

**Elsewhen**  
**Anthony Boucher**  
From "The Compleat Boucher"

"My dear Agatha," Mr. Partridge announced at the breakfast table, "I have invented the world's first successful time machine."

His sister showed no signs of being impressed. "I suppose this will run the electric bill up even higher," she observed.

Mr. Partridge listened meekly to the inevitable lecture. When it was over, he protested, "But, my dear, you have just listened to an announcement that no woman on earth has ever heard before. Never before in human history has anyone produced an actual working model of a time-traveling machine."

"Hm-m-m," said Agatha Partridge. "What good is it?"

"Its possibilities are untold." Mr. Partridge's pale little eyes lit up. "We can observe our pasts and perhaps even correct their errors. We can learn the secrets of the ancients. We can plot the uncharted course of the future—new conquestors invading brave new continents of unmapped time. We can—"

"Will anyone pay money for that?"

"They will flock to me to pay it," said Mr. Partridge smugly.

His sister began to look impressed. "And how far can you travel with your time machine?"

Mr. Partridge buttered a piece of toast with absorbed concentration, but it was no use. His sister repeated the question: "How far can you go?"

"Not very far," Mr. Partridge admitted reluctantly. "In fact," he added hastily as he saw a more specific question forming, "hardly at all. And only one way. But remember," he went on, gathering courage, "the Wright brothers did not cross the Atlantic in their first model. Marconi did not launch radio with—"

Agatha's brief interest had completely subsided. "I thought so," she said. "You'd still better watch the electric bill."

It would be that way, Mr. Partridge thought, wherever he went, whomever he saw. "How far can you go?" "Hardly at all." "Good day, sir." People cannot be made to see that to move along the time line with free volitional motion for even one fraction of a second is as great a miracle as to zoom spectacularly ahead to 5900 A.D. He had, he could remember, felt disappointed at first himself—

The discovery had been made by accident. An experiment which he was working on—part of his long and fruitless attempt to re-create by modern scientific method the supposed results described in ancient alchemical works—had necessitated the setting up of a powerful magnetic field. And part of the apparatus within this field was a chronometer.

Mr. Partridge noted the time when he began his experiment. It was exactly fourteen seconds after nine thirty. And it was precisely at that moment that the tremor came. It was not a serious shock. To one who, like Mr. Partridge, had spent the past twenty years in southern California it was hardly noticeable. But when he looked back at the chronometer, the dial read ten thirteen.

Time can pass quickly when you are absorbed in your work, but not so quickly as all that. Mr. Partridge looked at his pocket watch. It said nine thirty-one. Suddenly, in a space of seconds, the best chronometer available had gained forty-two minutes.

The more Mr. Partridge considered the matter, the more irresistibly one chain of logic forced itself upon him. The chronometer was accurate; therefore it had registered those forty-two minutes correctly. It had not registered them here and now; therefore the shock had jarred it to where it could register them. It had not moved in any of the three dimensions of space; therefore—

The chronometer had gone back in time forty-two minutes, and had registered those minutes in reaching the present again. Or was it only a matter of minutes? The chronometer was an eight-day one. Might it have been twelve hours and forty-two minutes? Forty-eight hours? Ninety-six? A hundred and ninety-two?

And why and how and—the dominant question in Mr. Partridge's mind—could the same device be made to work with a living being?

It would be fruitless to relate in detail the many experiments which Mr. Partridge eagerly performed to verify and check his discovery. They were purely empirical in nature, for Mr. Partridge was that type of inventor who is short on theory but long on gadgetry. He did frame a very rough working hypothesis—that the sudden shock had caused the magnetic field to rotate into the temporal dimension, where it set up a certain—he groped for words—a

certain negative potential of entropy, which drew things backward in time. But he would leave the doubtless highly debatable theory to the academicians. What he must do was perfect the machine, render it generally usable, and then burst forth upon an astonished world as Harrison Partridge, the first time traveler. His dry little ego glowed and ex-panded at the prospect.

There were the experiments in artificial shock which produced synthetically the earthquake effect. There were the experiments with the white mice which proved that the journey through time was harmless to life. There were the experiments with the chronometer which established that the time traversed varied directly as the square of the power expended on the electromagnet.

But these experiments also established that the time elapsed had not been twelve hours nor any multiple thereof, but simply forty-two minutes. And with the equipment at his disposal, it was impossible for Mr. Partridge to stretch that period any further than a trifle under two hours.

