. Still, here we are and the bills are paid till the end of the week so I expect it's all all right. It's marvellous seeing you."

Mr Campion blinked. He had always thought that the defunct Buntingworth had been christened "George", but he knew Margaret well enough to realise that she might easily have renamed him in her own mind, or on the other hand might equally well be speaking of the hero of the last novel to take her fancy. The reference to some sort of predicament disturbed him, however. Margaret was not the sort of person to be trusted with a predicament.

"What happened?" he enquired. "Come into a fortune?"

"Oh no, not so exciting as that." The blue eyes saddened momentarily before they began to twinkle again. "I've let the house, my dear—let it really well."

Mr Campion tried not to look bewildered.

"Not Swallows Hall?" he asked involuntarily.

She laughed. "It's the only house I've got, my pet. It's a dear old place but awfully cold in the winter, and of course it is miles from anywhere. It wants doing up too just now. Modernising, you know. Water and light and central heating and that sort of thing. So I was delighted when these people took it. They gave me a hundred and fifty down and promised me another hundred and fifty at the end of the week. I jumped at it. Wouldn't you?"

The man in the horn-rimmed spectacles gaped at her.

"Three hundred pounds?" he said faintly. "You've sold the place?"

"No, just let it." Margaret was beaming. "Let it for three months at twenty-five pounds a week. Isn't it good?"

"Unbelievable," said her visitor bluntly. "You ought to be head of the Board of Trade. Any catch in it?"

"Well, I'm wondering." Mrs Buntingworth's still pretty face was grave. "The rest of the money hasn't turned up yet and it's a week overdue. I wish Morty were here. He'd tell me just the sort of wire to send."

Mr Campion was still mystified.

"I say," he said, "don't think me unkind, but in your part of Suffolk rents are inclined to be cheap, aren't they?"

"I know." Mrs Buntingworth was smiling. "That's the lovely part. These people just came out of the blue and put down the money. They insisted that I take a holiday and they said they didn't want any of the servants, and when I was hesitating, wondering where I'd go, they suddenly suggested that I take the suite which they had booked and couldn't use. It was rather a wild idea, but Rose and Alice have worked for me for years and years and have never had a decent holiday in their lives, and I suddenly said to myself 'Well, why not?' So here we all are."

"Stop," murmured Mr Campion, who was becoming confused. "Who booked the suite? Who couldn't use it?"

"The people who've taken the house, of course," said Mrs Buntingworth calmly. "A Mrs Sacret and her husband. I didn't see him. She and I fixed up everything between us."

There was a long pause before she looked up. Her natural featherbrained expression had given way to unexpected shrewdness.

"I say," she said, "do you think it all sounds a bit fishy? I do now I'm here. Frankly, I've been trying not to think about it. Mrs Sacret seemed such a nice woman, so rich and friendly. I was fed up. Keeping the place eats up my income and I never have any fun. It was terribly cold, too, and

unbelievably dull. So I fell for the scheme and got so excited that I didn't really have time to think things out until I got here. We arrived within a week of her seeing the house. Now I'm beginning to wonder. It seems so funny, doesn't it, anyone wanting to bury themselves at Swallows Hall in the winter? I do wish I had Morty with me."

Mr Campion endeavoured to be cheerful.

"You've got the hundred and fifty, anyway," he said.

Margaret met his eyes.

"If you ask me, that's the fishiest part about it," she remarked, echoing his own private opinion. "I can't tell you how worried I've been. There's nothing of value in the house, of course, nothing they could steal that would be worth their while, and there can't be anything hidden there—buried treasure or that sort of thing. Albert, you're all mixed up with the police. You ought to be able to help me if anyone can. Supposing these people weren't straight, what could they be up to down at Swallows Hall?"

Mr Campion was silent. In his mind's eye he saw again the big rambling Tudor house standing in a belt of trees three miles from the nearest village. He imagined it in winter—cold, draughty, lit with paraffin lamps. He looked at Margaret blankly.

"Heaven only knows," he said.

Margaret frowned. "I ought not to have let it," she said. "But they would have it. I refused point-blank at first, but I

couldn't get rid of them. The woman had just set her heart on it, she said, and her offers got better and better until I just had to take it. What shall I do? I'm so far away."

Mr Campion grinned at her. "I'm on my way home," he said at last. "I've been on a cruise with some people. I left the yacht at San Remo. I'm catching the morning plane from Marseilles. I'll reconnoitre a bit for you, shall I?"

Mrs Buntingworth's relief was childlike.

"Oh, my dear," she said, "if only you would! You're so frightfully clever, Albert. Apart from Morty you're the only person I know who can really deal with difficult situations. Do you remember how wonderful you were that night when the roof leaked?"

Mr Campion modestly ignored the tribute.

"Look here," he said, "about this Mrs Sacret; what does she look like?"

Margaret considered. "Oh, rather nice," she said. "About my age, small and dark and soignée, with a little fringe and a shingle."

Her visitor's face grew blank.

"She hadn't a very faint, not unattractive cast in one eye, I suppose?" he enquired quietly.

Mrs Buntingworth gaped. "How *did* you know?"

Campion was silent. So Dorothy Dawson, of all people, was at Swallows Hall, was she, he reflected. Dorothy Dawson had passed as Mrs Tubby Bream before now, and Tubby Bream's partner, Digby Sellers, was keeping an eye on Margaret Buntingworth's maid here in Monte Carlo. It was all rather significant.

Margaret escorted him to the door of the hotel.

"The odd thing is what on earth these Sacret people can be doing at Swallows Hall if they're not honest," she said as they parted. "After all, what can they possibly hope to gain?"

"What indeed?" echoed Mr Campion and it was with a view to elucidating that very point that he wandered into Scotland Yard on the morning after his return home.

Superintendent Stanislaus Oates welcomed him with heavy humour and underlying affection.

"Sellers and Bream?" he said, leaning back in his hard chair behind his scrupulously tidy desk. "Con men, aren't they? Baker's the man you want. We'll have him in."

He spoke into the house telephone and returned to his visitor with a smile.

"You're quite the little 'busy' these days, aren't you?" he observed. "All your pals seem to get into trouble some time or other. Do you pick 'em, or just attract suckers naturally?"

"Neither. I am obliging." Mr Campion put forward the explanation modestly. "Crooks come to the crook conscious;

you know that."

"Ah, but I get paid for it," said the superintendent. "Hallo, Baker, this is Mr Campion. He does it for the thrill."

Inspector Baker, who had just entered, was a square, sober-looking young man who regarded Campion severely but was anxious to assist.

"Those two have split, I think," he said, glancing at a typewritten sheet in his hand. "Sellers came back from Canada a fortnight ago and left the country three days later. Bream has been in London for the last six months, living in a flat in Maida Vale. The Dawson woman was with him. We kept an eye on them in the usual way, of course, and one of our men thought there was something brewing a month or so ago, but the punter got wise and nothing transpired. Now they've disappeared and I'm afraid we've lost them. If you ask me, they were getting anxious. Bream likes his comforts and usually needs a bit of capital behind him for his little flutters. Funds were rather low, I should think."

Mr Campion contributed his own small store of information concerning the partnership and the two Yard men listened to him attentively.

"A lonely house?" enquired the superintendent at last. "Lonely and biggish?"

"It's certainly lonely and fairly big, but not attractive in winter." Mr Campion spoke feelingly. "The baths are filled from the kitchen copper."

"Still, it's been a good house in its time?" suggested Inspector Baker. "Worth a bit some years ago?"

Campion was still mystified.

"Yes," he admitted. "Property out there has gone right down, of course, but in its heyday, forty or fifty years ago, it might have fetched ten or fifteen thousand pounds. Still, I don't see..."

The inspector met the eyes of his superior officer.

"Sounds like 'the old home' again," he said.

"It does, doesn't it?" Oates was thoughtful. "Sellers!" he ejaculated suddenly. "That's it. Sellers met the sucker on the boat coming home from Canada, of course. He, Bream and the woman must have been going to team up in Monte for the season, but when he arrived home he had this scheme all set, having picked it up on the boat. Bream and Dorothy dealt with Mrs Buntingworth and bundled her off to the suite they'd already booked, not being certain of getting her right out of the way by any other method. Sellers followed her to watch things that end, because, of course, he couldn't appear at the house, while Bream and Dorothy are down there now, I suppose, in the thick of it. That's it."

Mr Campion leant back in the visitor's chair and stretched his long thin legs in front of him.

"This is all very interesting," he said mildly, "but I don't follow it. What exactly do you mean by 'the old home'?"

"Good heavens, something he doesn't know at last," said the superintendent, his lugubrious face brightening. "You tell him, Baker. I like to see him learn."

The inspector fixed his visitor with a chilly eye.

"Well, you see, Mr Campion," he began, "every now and again a colonial who has made good returns to this country with the intention of purchasing his old home at all costs. Sometimes he's foolish enough to talk about it on the boat and a clever crook can get details out of him. During the voyage the crook can usually size up his man and decide if the game is worth the candle. If it is he arranges for an accomplice to get hold of the house. Sometimes they go so far as to buy it very cheaply, sometimes they just rent it. Anyway, they get possession, and then, since they've always been careful to pick a really rich man, they run him up over the deal and clear a packet. If they buy the place it's not criminal, of course, but in this case, if they've merely rented it, they'll be letting themselves in for false title deeds and heaven knows what."

