

# Gallows of Chance

By E. Phillips Oppenheim

## The Story Thus Far:

CONVICTED of the murder of Gervase Benham, Cecil Brandt is sentenced to be hanged. According to the evidence brought out at his trial, he had returned unexpectedly to his home (where Mrs. Brandt was alone), found Benham in the study, and killed him. One man alone has the power to intercede for him: England's young Home Secretary, Sir Humphrey Rossiter. Sir Humphrey declines to do so. The night before the execution—while returning to London following a visit to Lord Keynesham and his sister, Lady Louise, in Norfolk County—he is kidnapped by four masked men, led to a gallows, and placed on the trapdoor. A noose is thrown about his neck. If (his captors inform him) he will not promise to grant a reprieve to Cecil Brandt, he will die—at once.

Sir Humphrey will promise nothing. An excited messenger arrives and talks with the leader. Whereupon, the kidnappers' spokesman (obviously a man of culture) tells Sir Humphrey that Mrs. Brandt has important new evidence to offer, which will alter the entire case. Sir Humphrey, still dubious, promises to hear it, grant the reprieve if he believes it. Blindfolded, he is taken to London and released. Katherine Brandt (an actress whom he has known for years) is waiting for him, at his home. She tells him that, to discuss her new play, Benham had gone to her bedroom (not the study), where her husband had found him. The case, Sir Humphrey realizes, is materially altered. He promises to order a reprieve. Then—after Mrs. Brandt has left his home—he collapses, faints. Hours later, he regains consciousness in a hospital. And Cecil Brandt has been hanged!

Convalescent, Sir Humphrey asks Mrs. Brandt (who understands what has occurred) to dine with him, at his home, Sunday evening. Scotland Yard is greatly interested in the case. General Moore, Chief Commissioner, at once details four men—Sub-Commissioner Matterson, Inspectors Smithers and Simpson, and Detective Pank—to solve the mystery. . . . Sunday evening, Sir Humphrey dines alone. Alarmed by Katherine Brandt's failure to arrive, he notifies Scotland Yard. Matterson hurries over, learns exactly what has happened. He leaves the room, to telephone headquarters. When he returns the room is empty. Sir Humphrey Rossiter, one of the world's most prominent figures, has disappeared!

## IV

GENERAL Sir Harold Moore, the chief commissioner of police, was a fine upstanding figure of a man, powerfully built to withstand shocks of every description. Nevertheless the flesh under his eyes was a little baggy and he had lost some of his healthy color as he opened the newspapers the following morning in his private room. Seated a few yards away was Colonel Matterson, and in the background Detective Inspector Cowling, one of the famous three at the Yard who specially concerned themselves with mysterious disappearances.

"I'll talk to you both," the chief commissioner muttered, "as soon as I see whether those paragraphs are in the Times. I hope they are. Must stop the evening papers gassing."

The news items of which he was in search were easily discovered. The first was in the Court and Society News and was brief enough:

Mrs. Brandt has left the Savoy Court for the continent. No letters will be forwarded.

The second was in the General News with an important headline:

We regret to state that the Right Honorable Sir Humphrey Rossiter, Secretary of State for Home Affairs, has suffered a slight relapse



Illustrated by  
T. D. Skidmore

Her arm was grasped by the inspector. "There may be work for our fingerprint expert here," he said

after his recent illness and has been moved to a nursing home. No communications of any sort will be dealt with or letters forwarded.

"That's all right," the general exclaimed, with a sigh of relief. "Gives us a day or two at any rate."

"Precisely, sir," Inspector Cowling commented. "The one thing we want to avoid in cases like this is a lot of talk and gossip. I'm hoping we'll clear this whole business up before anyone guesses at the truth."

"I hope to goodness you will," was the general's fervent response. "Did you learn anything from the condition of Sir Humphrey's dining-room?"

"Not very much," was the cautious reply. "Of course it is one of those old-fashioned houses, the lower windows of which are practically on the ground and only protected by shutters. When these are pushed back it's as easy for anyone to pass in and out by the window as by the door."

"What is the drop?" the general asked.

BARELY a couple of feet and onto a cement pavement. The catch of the window does not appear to have been tampered with, and the butler admits that it was very likely left unfastened

until the shutters would be pulled to at night. One puzzling thing, however, is that, although it must have been perfectly easy for anyone to enter the room, it is a very large apartment and one cannot imagine Sir Humphrey seeing anyone approach without calling out or ringing the bell."

"Just so," Matterson agreed. "He knew perfectly well that I was in the next room all the time."

"And in any case," the inspector went on, "why should he have allowed himself to be taken away by this visitor? He had plenty of time to see him coming, he had plenty of time to shout out. One has to consider the theory, gentlemen, that Sir Humphrey's departure was voluntary and that it isn't a case of disappearance at all."

"What in the world you're going to make of that I don't know," the general mumbled.

