



Toward the tool house they ventured, guns held in readiness

## The Blue Lamp

By WILLIAM  
DUDLEY  
PELLEY

Illustrated by COURTNEY ALLEN

### The Story Thus Far:

TWENTY years ago a wealthy girl, Mary Harmon, and her fiancé, Count Briskow, dined with Dr. Hawkins, a struggling bacteriologist. Returning home she was seized by a strange lethargy, and was in bed the next day. Briskow called and, at her request, Hawkins, with whom Briskow then had a violent quarrel, Mary and Hawkins disappeared. "Abduction," was the Count's verdict. Ajax Hubbard, the family attorney, who refused to talk, soon died. He died before the investigations were completed.

In Vermont a woman passing the empty Harmon country house saw a light, but search revealed only a humpback sent by Hubbard to make alterations and dig a well. Then Briskow, returning to Europe, saw Hawkins on the boat. Hawkins jumped overboard.

Later a letter from Mary Harmon to Hubbard was found in the Harmon house in Vermont. She alluded to mysterious spells and said that "Dr. Hawkins has done all he can," and that she "prefers to go quietly."

Twenty years after, Jacob Gleason, driving past the house, was frozen with fear. The voice of a black figure calling for the body of her daughter floated up to him. A few minutes later a blue light gleamed inside the house and a voice wailed.

FRANK FOWLER and his younger brother Seba were the next two persons to behold the blue lights. Strangely enough, they saw them the same night as old Gleason.

The Fowler boys had been off hunting coons. On a stretch of deer bottom near the Wickford town line they had treed

a hill, they were about to weave a path down through sear, stunted spruces when the younger man halted and stared down the grade.

"Frank!" he called softly. "Do you see what I see? Look!"

"See what? Where?"

"A light in the Harmon house! Frank, there's some sort of lamp being lighted in the cupola!"

The brothers drew together and peered through the boughs. Frank cried nervously:

"It's blue! What is it?"

"And why's it lighted up there at this hour of the morning?"

They waited, watching tensely.

"It's gone!" cried Seba, squatting down weakly.

"Someone took it away. Good Lord, Seba, do you s'pose it's a *haunt*?"

Frank likewise crouched down. The three beagles fretted.

"This place has been closed ever since we were kids. You remember the story about the missin' heiress?"

"There it is again, Seba! The north-west window. Above the ell roof."

They saw the glow plainly between the shutters of the blinds. A moment it stayed, and then it died away. But again it reappeared in the room on the east.

"I've got a mind to bang off one of the guns," said Seba, "just to see what happens."

"No, keep quiet. Plenty may happen without us inviting it."

The glow died completely on the floor above stairs. Whereupon, in so far as

the Fowlers could discern, the house had its customary aspect. Then Seba Fowler felt his brother clutch his arm.

"It's down cellar now. Look! The bulkhead's open under the kitchen in the back."

"Then whoever's got in there—"

"Seba, I can look straight into that basement. Move over this way. Ain't the cellar lightin' up?"

The hill dropped abruptly down into the yard. From their position in the spruces the Fowlers were directly above the gable of a tool house or vegetable cellar, one end of which was buried in an embankment. Straight in line with this gable the cellar's depth was visible. In it that eerie blue flame was now floating. One of the beagles started to yowl.

"Stop it!" cried Frank. He cuffed the dog sharply.

But cuffing the dog did not keep it from growling. The other two beagles lifted their voices. Instantly, with this canine chorus resounding in the Fork, the glow in the basement was drowned in swift darkness.

"Seba—did—someone—blow it out?"

"I'd say so, yeah!"

"Look, Seba! My gawd! *Somethin's risin' from out that cellar bulkhead!*"

THEIR hearts throttled down; Seba's nearly stopped. From that bulkhead's pit a wraith was coming out. It was whitish, vague, hesitant. It paused halfway out and stood searching the yard. Frank cackled softly:

"If that ain't a spook, then we'll never see another!"

"Shush! Let's see what it d-d-does."

"Seba, it's a woman. An old woman! Her hair's all white. Lord, oh, Lord!"

"That's not hair. It's some sort of veil."

The figure mounted higher. It moved out in the yard. There it stood for a time in ear-splitting silence, looking at the fixtures between ell and rear hill—two or three apple trees, a pile of old lumber, the roofed-over well which Wrightson had dug, a matted grape arbor, some weather-grayed crates.