Mr Campion remained silent for some time and the superintendent laughed.

"He's thinking of the wickedness and ingenuity of man," he said. "It surprises me myself sometimes. You'd better go along to the county police, my boy. They can't do anything until the feller actually pays over cash, of course, but either they or we will pick up Bream and Dorothy in the end. Well, well, we aim to please. Anything else you'd like to know?"

"Yes," said Campion slowly. "Yes, there is, rather. You're obviously right, of course, but there is one point I don't see at all. I'll tell you some time. Thank you kindly for the lecture. Most instructive. See you when I get back."

"Oh, Campion..." Oates called him when he reached the door, and when he spoke he was not joking. "Look out for Bream. He's nasty when he's cornered. Got a dirty streak in him."

"My dear fellow"—Campion was grinning—"there's nothing I'm so careful of as my valuable skin."

Oates grunted. "I wish that were true," he said. "Still, never say I didn't warn you. So long."

Mr Campion returned to his flat, where he was detained by an unexpected visitor. The following day brought unavoidable delays also, so that it was not until the afternoon of the third day of his return that he turned the nose of his big four-litre Lagonda into the overgrown drive of Swallows Hall.

The long, low, half-timbered house, which was so prettily rose entwined in summer, had an untidy and dilapidated aspect in mid-January. The miniature park was desolate, the iron railings flattened in many places, and the grass long and yellow through lack of grazing.

As he came slowly up the moss-grown way he fancied he saw a curtain drop back into place across one of the lower windows. His ring, too, was answered with suspicious

promptness, and he found himself looking down at Dorothy Dawson herself as soon as the door opened.

She had dressed the part, he noticed. Her country tweeds were good but shabby and her make-up was restrained almost to the point of absence. She looked up into his face and he saw her eyes flicker.

It was evident that he was not the person she had expected but there was no way of telling if she had recognised him. Her expression remained polite and questioning.

"Mr Sacret?" he enquired.

"Yes. Will you come in here? I'll tell my husband."

Her voice was very soft and she led him swiftly into Margaret's shabby drawing room. Mr Campion found himself a little surprised. Although she had shown no sign of actual haste the whole incident had passed with most unusual speed and it occurred to him that he had never before entered any house with such little delay. He glanced at his watch. It was a minute to three.

He heard the quick step on the stones of the hall outside a second before the door swung open with a subdued rattle of portiere rings and Tubby Bream came hurrying into the room.

His round white face shone smug and benevolent above the neatest of black suits; and his grey hair, which was longer than is customary, was sleeked down on either side of a

centre parting which added considerably to the general lay-reader effect.

In the doorway he paused with theatrical astonishment.

"Why, if it isn't Mr Campion," he said. "Inquisitive, friendly Mr Campion. My dear wife said she thought it was but she couldn't be sure. Dear me, what a pity you should choose just this moment to call."

He had a thick, not unmelodious voice with a crack in it, and all the time he was speaking his small bright eyes shot little darting glances about the room, now out of the window, now at his visitor's face. He was a shorter man than Campion but his shoulders were powerful and his neck square.

"It is a pity," he repeated. "Such a very inconvenient time. Let me see now, you're not actually connected with the police, are you, Mr Campion? Just a dilettante, if I may use the word?"

Mr Campion shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm an old friend of Mrs Buntingworth's," he began. "That's the only reason I'm here."

"Oh dear!" Bream's small round eyes widened. "Oh dear, isn't that interesting? Have you known her long, Mr Campion?"

"Since I was a child."

"Thirty years or more?" Bream was rubbing his fat hands together. "How unfortunate. Really, it couldn't be more unfortunate. You're so untrustworthy and there's such a little time. In fact"—he tugged at the chain leading to his fob pocket—"there really isn't any time at all. A minute to the hour, I see. *Put up your hands, Mr Campion*."

It was a new trick and one that added considerably, Mr Campion felt, to his education. The wicked little snub-nosed Colt shot into the pudgy white hand with the speed and smoothness of a conjuring trick, leaving the chain dangling harmlessly.

"You're making a great mistake, Bream," he began but the other interrupted him.

"Put up your hands. It's a question of time. Put up your hands."

There was nothing for it. Mr Campion raised his arms.

"Turn round, please." The liquid voice with the unexpected harshness in it was complacent. "I'm afraid I can't keep you in the drawing room. We're expecting an important visitor, you see. He's due at three o'clock. Dorothy, my dear..."

Mr Campion's opinion of the efficiency of women went up. He did not hear Dorothy Dawson come into the room, but, with the nose of the Colt pressing dangerously into a spot between his shoulder blades, he was forced to suffer her to bind his wrists behind him. The strands of soft cord cut

viciously into his flesh and he knew at once that it was the work of an expert. He ventured to congratulate her.

"No talking, if you please." Bream was breathing on his neck and the revolver muzzle pressed a little harder. "This way. The cupboard where the baskets are, Dorothy. Such a damp little hole, I'm afraid, Mr Campion, but you weren't invited, you know. Walk quickly, please."

Campion suffered himself to be driven into the disused butler's pantry across the hall where Margaret kept her gardening baskets. It was damp and smelt of mice.

The moment his foot touched the brick floor the man behind him sprang. The ferocity of the attack was wholly unwarranted and, unable to defend himself, Campion went down like a log in the darkness. He kicked out, only to receive a blow above the ear with the butt end of the gun which knocked him senseless.

When he came to himself a few minutes later his ankles were tied with the same paralysing tightness and there was a wad of paper in his mouth, kept in place by a strangling handkerchief.

"Tubby, he's here."

The woman's whisper reached Campion through the open doorway into the hall and he heard Bream's voice replying.

"Let him in then, my dear. I'll just straighten myself. What an inconvenient visit from that silly fellow."

The pantry door closed, the key turned softly in the lock, and Campion heard the pattering of feet trotting off towards the back of the house. He lay still. The effects of the blow he had received had by no means worn off and he dared not make an attempt to try the full strength of his bonds until he was sure he had all his wits about him.

Meanwhile, there was plenty to interest him. Far off down the hall he heard the front door open. He listened intently but had no need to strain his ears. The newcomer had a voice which entirely defeated its owner's obvious efforts to soften it. His military, not to say parade-ground, tones echoed round the old house, setting the glasses ringing.

"Mrs Sacret? Got my letter? Very obligin' of you. Just home, don't you know. Naturally anxious to see the old place again. Just the same, just the same. Not a stone altered, thank God."

At this point the stranger evidently blew his nose, and in spite of the acute discomfort which he suffered Mr Campion's eyes widened and he pricked up his ears. There is a type of Englishman which cannot be copied. Caricatured, they make an unconvincing spectacle. Campion wished he could see Mr Digby Seller's colonial dupe, for he sounded genuine, and that brought up the one point which had puzzled him ever since he had visited the superintendent, the same point which had brought him down to Swallows Hall and headfirst into his present predicament.

Meanwhile, a conducted tour of the house was evidently taking place. The visitor's stentorian tones, punctuated by

soft murmurs from the woman and Bream's less frequent unctuous rumbles, sounded at intervals from all over the house. Always the newcomer's theme was the same.

"Hasn't changed—hasn't changed. Used to play in here, don't you know. Happy days ... youth ... childhood. Makin' a fool of myself, I'm afraid. But affectin', you know, very affectin'."

In the basket cupboard Mr Campion wrestled with his bonds. His hands and feet were numb and the gag was choking him. The experience was both painful and infuriating. Even his attempts to make a noise were frustrated, for not only was it impossible for him to move but the effects of the blow, coupled with the lack of air, made him faint and helpless.

Meanwhile, the party seemed to have moved into the garden. The visitor's voice, muffled but still quite audible, percolated through the lath-and-plaster walls. Campion caught a few disjointed phrases.

"Stayin' at Ipswich a couple of days ... have to think it over, don't you know ... lot of money ... need repairin'. Who had the place before you, do you know? ... What? ... God bless my soul!"

There followed a long period of silence, broken only, for Mr Campion, by exquisitely distasteful scratchings in the panelling near his left ear. He cursed himself mildly for a meddler and closed his eyes.

His next conscious moment came nearly an hour later when the door was thrust cautiously open and he saw the silhouette of a square head and shoulders against the faint light of the hall.

"I think we might now consider our other visitor, Dorothy my dear." Bream's voice was ingratiating and somehow anticipatory. "Well, Mr Campion, comfortable, I hope?"

He came soft-footedly into the room, managing to tread on the edge of Campion's upper arm, driving his heel hard into the flesh. The young man forced himself to remain inert and was rewarded.

"Dorothy"—Bream's voice was sharp—"come here. Bring a light."

"What's happened? What's happened? You haven't killed him?

"That would be awkward, my child, wouldn't it? He's such an old friend of the police."

There was a laugh in the fat voice but it was not altogether one of amusement.

"Oh, don't." The woman sounded genuinely frightened. "You're so crazily cruel. There was no need to hit him as you did. If you've killed him——"

"Be quiet, my dear. Help me to get him out of here. He's alive all right."