"Neither do I at present," the inspector admitted coolly, "until we come across some shadow of a motive. We know that a large motor car did draw up outside the house at a quarter to eleven, which was just about the right time, and the constable who saw it noticed the extreme quietness with which it approached and was brought to a standstill; no hooting or grinding of

brakes or anything of that sort. Unfortunately his attention was distracted just then by a motorcyclist without a rear light, and he had to cross the road to take some particulars. When he came back again the car had gone. He seems to be the only person who saw it, and he is not able even to give us any idea as to its make."

A CAR stopping outside the house just at that particular time must have had some significance," Colonel Matterson remarked.

"I have two men," the inspector confided, "who are at work upon nothing else but the tracing of that car."

"No news from Norfolk yet, I suppose?" the chief commissioner inquired after a moment's pause.

"Not yet, sir," Matterson replied. "I shall let Smithers have a brief report of what has happened here, but I shall make no comment upon it. Let them come to their own conclusions, and we may correct them afterwards if necessary."

"Yes, I suppose that's sound," the general meditated. "Your idea is, then, to treat these two disappearances separately and work at them from an entirely different angle?"

"Exactly," Matterson agreed. "The



one thing that I should like to understand, though, is what the precise connection was between our chief at Whitehall, Brandt and Brandt's wife."

"I don't think there is anything to be discovered there," was the general's confident pronouncement. "Sir Humphrey is no philanderer and never has been. Go ahead your own way, though. I don't pretend to be a detective. Anything else I can do for you, Cowling?"

The inspector consulted his notebook.

"I should like a list of the guests at the shooting party at Keynsham Hall," he stated.

The general raised his eyebrows.

"So after all we've said you're determined to connect the two affairs," he remarked. "Well, you will find the list in the Records Department," the general told him. "Work quickly."

The inspector rose to his feet.

"I have four of my best men at work now," he announced. "I won't waste a minute, sir."

AS SOON as the two men were alone, General Moore motioned to the sub-commissioner to draw his chair a little closer.

"What do you really think of it all, Matterson?" he asked.

"I wish I knew what to think," the latter replied. "I am convinced, though, that the same people or the same interests are concerned in Mrs. Brandt's disappearance as in these two abductions of our chief."

"It's common sense, sheer common sense," the general assented, "yet how are we to connect them?"

"Quite so," Matterson agreed. "Our troubles seem to me to be twofold. First, it is almost impossible to find one central motive for the three incidents, and, secondly, I have been through our lists again and we have no organized band of criminals capable of work like this. If this is an amateur stunt all I can say is—Lord help us in the future! You are looking as though you had an idea, General."

The chief commissioner shook his head.

"Nothing that could be called an idea, I'm afraid," he denied. "As I told you just now, I don't pretend to be a detective. The thing that has been in my mind all the time, though, is just this—that the only person who might have tapped at that dining-room window and brought Sir Humphrey out without a second's hesitation would have been Katherine Brandt."

"But if so, what then?" Matterson demanded. "Does it get us any nearer? Why the devil could she not come to dinner in the ordinary way if she wanted anything from Sir Humphrey?"

"If we knew that, the whole mystery would be solved," was the dry rejoinder. "If Scotland Yard cannot solve it, all I can say is we shall have to revise the department. No reprimand, mind, but put it up to Cowling that I shall expect to hear something about Mrs. Brandt during the day."

Colonel Matterson nodded.

"I'm quite of your opinion, Chief," he said.

Which was tactful of the sub-commissioner and happened to be the truth.

THE management of the Savoy Hotel and Court were naturally only too anxious to be of any assistance to Scotland Yard. One of the undermanagers escorted Inspector Cowling to the apartment which Katherine Brandt had occupied, and invited him to make such investigations as he desired. The inspector neglected nothing. The wastepaper basket had unfortunately been emptied, but there was a drawerful of letters, mostly of sympathy, kind offers of various sorts, and invitations, not one of which was of any practical service.

The inspector even looked through the books and magazines lying about, and took notice of the newspapers which had been supplied. Finally he asked for Katherine Brandt's maid, who had been warned to be in attendance. She was a quiet, neatly dressed young woman, English, and a little nervous. Inspector Cowling adopted his most pleasant manner and begged her to take a chair.

"I see your trunks seem to be all packed," he remarked.

"Everything is prepared for going abroad," the maid told him. "Madam said we should be leaving today or tomorrow. I shouldn't be surprised to

see her back at any moment and ready for the train tomorrow."

"For the continent?"

"For Cannes, sir. I believe the concierge knows all about that."

"Mrs. Brandt had seats in the Blue Train for tomorrow," the undermanager confided. "We have telephoned to the Carlton Hotel for a small suite."

"Then you heard nothing from her to indicate that she had changed her mind?"

"Nothing whatever."

The inspector turned towards the maid.

"Your mistress said nothing in your hearing which would have led you to

believe she was not leaving for the south of France as arranged?"

"Not a word."

"You believed, when your mistress left, that she was going to keep her engagement and dine with Sir Humphrey?"