This, Mr. Partridge told himself, was ridiculous. Time travel at such short range, and only to the past, entailed no possible advantages. Oh, perhaps some piddling ones—once, after the mice had convinced him that he could safely venture him-self, he had a lengthy piece of calculation which he wished to finish before dinner. An hour was simply not time enough for it; so at six o'clock he moved himself back to five again, and by working two hours in the space from five to six finished his task easily by dinner time. And one evening when, in his preoccupation, he had forgotten his favorite radio quiz program until it was ending, it was simplicity itself to go back to the beginning and comfortably hear it through.

But though such trifling uses as this might be an important part of the work of the time machine once it was established—possibly the strongest commercial selling point for inexpensive home sets—they were not spectacular or startling enough to make the reputation of the machine and—more important—the repu-tation of Harrison Partridge.

The Great Harrison Partridge would have untold wealth. He could pension off his sister Agatha and never have to see her again. He would have untold pres-tige and glamour, despite his fat and his baldness, and the beautiful and aloof Faith Preston would fall into his arms like a ripe plum. He would—

It was while he was indulging in one of these dreams of power that Faith Preston herself entered his workshop. She was wearing a white sports dress and looking so fresh and immaculate that the whole room seemed to glow with her presence.

"I came out here before I saw your sister," she said. Her voice was as cool and bright as her dress. "I wanted you to be the first to know. Simon and I are going to be married next month."

Mr. Partridge never remembered what was said after that. He imagined that she made her usual comments about the shocking disarray of his shop and her usual polite inquiries as to his current researches. He imagined that he offered the conventional good wishes and extended his congratulations, too, to that damned young whippersnapper Simon Ash. But all his thoughts were that he wanted her and needed her and that the great, the irresistible Harrison Partridge must come into being before next month.

Money. That was it. Money. With money he could build the tremendous ma-chinery necessary to carry a load of power—and money was needed for that power, too—that would produce truly impressive results. To travel back even as much as a quarter of a century would be enough to dazzle the world. To appear at the Versailles peace conference, say, and expound to the delegates the inevitable results of their too lenient—or too strict?—terms. Or with unlimited money to course down the centuries, down the millennia, bringing back lost arts, forgotten secrets—

"Hm-m-m!" said Agatha. "Still mooning after that girl? Don't be an old fool."

He had not seen Agatha come in. He did not quite see her now. He saw a sort of vision of a cornucopia that would give him money that would give him the apparatus that would give him his time machine that would give him success that would give him Faith.

"If you must moon instead of working—if indeed you call this work—you might at least turn off a few switches," Agatha snapped. "Do you think we're made of money?"

Mechanically he obeyed.

"It makes you sick," Agatha droned on, "when you think how some people spend their money. Cousin Stanley! Hiring this Simon Ash as a secretary for noth-ing on earth but to look after his library and his collections. So much money he can't do anything but waste it! And all Great-Uncle Max's money coming to him too, when we could use it so nicely. If only it weren't for Cousin Stanley, I'd be an heiress. And then—"

Mr. Partridge was about to observe that even as an heiress Agatha would doubtless have been the same intolerant old maid. But two thoughts checked his tongue. One was the sudden surprising revelation that even Agatha had her inner yearnings, too. And the other was an overwhelming feeling of gratitude to her.

"Yes," Mr. Partridge repeated slowly. "If it weren't for Cousin Stanley—"

By means as simple as this, murderers are made.

The chain of logic was so strong that moral questions hardly entered into the situation.

Great-Uncle Max was infinitely old. That he should live another year was out of the question. And if his son Stanley were to pre-decease him, then Harrison and Agatha Partridge would be his only living relatives. And Maxwell Harrison was as infinitely rich as he was infinitely old.

Therefore Stanley must die, and his death must be accomplished with a maximum of personal safety. The means for that safety were at hand. For the one completely practical purpose of a short-range time machine, Mr. Partridge had suddenly realized, was to provide an alibi for murder.

The chief difficulty was in contriving a portable version of the machine which would operate over a considerable period of time. The first model had a traveling range of two minutes. But by the end of the week, Mr. Partridge had constructed a portable time machine which was good for forty-five minutes. He needed nothing more save a sharp knife. There was, Mr. Partridge thought, something crudely horrifying about guns.

That Friday afternoon he entered Cousin Stanley's library at five o'clock. This was an hour when the eccentric man of wealth always devoted himself to quiet and scholarly contemplation of his treasures. The butler, Bracket, had been reluctant to announce him, but "Tell my cousin," Mr. Partridge said, "that I have discovered a new entry for his bibliography."