Together they dragged the young man out into the hall and Bream bent down and tore the gag out of his mouth. The woman brought a glass of water. Mr Campion drank and thanked her feebly.

At the sound of his voice Bream chuckled.

"That's better, that's better," he said, smoothing his large moist hands down the sides of his coat. "It's all most unfortunate. I don't like to have to inconvenience anyone like this, especially a guest. But it's entirely your own fault, you know, for choosing to come at such a very awkward moment. Believe me, my young friend, if you had called at any other time, any other time at all, it would have been very different. As it is, you've put me in a very uncomfortable position. I really don't see what to do with you. If you were only more dependable..."

He broke off with a sigh of regret and stood looking down at his victim, a sad smile on his round white face.

"How are the wrists?" he enquired presently. "Sore? I feared so. Dear, dear, this is very awkward. You may have to remain like that for some little time. I don't see what else I can do, do you, Dorothy my dear? Since he's precipitated himself into my—ah—my business affairs I fear he may have to stay here until the project goes through. You see, Mr Campion, if I let you go you may so easily spoil all my beautiful work."

Mr Campion stirred painfully.

"I hope your visitor liked his old home," he said bitterly.

"Oh he did." The round eyes became shrewd and twinkling. "You overheard him, did you? He had a rather loud voice, hadn't he? I was afraid you might. Ah well, that practically clinches the matter, doesn't it? You must certainly spend a day or two with us. I see no other way out."

He was silent for a moment or so, lost in contemplation of the younger man's discomfort.

"Yes, he liked it very much indeed," he went on at last, still in the bantering affected tone he had adopted throughout their entire interview. "I think I can safely say that he is in love with it. Such a charming man, Mr Campion. You'd have been touched if you'd seen his eyes light up at each familiar scene. I was quite affected. I think we shall have an offer from him in the morning. Oh yes, I do indeed. When I told him I was thinking of cutting down the trees and refacing the house he seemed quite disturbed."

Mr Campion opened his eyes.

"He didn't attempt to borrow a tenner, I suppose?" he murmured.

Bream raised his eyebrows and for a moment his smile vanished.

"No," he said. "No, he did not. He was hardly the type. What a pity you couldn't meet."

Mr Campion began to laugh. The exertion hurt him considerably but he was genuinely amused.

"Bream," he said faintly, "do you see any reason why I should give you a hand out of your filthy troubles? You always were pigheaded and now, damn it, you deserve what's coming to you."

There was a long silence after he had spoken and he remained very still, his eyes closed. The other man pulled up a chair and sat down on it. He was not exactly shaken, but the habitual crook has a suspicious mind.

"Mr Campion," he began quietly, "why exactly did you come down here?"

"On an errand of mercy." Campion's voice was faint but resentful. "Like most acts of pure charity it was misunderstood. You can go and hang yourself, Bream, before I help you. You probably will in the end, if the state doesn't do it for you."

"Perhaps you'd care to explain a little more fully?" The soft voice was very gentle. "My wife is in the back of the house now. I mention this because women are squeamish, as you know, and you might think I might hesitate to persuade you to talk a little if she were present."

He began to beat a slow tattoo on Campion's shinbone with the heel of his broad shoe.

"Good God, what do you think I'm here for!" The righteous anger in Campion's voice was convincing. "Do you

think I'd come scouring, the country in an attempt to bag your scurvy little hide? That's a job for the police. I came here in a perfectly friendly spirit. I had a useful piece of information which would save you time and money, and because you happen to be in the house of a friend of mine and, after the showdown, I thought you might work off some of your natural resentment on the house itself, I dropped in to give you a brotherly tip. Instead of listening to me, as any sane man would, you started this kind of monkey trick. Use your head, Bream."

"But, Mr Campion, you gave me no option." There was the beginning of doubt in the greasy voice and the man on the floor was quick to press his advantage.

"Option be damned," he said cheerfully. "You were so afraid that your bird would drop in and find me that you lost your nerve. If you'd only paused to consider the obvious it might have dawned on you that if I meant to be unfriendly I had only to run round to the county police, who would have bided their time, waited until you'd done something they could pin on you, and walked in at the psychological moment to nab you in the decent and time-honoured manner."

"But, Mr Campion, consider." Bream's voice was unhappy. "Supposing you had dropped it here by chance..."

Campion stirred. "Is this the kind of place anyone would drop into by chance?" he demanded. "Mrs Buntingworth is in the south of France. I left her there three days ago. When she gave me a description of your wife I recognised it, and when I called in at the Yard the other morning they were kind

enough to explain the game you were probably playing. And so, because I knew something you didn't, I came trotting down here in a positively brotherly spirit instead of going to the police. Now, believe me, I don't feel brotherly, and you can sit here and wait for Nemesis."

"Mr Campion..." Bream had lost his banter and his voice and manner were no longer carefully matched to his costume. He was still wary but his eyes were anxious. "I'm beginning to be very interested."

"Very likely, but I'm in pain," protested his victim. "My wrists are raw and I'm feeling spiteful. If you have any sense at all you'll untie them. After all, you've got the gun; I haven't."

The reasonableness of the request seemed to appeal to the crook. He cut the cords carefully and stepped back.

"I think I'll leave your ankles, if you don't mind," he said. "I'm not so agile as I was and I can't trust you, can I?"

Campion wriggled into a sitting position and rubbed his bruised wrists. His yellow hair was dishevelled and his pale eyes were hard and angry.

"Now what do you think you're going to do?" he enquired. "It's a pretty heavy sentence for assault, you know, and quite a setout for murder."'

Bream wriggled. "You may be lying," he suggested softly.

"Oh, have a heart, man." Campion sounded exasperated. "Is there any other reasonable explanation for my coming down here at all? Haven't I told you the obvious truth? Haven't I behaved like any other sane man in similar circumstances? You're the fellow who's lost his head and jumped into trouble feet first. However, I'll do you one more courtesy just to prove how well I meant by you. I told you I had known Mrs Buntingworth all my life. What I haven't mentioned is that I knew her father and mother, who lived in this house until they died, when it had to go up for sale. Mrs Buntingworth's husband bought it, I believe. Now do you see what I'm driving at?"

Tubby Bream sat forward in his chair, his plump face even more pallid than before.

"Yes, Mr Campion; go on."

"Margaret Buntingworth was the only child of her parents," Campion continued, still with the same weary exasperation. "So any noisy middle-aged gentleman who comes roaring round here, moaning about his old home, is bogus, my poor friend. He's just another practitioner like yourself, working up to a loan or a dud check or whatever piece of fancy-work is his particular speciality. In fact, you've been done. Now are you grateful?"

Bream's jaw tightened. "But Sellers..." he began.

Mr Campion was derisive. "I saw Sellers in Monte Carlo," he said, "and believe me he wouldn't deceive a nursemaid. No; your colonial pal saw Sellers on the boat, recognised a

weak brother with capital, and played him for a sucker, trusting to match his wits against yours when the time came. Better face up to it."

Bream rose to his feet and walked slowly down the room. He looked a dangerous little customer with his heavy shoulders and short powerful arms. It was evident that he was going over Campion's arguments in his mind and was finding them unpleasantly convincing.

Suddenly, however, he swung round.

"No you don't, Campion!" he said sharply.

The young man withdrew his hands from the ankle bonds and looked unwaveringly into the muzzle of the little Colt.

"All right," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "But frankly I don't see the point of all this. What are you going to do, exactly?—in view of all the facts, I mean."

"Find out if you're right."

"And when you discover that I am?"

The man laughed. It was not a pleasant sound and Mr Campion, who was not a squeamish man, experienced a chilling sensation.

"Then I shan't waste my time any longer, of course," he said. "We shall clear out. Unfortunately, I can't trust you to keep your fingers out of my affairs, so naturally you'll have

to stay behind. It's a cold house, I know, but you're tough. I should think you'd be alive when they find you."

Mr Campion looked incredulous.

"But that's suicide on your part," he said. "Scotland Yard knows I came down here to look for you. They'll hang you if I die, Bream."

The man in the neat black suit spread out his hands.

"It's a risk I shall have to take," he said. "I may leave word for a village woman to come and clear up on Monday. If she's conscientious—well, you'll only have had four days of it."

Campion sat up stiffly, staring at him. His pale eyes looked frightened and Bream was amused.

"My dear wife says that there are rats in the outer kitchen," he began. "Of course they'll cling to you for the warmth, but they're companionable little creatures if they're not hungry."

His voice changed again and for a moment he showed the fury which was consuming him.

"If you're right I hope they start in on you," he said "Hullo, the thought's too much for you, is it?"

Mr Campion's eyes had closed and now he swayed violently and slumped down upon the stones, his face pallid and his mouth loose. Bream advanced cautiously to kick the

inert body in the ribs. It rolled lifelessly and the man laughed.

Slipping the gun into his pocket he stepped forward and bent down to raise his victim's eyelid. Because of his bulk he had to kneel to do so, and as his body swung down a hand as delicate as any pickpocket's moved quietly and Mr Campion's long fingers closed gratefully over the little gun.

"Get back. Shout and I'll plug you."