Slowly from one to the other of these the "specter" finally floated, brushing rank grass that came to its knees. Once

or twice more it paused, as though uncertain of direction. Then it drew near the tool house directly below. An instant later came the scrape of a door.

"Frank, you know the story about this dratted place—?"

"Listen! That's a woman we've just seen. A human woman. No ghost could open doors."

"Have you got the nerve to go down and make sure?"

"I'd give ten bucks to know if that grass has been walked in. No ghost would leave tracks."

"Hark! What's *that*?"

"Sounded like she'd tipped over something in the tool house—or run against something and mebbe fallen down."

TENSELY they waited for the spook to reappear. The minutes ticked away—three, four, five. . . .

"What the devil's become of her?" Frank cried at length.

"I say we go down. We've got guns and the dogs."

Frank laughed nervously. "A lot o' good these pups 'd be, trackin' down a ghost."

"Thought you claimed it was a woman? Well, s'pose we tie 'em up. We can leave 'em here with the coon and the lantern."

No ghost recurring, they tied up the beagles. With the coon in a spruce tree, they picked up their guns and crept down the grade.

The back yard was choked with rank vegetation; gnarled pear and plum trees in addition to the apple, thick clumps of briars, frowsy lilacs, coarse rhubarb, wild mustard. But no more phantom or other signs of life. Seba faced his brother.

"Then she's still in the tool house!"

"Let's get in 'ose. S'pose we call out."

They entered the yard, hearts bumping their ribs. Toward the tool house they ventured, guns held in readiness.

"Don't forget, Frank, that the humpback named Wrightson—"

Seba never finished. He fell over a tub.

In that instant, from the interior of the tool house, the night stillness was shattered by a scream.



It was high-pitched, long-drawn, horrible; the shack might have held a banshee in torture.

The Fowler boys froze. Frank dropped his gun.

The scream came again.

It lifted the hair, throttled the heart, curdled the blood.

FRANK and Seba Fowler found themselves in action. They did not stand on the order of their going. Neither did they bother to return up the hill. Their sense of direction failed utterly to function. To get from those premises with swiftness and dispatch galvanized them madly and sent them leaping obstacles.

The chief of these obstacles was the fence along the road. Seba clutched his brother as they sprinted toward the "tunnel."

"Frank—the dogs—the coon—"

"Devil take the dogs! They can't get away."

"But the coon—"

"The last thing I can use right now is a coon. *My gawd, what a yell!*"

Not till the tunnel was behind them did the two slow for breath. Halfway up the grade they lighted cigarettes. Then eastward toward Paris they began walking briskly.

The first factory whistles were blowing as a puzzled and somewhat disgruntled attorney came down in a dressing gown to confront two Fowlers.

He was a tall, lank, grizzled old Vermonter, Squire Butterworth, with moth-eaten hair and bushy gray eyebrows. A battered skullcap was set on one temple. He heard the story with a scowl down his forehead.

"If it's any human woman," he declared, sitting on the railing with his back against a post, "I can tell you right now she's there without my knowledge."

"We thought it was a human woman when we heard her open that door," Frank responded. "But after that yowl—!"

Squire Butterworth's wife appeared at the door.

"Jake Gleason is on the tellyphone," she announced to her husband. "Seems all crazed up 'bout seein' a ghost."

"A what?"

"At the Harmon place last night—at Echo Fork."

The three exchanged glances. So Jake had seen it too!

"You'd better come in and talk with him yourself. He's so plumb excited he's all tied in his tongue."

The squire went indoors and remained several minutes. When he came out his eyes showed concern.

"I'm goin' out there myself! You boys grab some breakfast and let me eat mine. Then hunt up Sheriff Crumpett. If you get anyone else to go along, mind they keep their traps shut. We don't want all Paris to be botherin' any woman who might prove she's got the right there."

The Fowlers found the sheriff opening Boland's cigar store. They likewise picked up Paul Lyman, local reporter on the Paris Daily Telegraph. Three quarters of an hour later, in the Fowler flivver, they added the squire on their way out East Main Street.

Arriving at the Fork at a quarter after seven, they discovered Jacob Gleason; his shaggy white mare was tied by the gate, her tail swishing flies as she nibbled at the bushes.

"Th' back bulkhead's open!" old Jacob greeted them.

"We know it," answered Frank. "She came out of it last night."

"Let's look to the front doors first," Squire Butterworth suggested, averting a rehearsal of the Fowlers' experience. "If a lady's asleep on the premises, we shouldn't be takin' her too much by surprise."