The most recent of Cousin Stanley's collecting manias was fiction based upon factual murders. He had already built up the definitive library on the subject. Soon he intended to publish the definitive bibliography. And the promise of a new item was an assured open-sesame.

The ponderous gruff joviality of Stanley Harrison's greeting took no heed of the odd apparatus he carried. Everyone knew that Mr. Partridge was a crackpot inventor.

"Bracket tells me you've got something for me," Cousin Stanley boomed. "Glad to hear it. Have a drink? What is it?"

"No thank you." Something in Mr. Partridge rebelled at accepting the hospitality of his victim. "A Hungarian friend of mine was mentioning a novel about one Bela Kiss."

"Kiss?" Cousin Stanley's face lit up with a broad beam. "Splendid! Never could see why no one used him before. Woman killer. Landru type. Always fascinating. Kept 'em in empty gasoline tins. Never could have been caught if there hadn't been a gasoline shortage. Constable thought he was hoarding, checked the tins, found corpses. Beautiful! Now if you'll give me the details—"

Cousin Stanley, pencil poised over a P-slip, leaned over the desk. And Mr. Partridge struck.

He had checked the anatomy of the blow, just as he had checked the name of an obscure but interesting murderer. The knife went truly home, and there was a gurgle and the terrible spastic twitch of dying flesh.

Mr. Partridge was now an heir and a murderer, but he had time to be conscious of neither fact. He went through his carefully rehearsed motions, his mind numb and blank. He latched the windows of the library and locked each door. This was to be an impossible crime, one that could never conceivably be proved on him or on any innocent.

Mr. Partridge stood beside the corpse in the midst of the perfectly locked room. It was four minutes past five. He screamed twice, very loudly, in an unrecognizably harsh voice. Then he plugged his portable instrument into a floor outlet and turned a switch.

It was four nineteen. Mr. Partridge unplugged his machine. The room was empty and the door open.

Mr. Partridge knew his way reasonably well about his cousin's house. He got out without meeting anyone. He tucked the machine into the rumble seat of his car and drove off to Faith Preston's. Toward the end of his long journey across town he carefully drove through a traffic light and received a citation noting the time as four-fifty. He reached Faith's at four fifty-four, ten minutes before the murder he had just committed.

Simon Ash had been up all Thursday night cataloging Stanley Harrison's latest acquisitions. Still he had risen at his usual hour that Friday to get through the morning's mail before his luncheon date with Faith. By four thirty that afternoon he was asleep on his feet.

He knew that his employer would be coming into the library in half an hour. And Stanley Harrison liked solitude for his daily five-o'clock gloating and meditation. But the secretary's work desk was hidden around a corner of the library's stacks, and no other physical hunger can be quite so dominantly compelling as the need for sleep.

Simon Ash's shaggy blond head sank onto the desk. His sleep-heavy hand shoved a pile of cards to the

floor, and his mind only faintly registered the thought that they would all have to be alphabetized again. He was too sleepy to think of anything but pleasant things, like the sailboat at Balboa which brightened his week-ends, or the hiking trip in the Sierras planned for his next vacation, or above all Faith. Faith the fresh and lovely and perfect, who would be his next month—

There was a smile on Simon's rugged face as he slept. But he woke with a harsh scream ringing in his head. He sprang to his feet and looked out from the stacks into the library.

The dead hulk that slumped over the desk with the hilt protruding from its back was unbelievable, but even more incredible was the other spectacle. There was a man. His back was toward Simon, but he seemed faintly familiar. He stood close to a complicated piece of gadgetry. There was the click of a switch.

Then there was nothing.

Nothing in the room at all but Simon Ash and an infinity of books. And their dead owner.

Ash ran to the desk. He tried to lift Stanley Harrison, tried to draw out the knife, then realized how hopeless was any attempt to revive life in that body. He reached for the phone, then stopped as he heard the loud knocking on the door.

Over the raps came the butler's voice. "Mr. Harrison! Are you all right, sir?" A pause, more knocking, and then, "Mr. Harrison! Let me in, sir! Are you all right?"

Simon raced to the door. It was locked, and he wasted almost a minute groping for the key at his feet, while the butler's entreaties became more urgent. At last Simon opened the door.