The vigorous voice startled Bream quite as much as the sudden movement, which brought his adversary up on one elbow, the revolver levelled. He darted backwards and Campion grinned dangerously at the startled figure flattened against the panelling of the opposite wall.

"Of course there's no earthly reason why I shouldn't kill you," he observed affably. "I've got a bona fide self-defence plea. That's where I'm one up on you. Stick your hands up and come away from that bell."

Bream did not hesitate. His face was green.

"I was getting at you, Mr Campion," he said huskily. "You brought me a bit of bad news and I daresay it made me angry."

"Well, make up your mind." The man on the floor was aggressively pleased. "Is this your idea of humour or ill temper? ... Don't move!"

The final admonition was occasioned by a wholly unexpected development. The front door at the other end of the hall was moving furtively. Campion kept his gun trained on Bream.

"Now go over," he whispered. "I'll shoot, remember."

Obediently the crook edged towards the widening door, his arms raised. From his place of vantage on the floor Mr Campion had an excellent view of the ensuing scene. Over the threshold, stepping gingerly to avoid making a sound, came a red-faced, white-haired stranger who stopped dead, not unnaturally, when confronted by the spread-eagled Bream.

"Beg your pardon," he ejaculated, his bright blue eyes widening and his face burning with embarrassment. "Ought not to have come bargin' in again like this. Very foolish of me." He cleared his throat noisily. "Tell you what happened. Matter of fact, was halfway to Ipswich when it came over me I wanted to clinch the deal. Came back. Came up to the door, saw it wasn't latched and couldn't resist the impulse to come in as I used to thirty years ago.... Good God, man, don't stand lookin' at me like that. What have you got your hands up for?"

"Oh my hat, the colonial," murmured Mr Campion wearily.

Bream was quick to seize the advantage. "Look out!" he shouted and leapt behind the bewildered visitor for the open door.

Campion fired, but in avoiding the newcomer the shot went wide and splintered the woodwork of the doorframe.

"God bless my soul!" The stranger peered into the shadow of the hall and suddenly perceived Campion still sitting on the floor. "Firin'?" he demanded. "You can't do that in England, my man. Get up and fight like a Christian. Oh I see, tied you up, has he? What are you doin'? Burglin'? Put that gun away."

This matter-of-fact reaction to what must have seemed, to say the least of it, a remarkable situation had a profound effect upon the younger man. The newcomer was such a perfect specimen of his type that to doubt his integrity seemed comparable with the suspicion that the Nelson Monument was built of plaster.

"I say, is this really your old home?" he heard himself saying stupidly.

"Certainly. Best years of my life were spent in this house and I hope to die in it. Don't see what the devil it's got to do with you, though. Got him, Sacret?"

He spoke a moment too soon. Bream, who had been creeping up behind Campion from the inner doorway, had not quite reached his goal. Campion swung over just as the man leapt. The gun shot out of his hand and slithered across the stones towards the stranger. Bream was after it instantly but Campion gripped him by the lapel and they rolled over together.

"Pick it up!" he shouted, trying to put authority into his voice. "Pick it up, for the love of Mike! This chap's dangerous."

The rest of his appeal was choked as Bream's hands found his throat. The blunt fingers dug into his neck and he felt himself weaken.

"Look out, man, you'll kill him!" The stranger's vigorous voice echoed through the room. "Stand up, sir! I've got him covered. What are you doin', damn you? The feller's *tied*."

The shocked astonishment in the last phrase had its effect. The fingers relaxed their stranglehold and Bream staggered to his feet, his puffy face twisted into a depreciatory grimace.

"I'm afraid I forgot myself," he said. "He frightened me. I'll take the gun, shall I?"

"No!"

Campion's croak was frantic in its appeal and the stranger stepped back.

"Wait a moment," he said. "Keep your distance, sir. Untie the feller's legs. Like to have this all made clear, if you don't mind."

"Oh come now, really..." Bream had gone back to his old ingratiating manner. "This is my house, you know."

"Lying," whispered Campion again. "Don't let him have the gun."

"Not your house, eh?" The newcomer seized the suggestion with interest. "Hang it, whose house is it? Must get that straight. Explain yourselves, both of you."

"All in good time." Bream was edging forward. "I'll just take the gun first. They—they're such dangerous things."

"The devil you do! Stand back." The old man was showing remarkable spirit. "This feller here has made a serious allegation and I'd like it properly refuted. Frankly, Sacret, there were one or two things you said this afternoon which made me wonder. Do you know you pointed out the old walnut on the lower lawn and told me there were fine pears on it last year? At the time I thought it was a slip of the tongue, but now I'm beginnin' to look at it in a different light. Besides, I've never seen a feller fight more dirtily in all my life."

Bream drew back from the revolver.

"This is an outrage," he said feelingly. "Holding up a man in his own house."

The newcomer's bright blue eyes snapped suspiciously.

"Whose house is it?" he demanded, his voice rising. "For the last time, sir, who owns this house?"

"I do, I'm afraid. Is anything wrong?"

The pleasant voice from the doorway behind them startled everybody. Margaret Buntingworth, followed by Jane, Rose and Alice, to say nothing of a taximan with the luggage,

trooped breathlessly into the hall. Margaret was weary, dishevelled and utterly charming, the complete mistress of any situation.

The stranger thrust the gun behind him and stepped back. Bream gaped helplessly and Mr Campion perforce remained where he was. Margaret caught sight of him and paused in the act of removing her travelling coat.

"Oh, Albert," she said, "how very nice of you to be here! I didn't see you at first down there. I got your telegram, my dear, and we packed up and came home just as soon as we could. What on earth are you doing? Dear me, is something going on?"

She turned to face the others, passed over Bream, who evidently meant nothing to her, and came face to face with the stranger. The man stared at her for a moment, grew an even more virulent crimson, and finally uttered a single strangled word.

"Meggie!" he said.

Margaret Buntingworth dropped her coat, her gloves, and the rolled travelling rug containing the two half-litres of eau de cologne which she had smuggled so successfully through the customs. Her little scream was an expression of pure delight.

"Morty!" she said. "Oh, Morty, my dear boy, how you startled me!"

Mr Campion bent forward and began to untie his ankles. He looked up at Bream.

"Twenty-four hours," he said meaningly. "It's a great deal more than you deserve."

The man glanced at him and nodded. His face was blank. Without a look behind him he made for the inner door.

As Campion scrambled painfully to a chair Margaret came over to him, dragging the newcomer behind her.

"Isn't this all wonderful?" she said, her eyes dancing. "Morty says you two haven't actually met yet. My dear, this is Morty himself. I haven't seen him for years and years and years. He used to live in a cottage down by the plantation and we used to play together up here when we were kids. He was the cleverest boy in the world. I cried my eyes out when he went away. He always promised to come back and buy the old house for me but I never believed him. Neither of us wrote, of course. You know how it is. And now here he is! Morty, you haven't changed a bit."

"I've never forgotten you, Meggie." The stranger seemed suddenly overcome with shyness. "Matter of fact, I came down here in the hope—in the hope..." He coughed, blew his nose and steered away from a dangerous subject. "Upset me to see that bounder in possession," he remarked suddenly. "Where is he, by the way? Somethin' very funny was goin' on here just now, Meggie. We'll have to have an explanation from you, young feller. I'm completely in the dark. Where is that man Sacret?"

"Oh, the Sacrets!" Margaret remembered them with consternation. "I forgot all about them. You put them clean out of my head, Morty. I've let the house. I ought not to be here if everything's all right. What has happened, Albert? As soon as I got your wire I came. We've been travelling nearly thirty-six hours. Where are the Sacrets, dear?"

Campion ceased to massage his bruised ankles.

"If you listen," he said, "you'll just hear their car going off down the drive. I should forget 'em if I were you. Something tells me that neither of us will hear of them for some considerable time."

Margaret frowned and gave the subject up as being too difficult.

"Perhaps if we all had some food and something to drink?" she suggested. "Food helps the brain so, don't you think? After we've eaten you two boys must tell me all about it. Morty, can you draw a cork?"

"Comin', m' dear." The stranger strode after her, regaining his youth at every step.

Mr Campion rose stiffly to his feet and practised walking.

Much later that evening the two men sat before the fire in the shabby drawing room. Margaret had gone to bed after an orgy of remembrances. Morty glanced round the room affectionately.

"Just as I remember it," he said. "Foolish of me to confuse everybody by callin' it my old home. Had always thought of it that way, you see."

Mr Campion looked into the fire.

"Thinking of buying it?" he enquired.

The elder man cocked a bright blue eye in his direction.

"Well," he said evasively, "I've found just exactly what I was lookin' for, don't you know."

ALBERT CAMPION'S CASEBOOK
VOL. 5. P. 18 ET SEQ.

## THE CASE OF THE OLD MAN IN THE WINDOW

DATE: Oct. 24-25, 1934.

VENUE: LONDON.

OFFICIALS: Superintendent Stanislaus Oates of the Central Branch, Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard.

PRIVATE NOTES: Contained one of the nastiest moments of my career. Thought my mind had gone.
The loss of the girl tipped March over the edge: no record of

crime before.
Colossal vanity of the very old.
Fielding offered to take my appendix out, gratis. Thanked him kindly but declined.