"Of course I did," the young woman acquiesced. "And another thing, I am quite sure Madam believed it too. I never knew a lady who was so particular in keeping her engagements."

"Very nice of her, I'm sure," the inspector approved. "By the bye, I was interested in what you said just now, that you thought she would be back in time to catch the train tomorrow. You have no real reason for saying that, I suppose—just your own idea, eh?"

"Just my own idea, sir, that's all," she agreed. "Madam is rather like that. She's very fond of turning up at the last moment. As a matter of fact, her last words to me were to be sure that I left some milk and the heating kettle for her."

"You were not supposed to sit up until she got back, then?"

"MADAM was always very considerate," the girl confided. "If she wasn't home by half past ten I was free to go to bed."

"Had she many visitors?"

The maid frowned.

"Not many," she said. "There was Mr. Guy Philpott. He came several times. He was always trying to persuade Madam to sign a contract. And there was Mrs. Philpott, his wife. Then there was Lady Middleton Hall and her cousin Lady Hynes, and Sir Humphrey Rossiter. He only came once—on Friday. I can't think of anyone else."

Inspector Cowling made a note of the names in his book.

"Thank you," he said. "Now tell me, what do you propose to do?"

"I shall stay here and wait for my mistress' return."

"For the present I think you are very wise," the inspector agreed. . . . "I think I noticed the trunks when I came in. Yes, here they are," he added, leading the way into the hall. "So that is Mrs. Brandt's luggage for Cannes, eh?"

"All but the hats and the boots which aren't packed yet."

"I see," the detective murmured.

He stared meditatively at the trunks as though in some vague way they interested him. He stooped down and examined the locks and then stood up again.

"I suppose these were all packed by yourself, Miss Brown?" he asked.

"Of course they were," the girl replied. "Madam only keeps one maid."

"They are all locked, naturally?"

"I shouldn't leave them out here if they weren't."

"I wonder whether it would trouble you very much," the inspector asked apologetically, "if I were to beg you to open one for a minute? I should like to have a glance at really high-class packing."

The maid opened the small bag which she had been carrying, and produced a bunch of keys.

"Which one?" she inquired.

THE inspector indicated the nearest, a small wardrobe trunk. The maid unlocked it and the inspector and the undermanager pulled it open. The maid gave a little scream. Instead of the neatly packed contents they had expected to see, there was an untidy medley of crumpled gowns, bundles of crêpe de Chine, scarfs and gloves, all in wild confusion.

The maid, as soon as she had recovered from the shock, would have thrown herself upon a shamefully maltreated gown of white satin, but her

(Continued on page 37)



## Keep Up with the World By Freling Foster

About \$1,000,000 is spent daily to feed the cherished household pets of 20,000,000 American families.

One of the cleverest card-cheating tricks ever devised now is being used by professional gamblers. The cards are marked with a certain ink that is visible only through the special dark glasses worn by the head of the gang, who keeps his confederates informed about each deal.

One night recently a man stood beside a closed window in a Schenectady factory and talked to a group of men on a mountain top 22 miles away—over a beam of light. This is one of science's latest achievements—called "narrowcasting."—By E. H. Hummell, Port Ewen, New York.

In South Africa mirages have developed such a distinct and complete effect at times that even thirsty cattle, horses and dogs have hurried to drink from the illusory pools.

A store is not compelled by law to sell merchandise at the price stated in an advertisement or on a price tag attached to the article in the show window.—By Archie Hansen, Long Island City, New York.

People throughout the world have been found to suffer from about 2,400 different physical and mental disorders.

There are today about 350 regular radio stations in 47 countries that broadcast daily or weekly many of their programs on short waves, which are heard on hundreds of thousands of short-wave sets throughout the world.

Although certain psychologists have claimed for years that children have a special preference for the parent of the opposite sex, a recent survey made among 3,200 families shows that there is virtually no difference in the affection of boys or girls for either the mother or father.

Stilts are still used daily by men, women and children throughout southwestern France to facilitate walking over the large tracts of sandy marshlands.—By Carol L. Douglas, Brunswick, Maine.

Despite its age, the Bible contains an astonishingly modern description of the medicinal properties of various alcoholic beverages.

Some simple articles require an amazing number of manufacturing processes. For instance, the making of a little shotgun shell that retails for only four cents calls for 888 different operations.—By A. J. Wiley, Spokane, Washington.

Wills or testaments have been written on nearly everything imaginable, including eggshells and life preservers. But the most oddly recorded wills in existence are those tattooed on human backs.

At the Dasehra Festival in Nepal each year, the men become so obsessed with the desire to win in the exciting dice games that they often gamble away all their money and property—and sometimes even their wives and children.

Through the ages men have eaten certain parts of animals and human beings in an effort to absorb their admirable qualities. Several centuries ago, however, the Tartars carried this idea further by eating books to acquire the knowledge contained in them.

Circulating throughout this country today are millions of dollars' worth of counterfeit bills and coins that are so perfect in ring, quality and appearance that they cannot be detected even by cashiers and bank tellers.

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