Bracket stared at him—stared at his sleep-red eyes, his blood-red hands, and beyond him at what sat at the desk. "Mr. Ash, sir," the butler gasped. "What have you done?"

Faith Preston was home, of course. No such essential element of Mr. Partridge's plan could have been left to chance. She worked best in the late afternoons, she said, when she was getting hungry for dinner; and she was working hard this week on some entries for a national contest in soap carving.

The late-afternoon sun was bright in her room, which you might call her studio if you were politely disposed, her garret if you were not. It picked out the few perfect touches of color in the scanty furnishings and converted them into bright aureoles surrounding the perfect form of Faith.

The radio was playing softly. She worked best to music, and that, too, was an integral portion of Mr. Partridge's plan.

Six minutes of unmemorable small talk—What are you working on? How lovely! And what have you been doing lately? Pottering around as usual. And the plans for the wedding?—and then Mr. Partridge held up a pleading hand for silence.

"When you hear the tone," the radio announced, "the time will be exactly five seconds before five o'clock."

"I forgot to wind my watch," Mr. Partridge observed casually. "I've been wondering all day exactly what time it was." He set his perfectly accurate watch.

He took a long breath. And now at last he knew that he was a new man. He was at last the Great Harrison Partridge.

"What's the matter?" Faith asked. "You look funny. Could I make you some tea?"

"No. Nothing. I'm all right." He walked around behind her and looked over her shoulder at the graceful nude emerging from her imprisonment in a cake of soap. "Exquisite, my dear," he observed. "Exquisite."

"I'm glad you like it. I'm never happy with female nudes; I don't think women sculptors ever are. But I wanted to try it."

Mr. Partridge ran a dry hot finger along the front of the soapy nymph. "A delightful texture," he remarked. "Almost as delightful as—" His tongue left the speech unfinished, but his hand rounded out the thought along Faith's cool neck and cheek.

"Why, Mr. Partridge!" She laughed.

The laugh was too much. One does not laugh at the Great Harrison Partridge, time traveler and perfect murderer. There was nothing in his plan that called for what followed. But something outside of any plans brought him to his knees, forced his arms around Faith's lithe body, pressed tumultuous words of incoherent ardor from his unwonted lips.

He saw fear growing in her eyes. He saw her hand dart out in instinctive defense and he wrested the knife from it. Then his own eyes glinted as he looked at the knife. It was little, ridiculously little. You could never plunge it through a man's back. But it was sharp—a throat, the artery of a wrist—

His muscles had relaxed for an instant. In that moment of non-vigilance, Faith had wrested herself free. She did not look backward. He heard the clatter of her steps down the stairs, and for a fraction of time the Great Harrison Partridge vanished and Mr. Partridge knew only fear. If he had aroused her hatred, if she should not swear

to his alibi—

The fear was soon over. He knew that no motives of enmity could cause Faith to swear to anything but the truth. She was honest. And the enmity itself would vanish when she realized what manner of man had chosen her for his own.

It was not the butler who opened the door to Faith. It was a uniformed police-man, who said, "Whaddaya want here?"

"I've got to see Simon . . . Mr. Ash," she blurted out.

The officer's expression changed. "C'mon," and he beckoned her down the long hall.

The tall young man in plain clothes said, "My name is Jackson. Won't you sit down? Cigarette?" She waved the pack away nervously. "Hinkle says you wanted to speak to Mr. Ash?"

"Yes, I—"

"Are you Miss Preston? His fiancée?"

"Yes." Her eyes widened. "How did you—Oh, has something happened to Simon?"

The young officer looked unhappy. "I'm afraid something has. Though he's perfectly safe at the moment. You see, he—Damn it all, I never have been able to break such news gracefully."

The uniformed officer broke in. "They took him down to headquarters, miss. You see, it looks like he bumped off his boss."

Faith did not quite faint, but the world was uncertain for a few minutes. She hardly heard Lieutenant Jackson's explanations or the message of comfort that Simon had left for her. She simply held very tight to her chair until the ordinary outlines of things came back and she could swallow again.

"Simon is innocent," she said firmly.

"I hope he is." Jackson sounded sincere. "I've never enjoyed pinning a murder on as decent-seeming a fellow as your fiancé. But the case, I'm afraid, is too clear. If he is innocent, he'll have to tell us a more plausible story than his first one. Murderers that turn a switch and vanish into thin air are not highly regarded by most juries."

Faith rose. The world was firm again, and one fact was clear. "Simon is inno-cent," she repeated. "And I'm going to prove that. Will you please tell me where I can get a detective?"