## The Case of the Old Man in the Window

Newly appointed Superintendent Stanislaus Oates was by no means intoxicated, but he was cheerful, as became a man celebrating an important advance in a distinguished career, and Mr Campion, who sat opposite him at the small table in the corner of the chophouse, surveyed the change in his usually taciturn friend with interest.

"This promotion puts me into the memoir class when I retire, you know," observed the ex-inspector suddenly with uncharacteristic ingenuousness. "I could write a first-rate book if someone put it down for me. We professionals get to know all kinds of things, interesting stuff a lot of it, that you amateurs never come across; things you'd never consider worth noticing. I struck something very curious today. Big business is extraordinary, Campion. Amazing inducements to crime in it. Let me tell you something about company law."

Mr Campion grinned. "Tell the world as well," he suggested affably, for the superintendent's voice had risen. "I thought you said this place was deserted in the evening," he went on, stretching his long thin legs under the table and

adjusting his horn-rimmed spectacles. "It seems to me to be pretty well crowded with youth and—er—passion."

The ex-inspector's innate caution reasserted itself and as he glanced about him his long face took on its natural melancholy expression.

"Must have suddenly become fashionable," he said gloomily. "That's the trouble with these places. The word goes round that So-and-so's is good, quiet and cheap, and what happens? Before you know where you are a great bunch of goggle-eyed sweethearts swoop down on it and up go the prices while the food goes to pieces. There's a lad over there out with someone he doesn't intend to take home to meet the family."

Mr Campion, glancing casually over his thin shoulder, caught a glimpse of a heavily jowled face beneath a domed head prematurely bald, and beyond it the dark curls and crimson lips of a girl in a grey hat. He looked away again hastily.

"The name is March," said Oates, whose spirits were reviving. "Member of the big theatrical machinery firm. Funny we should see him. It reminds me of what I was going to tell you. They're in low water again, you know."

His voice promised to carry across the small print-hung room and Mr Campion protested.

"Does alcohol always make you shout?" he enquired gently. "Don't bellow. I know the fellow quite well by sight.

We're members of the same club."

"Really? I heard the clubs were having a thin time," said Oates more quietly but unabashed. "Still, I didn't know they had to let anyone in."

Mr Campion looked hurt. "He's a valued and respected member as far as I know," he said, "and may very well be out with his wife."

"Don't you believe it," said Oates cheerfully. "That little kid is on at the Frivolity, or was until the show closed last week. And what's more, my lad, Mr Arthur March is due to marry someone else in less than a month. A good policeman studies everything, even the gossip columns, and that bears out what I told you about you amateurs not being thorough. You don't collect sufficient out-of-the-way information. Take this company law, for instance..."

He broke off, a light of interest in his mournful grey eyes. From where they sat the view of the entrance was unobstructed and Campion, following his glance, saw two young people come in. Superintendent Stanislaus Oates grinned broadly.

"This is good," he said. "That's the girl March is engaged to—Denise Warren. She's out on the spree with a boy friend too. They've come here because they've heard it's quiet, I bet you. They haven't seen March yet."

Mr Campion did not speak. He was looking at the girl. She was an unusual type, taller than the average and very fair,

with wide apart blue-grey eyes and a magnificent carriage.

Her companion was a square, solid young man only a few years her senior. He was not unhandsome and had an air of authority about him unusual in one of his age. They found a table and settled down in full view of Campion and his guest. Oates was frankly delighted.

"They'll see each other in a moment," he said with schoolboy mischievousness. "Who's the fellow with her? Do you know?"

Mr Campion was frowning. "Yes, I do," he said. "That's Rupert Fielding, a surgeon. He's young but an absolute prodigy, they say. I hope he's not playing the fool. His is the one profession that still demands absolute conventionality."

Oates grinned. "Another member of the club?"

Campion echoed his smile. "Yes, as it happens. Spends all his spare time there. Gives the older members a sense of security, I think."

Oates glanced at the girl again. "Oh well, she's keeping it in the family, isn't she? What is this famous club? Not Puffin's?"

"No. Quite as respectable if not so eminent. The Junior Greys, Pall Mall."

Oates sat up with interest. "Curiouser and curiouser," he said. "Isn't that the place where the old boy sits in the window all day?"

"Old Rosemary?"

"That's the man. One of the landmarks of London. Hasn't changed in fifty years. It's a funny thing, I was hearing of him today, as I was going to tell you. Is he as old as they say?"

"He's ninety some time this year."

"Really?" The superintendent was interested. "I've seen him, of course, dozens of times, You can't very well miss him sitting there in that great window. He looks young enough from the street. Scraggy men like yourself wear well. What's he like close to?"

Mr Campion considered. He was eager to give serious attention to any subject which would divert his guest's embarrassing attention from his two fellow members and their more ultimate affairs.

"One doesn't get very close to him in the ordinary way," he said at last. "That bay window is his holy of holies. There's a draught screen round the back of his chair and a table between him and the rest of the room. I'm seldom there early enough to see him come in in the morning but I meet him tottering out at half-past six now and again."

"He's frail then?" the superintendent persisted. "Frail but young looking? I'm sorry to be so inquisitive," he added, "but I don't like freaks. How young does he actually look close to in a good light?"

Mr Campion hesitated. "He's very well preserved," he began at last. "Had all kinds of things done to him."

"Oh, facial stuff, rejuvenation, toupees, special teeth to take out the hollows—I know." The superintendent spoke with contempt. "That accounts for it. I hate that sort of thing. It's bad enough in old women but in old men it's revolting."

He paused and, evidently thinking that he might have expressed himself ungraciously, added handsomely: "Of course, when you remember he was a famous actor it doesn't seem so bad. He was one of the first of the stage knights, wasn't he?"

"I believe so. Sir Charles Rosemary, one of the great figures of the eighties. I believe he was magnificent."

"And now he spends his days sitting in a window trying to look sixty," the superintendent murmured. "Is it true he does it all day and every day?"

"An unbroken record of twenty years, I believe," said Mr Campion, who was growing weary of the catechism. "It's quite a legend. He comes up to the club at eleven o'clock and sits there until six-thirty."

"My God," said Oates expressively and added abruptly: "Hullo, he's seen her!"

Mr Campion gave up the hope of diverting him. The superintendent's round dull eyes were alight with amusement.

"Look at March," he said. "He's wild. Isn't that typical of that sort of chap? Doesn't seem to realise he's in the same boat. Can you, see him?"

"Yes, in the mirror behind you," Campion admitted grudgingly. "Rather awkward for his guest, isn't it?"

"She's used to it, I'd say," said the ex-inspector cheerfully. "Look at him."

Arthur March was angry and appeared to be indifferent about showing it. He sat upright in his chair, staring at his fiancée and her companion with white-faced indignation. The girl opposite in the grey hat did her best to look faintly amused, but her eyes were angry.

Campion looked at Miss Warren and caught her at the moment when curious glances from other tables directed her attention to the furious man on the other side of the room. She met his eyes for a moment and grew slowly crimson. Then she murmured something to the stolid young man at her side.

Oates was very interested.

"March is going over," he said suddenly. "No, he's changed his mind. He's sending a note."

The waiter who bore the hastily scribbled message on the half sheet torn from a memorandum book looked considerably embarrassed and he handed it to Miss Warren with a word of apology. She glanced at it, blushed even more deeply than before, and passed it on to Fielding.

The young surgeon's square, immobile face became a shade darker and, leaning towards the girl, he said something abruptly. She hesitated, looked up at him and nodded.

A moment later the waiter was off across the room again, a fault smile on his face. The superintendent frowned.

"What happened?" he demanded. "I didn't see, did you? Wait a minute."

Before Campion could stop him he had risen from his seat and sauntered off across the room, ostensibly to get a pipe out of the pocket of his overcoat which hung on a stand near the doorway. The somewhat circuitous route he chose led him directly behind March's chair at the moment when he received the return note from the waiter.

Oates came back smiling.

"I thought so," he said triumphantly as he sat down. "She wrapped her engagement ring in his own note and sent it back to him. Oh, very dignified and crushing, whatever he wrote! Look at him now ... is he going to make a row?"

"I hope not," said Mr Campion fervently.

"No, he's thought better of it. He's going." The superintendent seemed a little disappointed. "He's livid, though. Look at his hands. He's shaking with fury. I say, Campion, I don't like the look of him; he's demented with rage."

"Don't gawp at him then, poor chap," his host protested. "You were going to tell me something of unparalleled interest about company law."

The superintendent frowned, his eyes still on the retreating figures at the other side of the room.

"Was I? This little show has put it out of my head," he said. "Ah, they've gone and the other two are settling down again. Well, that's the end of that little romance. I enjoyed it."

"Obviously," said Mr Campion bitterly. "It's probably cost me two perfectly good acquaintances, but what of that if you're happy? The whole incident would have been washed away with a few pretty tears in a day or so and might have been decently forgotten. Still, if you enjoyed it..."

The ex-inspector regarded him owlishly.

"You're wrong," he said. "I'm not a man given to—er—soothsaying ... what's the word?"

"Prophecy?" suggested Campion, laughing.

"Prophecy," echoed Oates with success. "But I tell you, Campion, that the incident we have just witnessed is going to have far-reaching consequences."

"You're tight," said his companion.