They entered the yard.

"You're caretaker, ain't you?" demanded Sheriff Crumpett. He too was grizzled and tall like the squire, but hewn in rougher mold, with the steepest shoulders and biggest Adam's apple of any native in middle Vermont. He had hands like claws and legs like tree-trunks. Few in the valley had ever seen him hurry. Yet he knew his business and was no yokel constable.

"I've considered so, Amos. No one's ever come to take the keys away from me."

"Who's kept up th' taxes?"

"Trust company at Boston sends a yearly check regular."

In a tense, nervous group they mounted the veranda. Sheriff Crumpett squinted thoughtfully.



*Seba's heart nearly stopped. . . . The wraith paused halfway out and stood searching the yard*

in this place? Helloo-oo! Helloo-oo-oo!"

They listened intently. The house remained silent.

The squire breathed raggedly, yet seemed to act relieved. "No one in sound of my voice, I take it."

"We're going to find her in the tool house," Frank Fowler muttered doggedly. "Come on, Sheriff Crumpett. Let's search this ark later."

"No, we're in here. Might as well look around."

They crossed the sitting-room, huddling together as the squire opened doors.

Sheriff Crumpett groped his way alternately into parlor and library. He ran up blotched shades, pounded refractory sashes till they lifted, opened brittle blinds. More light poured in, and cool, spicy air of the fresh autumn morning.

Then at once he stared at what the floors revealed.

Almost twenty years had coated them with dust. In this dust was a bedlam of footprints. They crossed and criss-crossed, led from door to door, out into the hall, from vestibule to stairs, from stairs to the kitchen and laundry in the ell. Wherever the nocturnal visitor had wandered, there her tracks were in evidence. She had plainly done much wandering.

"I guess you're right, boys," the attorney admitted. "A lady's been here, and she wasn't a ghost."

Paul Lyman voiced the general amazement:

"—And not only that, but she must have been barefoot!"

"Or else in her stocking feet," the sheriff qualified. "She could be in her stockings, and the fabric wouldn't show. not in dust such as this."

"Helloo!" called the squire again. "Anybody in this house? Helloo-oo-oo!"

But again no response reached the listening group.

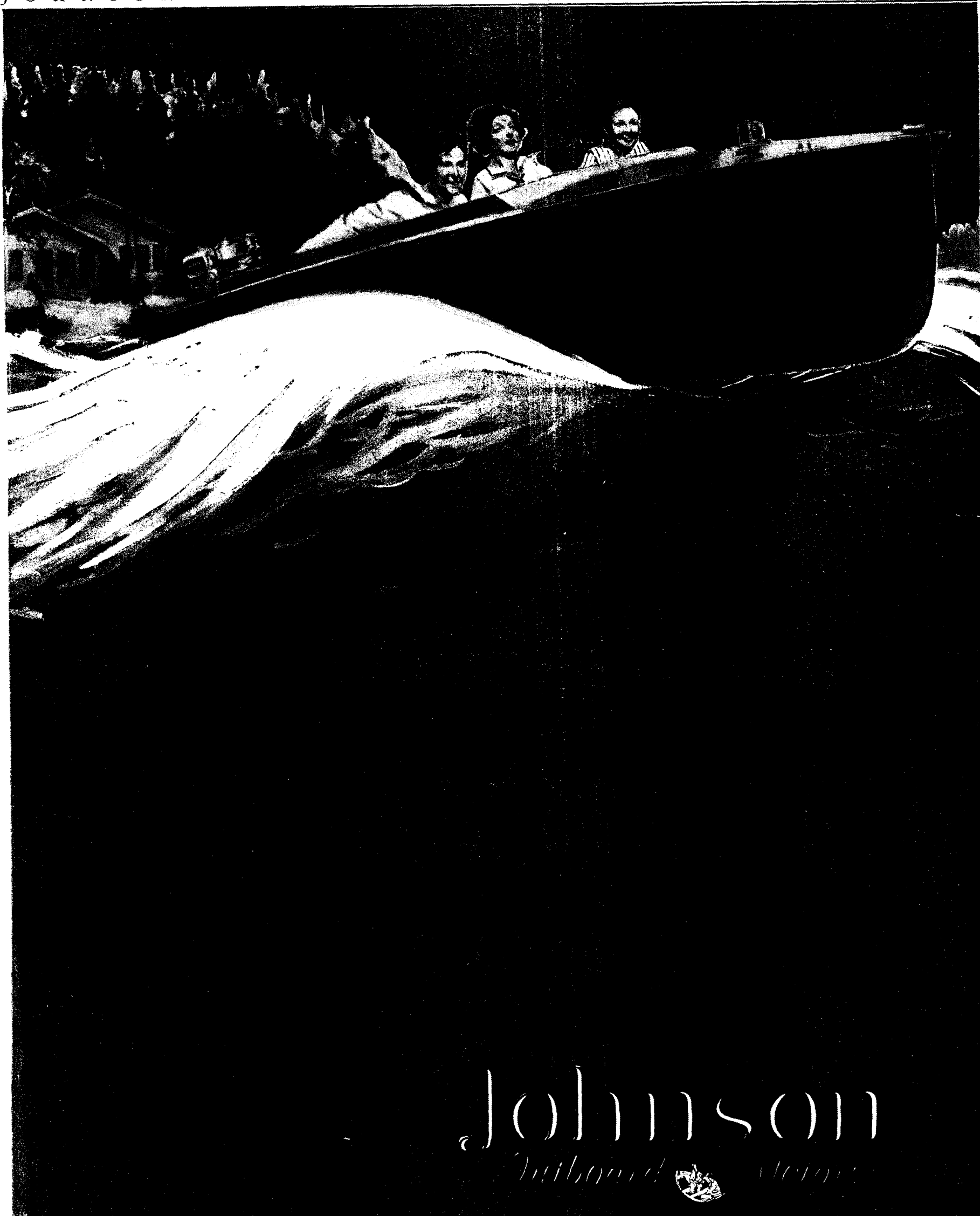
Then started a careful search of the premises.