The uniformed officer laughed. Jackson started to, but hesitated. "Of course, Miss Preston, the city's paying my salary under the impression that I'm one. But I see what you mean: You want a freer investigator, who won't be hampered by such considerations as the official viewpoint, or even the facts of the case. Well, it's your privilege."

"Thank you. And how do I go about finding out?"

"Acting as an employment agency's a little out of my line. But rather than see you tie up with some shyster shamus, I'll make a recommendation, a man I've worked with, or against, on a half dozen cases. And I think this set-up is just impossible enough to appeal to him. He likes lost causes."

"Lost?" It is a dismal word.

"And in fairness I should add they aren't always lost after he tackles them. The name's O'Brien—Fergus O'Brien."

Mr. Partridge dined out that night. He could not face the harshness of Agatha's tongue. After dinner he made a round of the bars on the Strip and played the pleas-ant game of "If only they knew who was sitting beside them." He felt like Harun-al-Rashid, and liked the glow of the feeling.

On his way home he bought the next morning's *Times* at an intersection and pulled over to the curb to examine it. He had expected sensational headlines on the mysterious murder which had the police completely baffled. Instead he read:

#### SECRETARY SLAYS EMPLOYER

After a moment of shock the Great Harrison Partridge was himself again. He had not intended this. He would not willingly cause unnecessary pain to anyone. But lesser individuals who obstruct the plans of the great must take their medi-cine.

Mr. Partridge drove home, contented. He could spend the night on the cot in his workshop and thus see that much the less of Agatha. He clicked on the work-shop light and froze.

There was a man standing by the time machine. The original large machine. Mr. Partridge's feeling of superhuman self-confidence was enormous but easily undermined, like a vast balloon that needs only the smallest

pin prick to shatter it. For a moment he envisioned a scientific master mind of the police who had de-duced his method, tracked him here, and discovered his invention.

Then the figure turned.

Mr. Partridge's terror was only slightly lessened. For the figure was that of Mr. Partridge. There was a nightmare instant when he thought of Doppelganger, Poe's William Wilson, of dissociated personalities, of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Then this other Mr. Partridge cried aloud and hurried from the room, and the entering one collapsed.

A trough must follow a crest. And now blackness was the inexorable after-math of Mr. Partridge's elation. His successful murder, his ardor with Faith, his evening as Harun-al-Rashid, all vanished. He heard horrible noises in the room, and realized only after minutes that they were his own sobs.

Finally he pulled himself to his feet. He bathed his face in cold water from the sink, but still terror gnawed at him. Only one thing could reassure him. Only one thing could still convince him that he was the Great Harrison Partridge. And that was his noble machine. He touched it, caressed it as one might a fine and dearly loved horse.

Mr. Partridge was nervous, and he had been drinking more than his frugal customs allowed. His hand brushed the switch. He looked up and saw himself entering the door. He cried aloud and hurried from the room.

In the cool night air he slowly understood. He had accidentally sent himself back to the time he entered the room, so that upon entering he had seen himself. There was nothing more to it than that. But he made a careful mental note: Always take care, when using the machine, to avoid returning to a time-and-place where you already are. Never meet yourself. The dangers of psychological shock are too great.

Mr. Partridge felt better now. He had frightened himself, had he? Well, he would not be the last to tremble in fear of the Great Harrison Partridge.

Fergus O'Brien, the detective recommended—if you could call it that—by the police lieutenant, had his office in a ramshackle old building at Second and Spring. There were two, she imagined they were clients, in the waiting room ahead of Faith. One looked like the most sodden type of Skid Row loafer, and the elegant disarray of the other could mean nothing but the lower reaches of the upper layers of Hollywood.

The detective, when Faith finally saw him, inclined in costume toward the latter, but he wore sports clothes as though they were pleasantly comfortable, rather than as the badge of a caste. He was a thin young man, with sharpish features and very red hair. What you noticed most were his eyes—intensely green and alive with a restless curiosity. They made you feel that his work would never end until that curiosity had been satisfied.

He listened in silence to Faith's story, not moving save to make an occasional note. He was attentive and curious, but Faith's spirits sank as she saw the curiosity in the green eyes deaden to hopelessness. When she was through, he rose, lit a cigarette, and began pacing about the narrow inner office.

"I think better this way," he apologized. "I hope you don't mind. But what have I got to think about? The facts you've told me are better than a signed confession for any jury."