He was, of course, but it was a remarkable thing, as he himself pointed out afterwards, that he was unequivocably right at the same time.

The engagement between Miss Denise Warren and Mr Rupert Fielding, F.R.C.'S., was announced at the end of August, a decent six weeks after the intimation that her marriage to Mr Arthur March, son of the late Sir Joshua March, would not take place, and when Mr Campion walked down Pall Mall to the Junior Greys one morning in October the whole affair was ancient history.

It was a little before twelve and the sun was shining in at the great bay windows of the club, windows so large and frank that the decorous gentlemen within looked almost more like exhibits under glass than spectators of the procession of traffic in the street below.

As he approached the building Mr Campion was aware of a subtle sense of loss. It was not until he had stood for some seconds on the pavement surveying the broad façade of the left wing of the building that he realised where the difference lay. When he saw it he was shocked. The great chair in the centre window of the lounge was occupied not by the familiar aquiline figure of Old Rosemary but by a short fattish old gentleman by the name of Briggs, a member of but ten or fifteen years standing, a truculent, tasteless person of little popularity.

Mr Campion entered beneath the Adam porch with a premonition of disaster and was confirmed in his suspicions a few moments later when he discovered Walters, the head steward, in tears. Since Walters was a portly sixty-five and possessed a dignity which was proverbial, the spectacle was both shocking and embarrassing. He blew his nose hastily

when Mr Campion appeared and murmured a word of apology, after which he added baldly: "He's gone, sir."

"Not old—I mean Sir Charles Rosemary?" Mr Campion was shocked.

"Yes sir." Walters permitted himself a ghostly sniff. "It happened this morning, sir. In his chair where he always sat, just as he would have liked. Mr March and one or two other gentlemen had a word with him when he first came in and then he dozed off. I saw him sleeping heavily but didn't think anything of it, him being so old, but when Mr Fielding came in about an hour ago he noticed at once that something was wrong and called me. We got the old gentleman into a taxi between us and Mr Fielding took him home. He died in the taxi. Mr Fielding has just come in and told us. He'd have been ninety in two days time. It's been a great shock. Like the end of an era, sir. I remember the old queen going but it didn't seem like this. I remember him when I came here forty years ago, you see."

Mr Campion was surprised to find that he was a trifle shaken himself. There was a great deal in what Walters said. Old Rosemary had been an institution.

As he came into the lounge he caught sight of Fielding standing by the eastern fireplace with a small crowd round him. Mr Campion joined it.

Fielding's professional calm was standing him in good stead. He was giving information quietly and seriously, without capitalising or even seeming conscious of the undue

prominence into which chance had forced him. He nodded to Campion and went on with his story.

"He was breathing so stertorously that I went and had a look at him," he was saying. "He wasn't conscious then and didn't recover before the end, which came in the taxi, as you know."

"He had a flat in Dover Street, hadn't he?" said someone.

Fielding nodded. "Yes. Walters got me the address. He'd gone before we arrived and I knew I couldn't do anything, so I got hold of his man, who seems a very capable chap. We put him onto his bed and the servant told me that his regular doctor was Philipson, so I rang Harley Street and came away."

"Sir Edgar was upset, I bet," said a man Campion did not know. "They knew each other well. Still, he was very old. I don't suppose he was surprised. The very old often die suddenly and peacefully like that."

The crowd split up into smaller groups, which grew again as other members came in to lunch. Mr Briggs' behaviour in commandeering the favourite seat came in for a good deal of comment and the secretary received several complaints. A half-excited gloom, as at a major disaster, settled over the smoking room, and the newspapers, who had already been notified by one of Walters' underlings, received quite a number of calls.

The awkward incident occurred just before lunch, however. Mr Campion witnessed it and was shocked by it, in company with nine tenths of his fellow members present. Arthur March came in and made a scene.

It began in the hall when he heard the news from Scroop, the porter. His high thin tones protesting disbelief reached the lounge before he appeared himself, pale and excitable, in the doorway. He sank into a chair, snapped at the wine steward, and, after mopping his brow a trifle ostentatiously, rose to his feet again and came across the room to where Fielding stood with Campion.

"This is ghastly," he said without preamble. "I was with the old man only this morning, you know. He was in one of his black moods but otherwise he seemed perfectly all right. You found him, didn't you? Was—was it peaceful?"

"Perfectly," said Fielding shortly. He was obviously embarrassed and Campion found himself wondering if the two men had ever spoken since the little scene in the city chophouse earlier in the year.

"Thank God," said March with nauseating fervour. "Oh thank God."

He did not move away and the surgeon hesitated.

"Relation of yours?" he enquired abruptly.

March coloured. "Practically," he said. "My grandfather and he were like brothers."

The explanation evidently sounded a little lame, even to himself, for he took refuge in wholly unwarrantable abuse.

"You wouldn't understand that sort of loyalty," he muttered and turned on his heel.

Fielding stood looking after him, his eyebrows raised.

"That chap's in a funny mental state..." he was beginning when Mr Campion touched his sleeve.

"Lunch," said Mr Campion.

It was after the meal, nearing the end of the hour of pleasant somnolence sacred to the gods of digestion, when the Junior Greys experienced its first real sensation since the suffragette outrage, of which no one ever speaks. Campion had been watching with lazy eyes the efforts of the bishop in the chair next his own to keep his attention on the pamphlet on his knee when he saw that divine sit upright in his chair, the healthy colour draining rapidly from his plump cheeks.

At the same moment, on the other side of the room, Major General Stukely Wivenhoe's cigar dropped from his mouth and rolled on the carpet.

A communal intake of breath, like the sigh of a great animal, sounded all over the room and in a far corner somebody knocked over a coffee cup.

Mr Campion hoisted himself on one elbow and looked round. He remained arrested in that uncomfortable position for some seconds.

Old Rosemary, immaculate and jaunty as ever, was coming slowly across the room. There was a red carnation in his buttonhole, his flowing white hair glistened, and his curiously unwrinkled face wore its customary faint smile.

Behind him, portly and efficient, strode Sir Edgar Philipson, the Harley Street man.

It was a petrifying moment and one which demanded every ounce of the Junior Greys' celebrated aplomb.

Halfway across the room the newcomers were met by a page hurrying in with the early editions. Confronted by the spectacle of old Rosemary himself the boy lost his head completely. He thrust an *Evening Wire* at the old man.

"They—they say you're dead, sir," he blurted out idiotically.

Rosemary took the paper and peered at it while the stupefied room waited in silence.

"Greatly exaggerated," he said in the unmistakable clipped tone they all knew so well. "Take it away."

He moved on to his chair. No one saw Briggs leave it. Some insist that he crawled out behind the screen on all fours; and others, more imaginative, that he dived out of the window and was afterwards found gibbering in the basement. But at all events, his departure was silent and immediate.

Old Rosemary sat down and, beckoning to a paralysed servant, ordered a whisky and soda.

Meanwhile, Sir Edgar Philipson stood looking round the room, and Fielding, pale and incredulous, rose to meet him. The elder man was not kind.

"That's the trouble with you younger men, Fielding," he said in a rumbling undertone that was yet loud enough to be heard. "Overhasty in your diagnosis. Make sure before you act, my boy. Make sure."

He walked away, a handsome old man very pleased with himself.

Fielding glanced helplessly round the room but no one met his eyes. Mr Campion, who alone was sympathetic, was looking at old Rosemary, noting the healthy brilliance of his eyes and the colour in his cheeks.

Fielding walked out of the room in silence.

Mr Campion dined alone that evening and was writing a brief report on his own share in the Case of the Yellow Shoes, which had just come to a satisfactory conclusion, when the young surgeon called. Fielding was embarrassed and said so. He stood awkwardly in the middle of the study in the flat in Bottle Street and made a hesitating apology.

"I'm terribly sorry to presume on an acquaintance like this, Campion," he said, "but I'm in such a devil of a mess. That chap Rosemary, you know, he was dead as mutton this morning."

Mr Campion produced a decanter.

"I should sit down," he said. "It soothes the nerves and rests the feet. I suppose this affair is going to be—er—bad for business?"

Fielding looked relieved and a faint smile appeared for an instant on his square, solemn face.

"Frightfully," he said, accepting the glass Campion handed him. "It makes such a darned good story, you see. Rupert Fielding is such a brilliant surgeon that he doesn't know when he's beaten and the patient is dead—it's all over the place already. I shall be ruined. Incompetence is bad enough in any profession but in mine it's unforgivable. And," he added helplessly, "he was dead, or at least I thought so. His heart had stopped and when I got him home I tried the mirror test. Of course, miracles do happen nowadays, but not under old Philipson. At least, I wouldn't have said so yesterday. It's funny, isn't it?"

"Odd, certainly," Mr Campion agreed slowly. "When you talk of these modern miracles, what are they exactly?"

"Oh, electrical treatment and that sort of thing." Fielding spoke vaguely. "You see," he added frankly, "I'm not a physician, I'm a surgeon. I've done a certain amount of medicine, of course, but I don't set up to be a G.P. Drugs are not in my line."

Mr Campion glanced up and his pale eyes behind his spectacles were inquisitive.

"You're wondering if the old boy couldn't have taken something that produced a pretty good simulation of death?" he suggested.