The kitchen revealed nothing but the foot treads; it was merely a kitchen. Upstairs, barring space for the hall, the house was divided into four equal quarters, each corner taken by a sizable bedroom.

BETWEEN the two bedrooms on the front, however, an additional short flight of stairs on the left led up in the campanile tower. An archway in which a dusty portiere dangled partially screened this flight. The compartment at the top was uncarpeted and empty; even the windows wholly lacked shades.

Each of the chambers, however, was furnished. The beds were all made, though moths had chewed the counterpanes. Barring the dust, dirt and cobwebs, the structure was completely fitted for occupancy. Between the two bedrooms at the back the paper showed spoilage where (Continued on page 38)

J O H N S O N   H A S   G I V E N   W I N G S   T O   W A T E R   T R A V E L



Johnson  
*Outboard Motors*

M O R E   T H A N   H A L F   T H E   O U T B O A R D   M O T O R S   T H A T   A R E   S O L D   A R E   J O H N S O N S



## HOW WOULD YOU PLAY IT?

North

♠ K-J-7-6  
♥ 3-2  
♦ 10-8  
♣ J-9-8-7-4

East

♠ 10-9-8  
♥ A-K-Q-J-10-9  
♦ A-K-J-5  
♣ None

West

♠ A-Q-2  
♥ 6-5-4  
♦ Q-9-4-3  
♣ 10-6-2

South

♠ 5-4-3  
♥ 8-7  
♦ 7-6-2  
♣ A-K-Q-5-3

The Auction Bridge hand printed here is a continuation of the series that has been appearing each week in Collier's. Once again it embodies features of both offense and defense.

By MILTON C. WORK  
Author Auction Bridge Complete

ALTHOUGH the rest of South's hand was worthless, he bid one Club, which would have been justified even if the Queen of Clubs had been a small card of that suit. With his Ace-King-Queen at the top and one more small Club at the bottom, he might have made the initial two-bid which announces a suit of six cards or more headed by Ace-King-Queen. This two-bid is particularly advantageous when the remainder of the hand is valueless; when the strong six-card suit is a Major and some strength is held in the other Major, a one-bid probably is better, as partner then is more apt to announce himself if strong in the other Major. However, South had only five cards in his Club suit and therefore did not have a two-bid.

West passed and North, for several good reasons, made a preemptive bid of four Clubs. North's hand was hopelessly weak at any declaration but Clubs, and, in spite of West's pass, South's bid combined with North's cards unpleasantly suggested game-going strength in the East and West hands. It was tempting to try three Clubs, but three of a Minor is apt to whet the bidding appetite of the adversaries by showing them that their opponents are trying to keep them from bidding; four is far more apt to preempt, but of course is correspondingly more dangerous.

In this hand East of course bid four Hearts and obtained the contract; he was much too strong to permit the preempting bid to shut him out.

## The Play

SOUTH, opening against East's contract, led his King of Clubs, which East ruffed. East then led two rounds of trumps and was gratified to find that doing so exhausted all the adverse trumps and still left one in the Dummy hand; this proved to be most important.

The Declarer could see that the only tricks he might lose would be two Spades. He could not locate the King and Jack of that suit, although the preempting bid suggested that North held them. If both were held by South, Declarer could make a Grand Slam; if one by South and one by North, a Small Slam; if both by North (and this was what Declarer feared), he could make the Small Slam only by the aid of "elimination," which he could try without burning any bridges. In order to eliminate, he must exhaust Dummy's (West's) Clubs; and to do this he must

enter Dummy twice with Diamonds. The chances were that this could be accomplished and without risk.

To tricks 4 and 5 Declarer led the Ace and King of Diamonds; when both adversaries followed, it was very simple for him to lead the Jack of Diamonds to trick 6 and overtake it with the Queen in Dummy. As the last adverse Diamond fell on this trick, an extra Diamond entry was established in Dummy without any risk. Trick 7, Declarer led a Club from Dummy and trumped it in Closed Hand; trick 8, the Five of Diamonds from Closed Hand won it with the Nine in Dummy; trick 9, Dummy's last Club for Closed Hand's third ruff.

Declarer now had reached the position at which he was aiming. He then proceeded (trick 10) to lead the Ten of Spades from Closed Hand, and when South did not cover, played a small Spade from Dummy, passing the trick up to North. This play insured a Small Slam for the Declarer. If North led a Club, Declarer would trump in one hand and discard in the other. If North led a Spade, it would be up to Dummy's Ace-Queen. If North refused to take the tenth trick, the Small Slam was at once assured. Declarer also was fortified in the event that South held both the King and Jack of Spades. If South covered the Ten with one of them, Dummy would win and put the Closed Hand back with a trump for the second Spade finesse.

The hand is an eminently practical illustration of the beauties of elimination. The player who did not understand this play, as soon as he exhausted the adverse trumps, would lead Spades twice from the Closed Hand, finesse both times, lose both times, and then complain about his hard luck.

Next week's hand is given below; make up your mind how you would bid and play it before you read next week's description.

North	East
♠ 7-5-2	♠ 6-4-3
♥ A-Q-5	♥ 10-7-4
♦ 8-6-5	♦ A-Q-10-4
♣ K-J-7-4	♣ 8-6-2
South	West
♠ K-J-9-8	♠ A-Q-10
♥ K-J-3-2	♥ 9-8-6
♦ K	♦ J-9-7-3-2
♣ A-Q-10-9	♣ 5-3

## The Blue Lamp

Continued from page 36

a door had been cut, plainly the aperture effected by Wrightson.

"Well?" drawled the squire. He looked at the group.

Their failure thus far to apprehend an intruder now made old Jacob an ally of the Fowlers.

"You gotta admit we seen somebody," he argued. "An' most likely we'll find her down in the tool house."

"All right. Let's go down there."

Crushed weeds about the door showed plainly enough where the tool house had recently been opened. The squire grasped the hasp and jerked the door open.

White faces peered in. The outhouse was empty. Nothing met their gaze but a badly rusted wheelbarrow, a pair of ancient barrels, a portion of a door—a shed door apparently—that had been thrown in there flat and been buried by old leaves. The walls were half stone for three or four feet; they were coated with moss and greenish with mold.

"I'll grant you the house was entered," said the squire. "But, natural or supernatural, the visitor's departed."

OF a week in autumn when news throughout New England was woefully sparse, an obscure rural hamlet leaped into metropolitan notoriety. Paris, Vt., burst out on the front pages of great daily newspapers with a wham! The country seemed due for a resuscitation of the notorious Harmon disappearance, now a score of years old.

Was the person whom Jake Gleason had encountered Mary Harmon grown old? She would be about forty-eight in that current year, rewrite men calculated. And yet they always came back to her pronouncement to Jacob—that she was searching for the "body of her child."

Wherefore it happened that a youth named Battles, son of the Joshua Battles who found the famous last letter of Mary Harmon, made his advent in the valley and promptly at his coming the mystery's aspect altered. For young James Battles met with an experience in the "haunted" premises beside which all others were as preface and prologue.