The younger man regarded him steadily. "It sounds far-fetched, I know," he said, "but it's the only explanation I can think of, although what on earth the stuff can have been I can't imagine. You see, the dreadful thing is that I didn't do anything. I just made up my mind he was dead and, realising the whole thing was hopeless, I simply rang up Philipson in accordance with medical etiquette."

"I see." Mr Campion spoke gravely. "What do you want me to do?"

Fielding hesitated. "If you could find out what actually happened you'd save my reason, anyway," he said so simply that the words were robbed of any hint of melodrama. "Nothing can save my career, at least for a few years, I'm afraid. But I tell you, Campion, I must know if I'm losing my grip or if my mind's going. I must know how I came to make such an incredible mistake."

Mr Campion glanced at the dignified youngster and noted that he betrayed no hint of the nervous strain he was undergoing. He felt his sympathy aroused and, at the same time, his curiosity. Before he could speak, however, Fielding went on.

"There are other complications too," he said awkwardly. "I'm engaged to old Rosemary's grandchild, you know, and

when I tell you she's his principal heir you'll see how infernally awkward it all is."

Mr Campion whistled. "I say, that's very unfortunate!"

"It is," said Fielding grimly. "And it's not all. I'm afraid she broke off her engagement with Arthur March on my account and he had the impudence to phone her about this business almost as soon as it happened. I saw him this evening and frankly I don't understand the fellow. My mistake is an appalling one, I know. Old Rosemary's perfectly entitled to sue me. But March has taken the business as a personal insult. He blew me up as if I was a schoolboy, and, after all, he's only the grandson of a friend of the family. There's no blood tie at all. I couldn't say much to him. I'm so hopelessly in the wrong."

Mr Campion considered. "I noticed the old man when he came in this afternoon," he said. "He was looking remarkably well."

Fielding smiled wryly. "If you'd gone close to him you'd have been amazed," he said. "I was when I got him into the cab. It's vanity, I suppose, but the amount of time he must spend while his man gets him ready for the day must be considerable. It's gone on for so many years, I suppose, that the little additions and adjustments have mounted up, but what began presumably as a toupee is now damned nearly a wig, I can tell you. I don't think you'd have seen any ill effects of a drug, even if there were any. Still, I've talked too much. Will you have a shot at it?"

Mr Campion would not commit himself. "I'll have a look round," he said. "I can't promise anything. It sounds like conjury to me."

All the same, the following morning found him at the Junior Greys much earlier than usual. He sought out Walters and cornered him in the deserted smoking room. The steward was in expansive mood.

"A dreadful thing, sir," he agreed. "Quite a scandal in its way. One gets to trust doctors, if I may say so. Still, I'd rather a dozen scandals than lose Sir Charles. Yes, he's here already, right on his usual time and in one of his good moods."

Mr Campion smiled. "His bad moods were pretty sensational, weren't they?"

"Well, he's old, sir." Walters spoke indulgently. "There are days when he snaps everybody's head off and sits sulking over his paper without speaking to a soul, but I don't take any notice because I know that tomorrow he'll be quite different, quite his old charming self with a nod and a smile to everyone. I always know which mood it's to be. As soon as he comes in he calls for a whisky. If it's a good day it's whisky and water and if he's upset it's whisky and soda, so I have plenty of warning, you see."

Mr Campion thanked him and wandered away. He had suddenly become very grave and the expression in his eyes behind his horn-rimmed spectacles was one of alarm.

He went down to the telephone and called Oates. Less than twenty minutes later he and the superintendent were in a taxi speeding towards Fleet Street. Stanislaus Oates was his customary sombre self. The somewhat elephantine gaiety which he had displayed at the chophouse was gone as if it had never been. This morning he was a trifle irritable.

"I hope this isn't a wild-goose chase, Campion," he protested as the cab lurched down the Embankment. "I'm not an idle man, you know, and I've got no business careering off on a purely private jaunt like this."

Campion turned to him and the elder man was surprised by the gravity of his expression.

"Somehow, I don't think even you could keep this business private if you wanted to," said Mr Campion. "Here we are. Wait for me."

The cab had pulled up outside a dingy building in a narrow court and the superintendent, peering out after his departing guide, saw him disappear into the offices of the *Curtain*, a well-known stage weekly famous for its theatrical cards and intimate gossip.

He was gone for some little time but seemed pleased with himself when he reappeared. He gave an address in Streatham to the man and clambered back beside his friend.

"I've got it," he said briefly. "We shan't be too late to interfere, although of course the main mischief is done. Why? That's what I don't understand. It couldn't have been

merely to discredit Fielding; that was taking far too long a chance."

"I wish you'd explain and not talk like the wrong end of a telephone," said Oates testily. "What have you got from the benighted hole we've just left?"

Campion looked at him as though he had only just remembered his existence.

"The address, of course," he said briefly.

The cab drew up at last in a wide suburban street where each pair of houses was exactly like the next, red brick, white stucco and solid chocolate paint.

Mr Campion led the way up a short tiled path to a neat front door and Oates, who had taken one look at the windows with their drawn blinds, followed him hastily, his irritation vanishing.

A little woman in a dark overall, her grey hair scraped into a tight knot at the back of her head, opened the door to them. Her face was mottled and her eyes red.

"Mr Nowell?" she echoed in response to Campion's question, and then, fishing hastily for her handkerchief, she began to cry.

Mr Campion was very gentle with her.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I shouldn't have asked for him like that. He's dead, isn't he?"

She looked up at him sharply. "Oh you're from the police, are you?" she said unexpectedly. "The doctor told me there'd have to be an inquest, as the death was so sudden. It's been such a shock. He lodged here so long."

She made way for them and they crowded into the little hall. The superintendent realised they were entering by false pretences but there seemed to be no point in going into explanations just then.

"When did you find him?" Campion enquired cautiously.

"Not till this morning when I took up his tea." The old woman was anxious to talk. "He must have died last night, so the doctor says. He put me through it very carefully. 'Well, he was alive at ten o'clock,' I said, 'because I spoke to him.' I always go to bed at a quarter to ten and if Mr Nowell was later he didn't like me to sit up for him. He had his own key and there was always someone to help him up."

She paused for breath and Campion nodded encouragingly.

"Well," she went on, "last night I had just turned out my bedroom light when I heard a motor stop and then the door went. 'Is that you, Mr Nowell?' I called. 'Yes, Mrs Bell,' he said. 'Good night.' A little while afterwards I heard the car drive away."

Oates interrupted her. "Did the chauffeur come in with him?"

Mrs Bell turned to him. "I don't know if it was the chauffeur, sir, but somebody did. He was nearly eighty, you know, and it was nothing for the gentleman who brought him home to help him up to his room."

"Can we see him please?" said Mr Campion softly.

Mrs Bell began to weep again, but afterwards, when they stood bareheaded in the big front bedroom and looked down at the gaunt still figure on the bed, she began to speak quietly and with pride.

"You're not seeing him as he was at all," she said. "He was wonderfully handsome with his white hair, his cane and his buttonhole. He used to take a great pride in his appearance. Spend hours and hours and pounds and pounds over it, he would. There was something he used to do with his cheeks to make them stand out more; I don't know what it was."

Campion bent towards her and murmured something. She shook her head dubiously.

"A photograph, sir?" she repeated. "No, that's a thing I don't think I 'ave got. He was extraordinarily touchy about having his photograph took, which was funny when he thought so much of himself, if I can say such a thing without meaning to be unkind. Wait a minute, though. I do believe I've got a little snapshot I took of him in the garden one day when he didn't know. I'll go and get it."

As soon as they were alone Campion bent over the man on the bed and raised an eyelid very gently.

"Yes, I think so," he said softly. "Fielding couldn't be blamed for not noticing that. It would look like a perfectly normal death to him, thinking he knew the fellow's age. If we can get your people on to this at once and get 'em to test for morphia sulphate I fancy they'll get results if they hurry."

The superintendent's question was cut short by the return of Mrs Bell with a faded snapshot and they adjourned to a little light room at the back of the house.

"There he is," she said proudly. "I was lucky to find him. That was taken last summer. He wasn't going up to Town so often then."

"What did he do in London?" enquired Mr Campion, holding the photograph down, to the annoyance of the superintendent.

Mrs Bell looked uncomfortable. "I hardly know," she said. "He used to tell me he spent his time in his nephew's office keeping an eye on things, but I think myself he was in a sort of high-class library and was one of those people who sit about making the place look respectable. Dressing the house we used to call it in my stage days."

Oates smiled. "That's a funny idea," he said. "I've never heard of it being done in a library."

"Well, a very expensive tailor's, then," she persisted. "I know I thought I saw him sitting in a window in a West End street once. He wasn't doing anything; only sitting there and

looking very nice. I asked him about it, of course, but he got very angry and made me promise never to speak of it again."

The front-door bell interrupted her and she hurried out with a word of excuse.

Oates turned to Campion. "I'm in a fog," he said. "You'll have to explain."

The younger man gave him the snapshot and he stared at the little photograph of a tall, thin, distinguished figure walking down the gravel path of the tiny garden.

"Old Rosemary!" ejaculated the superintendent and raised a bewildered face to his friend's. "Good Lord, Campion, who was that chap in the next room?"

"John Nowell, Sir Charles Rosemary's understudy at the Thespian Theatre thirty years ago—and ever since, apparently."

Mr Campion spoke calmly.

"I admit the idea didn't seem credible when I first thought of it," he went on, "but afterwards, when I looked into it, it became obvious. Nowell got his job nearly sixty years ago because he resembled Rosemary; that was when he was twenty. Rosemary was nearly ten years older but they were the same type and very much alike in feature. Since then Nowell has spent his life in imitating the greater actor. He copied his walk and his mannerisms, and as the two men grew older the simulation became easier. Rosemary resorted

to artificial aids to keep young looking, and Nowell, to the same aids to look like Rosemary."

"Yes, yes, I get that," said the superintendent testily. "But in the name of heaven, why?"

Mr Campion shrugged his shoulders.

"Vanity takes a lot of explaining," he said. "But Rosemary was a rich man and I think it was worth his while to employ a fellow, already a pensioner of his perhaps, to sit in the Greys and keep the legend of his perennial health alive. If ever Rosemary was prevented from going to the club Nowell took his place. When you think of it, Rosemary's record at the Greys, all day and every day for twenty years, is much more hard to swallow than this explanation of it."

Oates continued to stare at the photograph.

"I grant the looks," he said suddenly, "now that I've seen the chap in the next room, but what happened if he had to talk?"

"He didn't," said Campion. "At least, hardly at all. For the last few years Rosemary's been having moods. On his good days he was his old self. On his bad days he was very nearly speechless with sulkiness. It was these moods that put me on to Nowell, as a matter of fact. Walters told me this morning that on his good days Rosemary drank whisky and water and on his bad ones whisky and soda. I have met men who'd drink whisky and soup at a pinch, but never one who hadn't a definite preference in the water or soda controversy when he

was in a position to choose. It occurred to me, therefore, that there must be two men, and an understudy naturally came into my mind because the imitation had to be so perfect. So I called at the *Curtain* offices and was lucky to catch Bellew, who does the old-timers gossip. I asked him if Rosemary ever had a regular understudy and he coughed up the name and address immediately."

"Neat," admitted the superintendent slowly. "Very neat But what are we doing here and where's the crime?"

"Well, it's murder, you know," said Mr Campion diffidently. "Yesterday morning someone gave that poor chap in there a shot of something in his whisky and soda under the impression that he was giving it to Rosemary. Nowell dropped into a coma at the club and young Fielding, the surgeon, seeing that he was pretty far gone, took him home. In the cab he died. Morphia sulphate produces very much the same symptoms as the sudden cardiac collapse of the aged, and Fielding, thinking it was a clear case, left the body with Rosemary's man at the Dover Street flat, phoned Sir Edgar Philipson and went away like a polite little medico. When Philipson got there, of course, he saw Rosemary himself, who was perfectly fit. I imagine Nowell's body remained at Dover Street all day and in the evening, when Mrs Bell was thought likely to be in bed, the valet, probably aided by Rosemary's chauffeur, brought it down here. They took it up to his room, as they'd often done before, and went away."

"But the voice?" protested the superintendent. "He spoke to the landlady; she said so."

Campion glanced at him. "I think," he said slowly, "old Rosemary must have come down here, too, just in case. After copying him so long, Nowell's voice was a replica of Rosemary's, you see."

"At ninety?" exclaimed the superintendent. "A nerve like that at ninety?"

"I don't know," said Mr Campion. "It takes a bit of nerve to get to ninety, I should say."

Oates glanced towards the door. "She's a long time," he said. "I wonder if that was the coroner's officer..."

He went out on to the narrow landing with Campion behind him and appeared just as Mrs Bell opened the door of the front bedroom and showed a white-faced man out.

"I can't tell you any more, sir," she was saying stiffly. "Perhaps you'll ask the police gentlemen here?"

She got no further. With an inarticulate cry the stranger swung round and the light from the landing window fell upon his face. It was Arthur March. He stood staring at Campion, his eyes narrowed and the knotted veins standing out on his temples.

"You—you interfering swine!" he said suddenly and sprang.

Campion only just met the attack in time. As the man's fingers closed round his throat he jerked his knee upward and caught his opponent in the wind. March collapsed against the

flimsy balustrade, which gave beneath the sudden weight and sent him sprawling on to the stairs below, Campion after him.

A vigorous pounding on the hall door announcing the arrival of the coroner's officer added to the general confusion, and the superintendent, with an energy surprising in one of his somewhat dyspeptic appearance, pounced down upon the two scuffling on the stairs.

It was nearly three hours later when Mr Campion sat in the superintendent's office at Scotland Yard and expostulated mildly.

"It's all very well to arrest him on the assault charge," he was saying, "but you can't hold him. You cannot prove the attempted murder of Rosemary or the actual murder of Nowell."

Stanislaus Oates sat at his desk, his hands crossed on his waistcoat. He was very pleased.

"Think not?" he enquired.

"Well," said Mr Campion judicially, "I hate to dampen your enthusiasm, but what have you got? Walters can swear that March met him in the lounge yesterday morning and persuaded him to let him take the old man's refresher over to him, as he wanted an excuse to have a word with the old boy, who was in a bad humour. There's opportunity there, I know, but that's not much in court. Then you can show that March spotted his error and, by much the same process of reasoning

as mine, arrived at Nowell's. And you can prove that he attacked me. But that's your whole case. He'll go scot free. After all, why should March want to kill Rosemary? Because the old boy's granddaughter wouldn't marry him?"

"That's not so absurd as you think, my boy." Oates was avuncular. "As a matter of fact, if Denise Warren had married Arthur March, Rosemary would never have been attacked."

Mr Campion stared at him and the superintendent continued contentedly.

"Do you remember a meal we had together at Benjamin's chophouse to celebrate my promotion?"

"Perfectly. You were very tight and made an exhibition of us."

"Not at all." Oates was scandalised. "I was observant and informative. I observed Miss Warren break off her engagement with the grandson of Rosemary's old friend, Sir Joshua March, and I tried to inform you of certain facts and you wouldn't listen to me. Do you remember me telling you that you amateurs don't collect enough data? Do you remember me telling you about company law?"

"It comes back to me," admitted Mr Campion.

The superintendent was mollified.

"Did you know it's a common practice among small companies to raise money on large life insurances taken out

on behalf of a member of the firm for the express purpose of such money raising?"

"Yes, I had heard of it. But it's usually a partner who insures his life, isn't it?"

"Not always. That's the point." Oates was beaming. "If the partners are none of them particularly good risks they often insure a junior member of the firm, or sometimes an outside person altogether who happens to be "a good risk," as they call it. Now look here, Campion..." Oates leant across the desk. "When Allan March and Son—the first Sir Joshua was the son in those days—were in low water sixty odd years ago they wanted to take out a sixty-thousand-pound policy in order to borrow upon it. Allan March was an old man and Joshua was a heart subject. They needed someone who was a good risk, you see, because the sum was so large that it was necessary to get the premium as low as possible. Rosemary and Joshua were friends and in those days Rosemary was something of a marvel. His constitution was wonderful, his habits were temperate, and also he had a strong publicity value."

He paused and Campion nodded.

"Go on. I'm following."

"Well, March and Son approached the Mutual Ordered Life Endowment, which was a young firm then, one of the first of the flashy, advertising insurance companies, and they agreed to take the risk at an extremely low premium because of the publicity and because, of course, the fellow had a

pretty good life. Rosemary agreed to stand for his part in the business; that is, he agreed to have himself insured for friendship's sake and because the Marchs were in a bad way. But as a sort of gesture he made a stipulation. 'If I live to ninety' he said, 'the policy reverts to me.' It was a joke at the time because the heavier Victorians didn't usually reach anywhere near that age, and, anyway, it was the immediate loan which interested anyone. However, they agreed to it and it was all duly signed and sealed."

"Had March and Son kept up the insurance?"

"Oh yes." The superintendent was watching Campion's face as he spoke. "I don't suppose it's been convenient for them to repay the sum they'd borrowed on that policy, or that, since the premium was so low, they could have bought a loan more cheaply. But you see the situation now. I'd have told you all this back in the summer if you'd listened. It's a clear case, isn't it?"

Mr Campion blinked. "If old Rosemary died before his ninetieth birthday, then," he said at last, "the residue of the sixty thousand went to March and Son; but if he lives until after tomorrow it will pass into his own estate and go to Denise Warren."

"Tomorrow's the ninetieth birthday, is it?" said Oates. "March was cutting it pretty fine. I suppose he hoped the girl would come back to him and he'd get the cash through her. Well, my lad, what have you got to say now?"

"Nothing," said Mr Campion affably. "Nothing, except that it wasn't company law, was it? It sounds more like insurance to me."

Oates shrugged his shoulders. "You may be right," he said airily. "I'm not a dictionary and I didn't go to a night school. Still," he added with a chuckle, "we like to feel we do a little, you know, we professionals. You amateurs have your uses now and again, but when it comes to the groundwork we've got you licked every time."

Mr Campion grinned at him.

"I really think you believe that, you old sinner," he said.

[End of *Mr. Campion: Criminologist*, by Margery Allingham]