An agile lad in his twenties was Jimmy, with wavy brown hair and clean girlish jaw. Precociously wise in the ways of humankind, as he considered it behooved a militant young newspaper man to deport himself, trimly tailored, magnetic, aggressive, he crossed Boston Common of a morning in October, the day of his introduction to the mystery at the Fork, and got into Tremont Street.

With soft hat aslant over eager eyes, he reached a door in Summer Street and went whistling up worn stairs. An inimitable odor compounded of printer's ink, damp newsprint and paste permeated this building, and the lad breathed it deeply. He loved it, that smell. It was the physical exudation of a newspaper, epitomizing drama, exploration, excitement. Down a length of upper corridor was a door with glass panels. In block letters on this glass the words were visible:

## SUNDAY SUPPLEMENT

Young Battles entered

An office in the northeast corner of this Sunday Room, partitioned off with windows, bore the designation:

## MR. QUIGLEY

A young man came from it and saw Jimmy Battles.

"About time you showed up!" he bawled across the desks. "Quig's been layin' duck eggs, waitin' for you to get here."

A bony, undersized man, with greenish eye shade aslant his forehead, took a cob from his teeth at James Battles' entrance. He had mothly grayed hair and a queerly flattened nose. A thousand wrinkles puckered his countenance, and the stubble on his jowls showed a faint awn of white. He worked

in his shirt sleeves. His vest was unbuttoned.

"Jimmy," he demanded, "how much nerve have you got? Real nerve? To face down a good scare?"

The boy had helped old Cassius Quigley home on too many nights to stand in much awe of the pug-nosed Sunday editor. "Well, every six weeks or so I generally find the grit to survive your threats to fire me—"

"No wise-crackin', Jimmy. I'm serious this mornin'. Haven't I heard that you came from Vermont?"

"My folks lived there once, when I was a kid."

"Paris, wasn't it?"

"A little burg northeast of Paris. Wickford!"

"H'm!—I s'pose you were too young to recall much about the famous Harmon mystery some twenty years ago?"

"Betcha life I recall it. Wasn't it my old man who found Mary Harmon's last letter?"

"Have you ever seen the Harmon place out at Echo Fork?"

"Yeah, I've been past it. My uncle, Sheriff Crummett, pointed it out to me no later than last summer—"

"Sheriff Crummett's your uncle?"

"Yeah, he's my mother's brother—or he was till she died—"

"What do you think about this so-called phantom who's appeared on the premises?"

"A lot of hokum. These haunts always are. Hunt down the rappings, and you find a loose shutter; run down the groans, and you bag some smart Aleck—"

"There's no rappings to this case or any groans either. A human woman, for some reason or other, has taken to stalking that abandoned summer place. I've got a hunch we haven't heard the last of the Harmon disappearance after all."

"That old woman the incubator inventor saw couldn't have been a real ghost. Ghosts never leave footprints."

"I don't say it's a real ghost, nor a disembodied spirit." The editor set the horrible stuff in his pipe bowl afire and waved out the match. "But some woman's gotten into that ark and why she's around there has the vitals of a story."

"She might be anyone from escaped lunatic to bootlegger."

Quigley cogitated.

"Yeah, that's very possible. But no matter. There's a Sunday story in this too good to pass up. Jimmy, I want you to go to Paris. I want you to sleep in that house—alone—till you've got the mystery solved."

The youngster jolted.

"Sleep there! Alone!"

"You don't imagine ghosts walk for a grand stand?"

"WHO else has seen the ghost lately?" "A man named Prouty, driving to Wickford one night in a flivver. Then a woman who took refuge on the porch to get shelter from a freak thunderstorm. At last Squire Butterworth saw her himself. He'd gone out there alone to tack up some signs."

"Where was she when the squire spotted her?"

"Climbing into the spruces on the hill behind the house. He dropped his No Trespass signs and took after her. But he lost her in the trees."

"Well," the lad laughed wryly, "I've gone up in airplanes for this Sabbath Fly-Swatter, and down in submarines. I've tried to solve murders and sat in at executions. I might as well end my brilliant career attempting to bag a she-ghost. Can I lug along a gun?"

"Yes, if you've got one. But be careful how you use it."

Twenty minutes later Jimmy Battles descended to Summer Street, sought out a pawnshop and bought an automatic. He likewise bought cartridges and a strong pocket flashlight.

He caught the 10:15 train that left the North Station.

(To be continued next week)