"But Simon is innocent," Faith insisted. "I know him, Mr. O'Brien. It isn't possible that he could have done a thing like that."

"I understand how you feel. But what have we got to go on besides your feelings? I'm not saying they're wrong; I'm trying to show you how the police and the court would look at it."

"But there wasn't any reason for Simon to kill Mr. Harrison. He had a good job. He liked it. We were going to get married. Now he hasn't any job or...or anything."

"I know." The detective continued to pace. "That's the one point you've got—absence of motive. But they've convicted without motive before this. And rightly enough. Anything can be a motive. The most outrageous and fascinating French murder since Landru was committed because the electric toaster didn't work right that morning. But let's look at motives. Mr. Harrison was a wealthy man; where does all that money go?"

"Simon helped draft his will. It all goes to libraries and foundations and things. A little to the servants, of course—"

"A little can turn the trick. But no near relatives?"

"His father's still alive. He's terribly old. But he's so rich himself that it'd be silly to leave him anything."

Fergus snapped his fingers. "Max Harrison! Of course. The superannuated robber-baron, to put it politely, who's been due to die any time these past ten years. And leave a mere handful of millions. There's a motive for you."

"How so?"

"The murderer could profit from Stanley Harrison's death, not directly if all his money goes to foundations, but indirectly from his father. Combination of two classic motives—profit and elimination. Who's next in line for old man Harrison's fortune?"

"I'm not sure. But I do know two people who are sort of second cousins or something. I think they're the only living relatives. Agatha and Harrison Partridge."

Fergus' eyes were brightening again. "At least it's a lead. Simon Ash had no motive and one Harrison Partridge had a honey. Which proves nothing, but gives you some place to start."

"Only—" Faith protested. "Only Mr. Partridge couldn't possibly have done it either."

Fergus stopped pacing. "Look, madam. I am willing to grant the unassailable innocence of one suspect on a client's word. Otherwise I'd never get clients. But if every individual who comes up is going to turn out to be someone in whose pureness of soul you have implicit faith and—"

"It isn't that. Not just that. The murder was just after five o'clock, the butler says. And Mr. Partridge was with me then, and I live way across town from Mr. Harrison's."

"You're sure of the time?"

"We heard the five-o'clock radio signal and he set his watch." Her voice was troubled and she tried not to remember the awful minutes afterward.

"Did he make a point of it?"

"Well . . . we were talking and he stopped and held up his hand and we listened to the bong."

"Hm-m-m." This statement seemed to strike the detective especially. "Well, there's still the sister. And anyway, the Partridges give me a point of departure, which is what I needed."

Faith looked at him hopefully. "Then you'll take the case?"

"I'll take it. God knows why. I don't want to raise your hopes, because if ever I saw an unpromising set-up it's this. But I'll take it. I think it's because I can't resist the pleasure of having a detective lieutenant shove a case into my lap."

"Bracket, was it usual for that door to be locked when Mr. Harrison was in the library?"

The butler's manner was imperfect; he could not decide whether a hired detective was a gentleman or a servant. "No," he said, politely enough but without a "sir." "No, it was most unusual."

"Did you notice if it was locked earlier?"

"It was not. I showed a visitor in shortly before the . . . before this dreadful thing happened."

"A visitor?" Fergus' eyes glinted. He began to have visions of all the elaborate possibilities of locking doors from the outside so that they seem locked on the inside. "And when was this?"

"Just on five o'clock, I thought. But the gentleman called here today to offer his sympathy, and he remarked, when I mentioned the subject, that he believed it to have been earlier."

"And who was this gentleman?"

"Mr. Harrison Partridge."

Hell, thought Fergus. There goes another possibility. It must have been much earlier if he was at Faith Preston's by five. And you can't tamper with radio time signals as you might with a clock. However—"Notice anything odd about Mr. Partridge? Anything in his manner?"

"Yesterday? No, I did not. He was carrying some curious contraption—I hardly noticed what. I imagine it was some recent invention of his which he wished to show to Mr. Harrison."

"He's an inventor, this Partridge? But you said yesterday. Anything odd about him today?"

"I don't know. It's difficult to describe. But there was something about him as though he had changed—grown, perhaps."

"Grown up?"

"No. Just grown."

"Now, Mr. Ash, this man you claim you saw—"

"Claim! Damn it, O'Brien, don't you believe me either?"

"Easy does it. The main thing for you is that Miss Preston believes you, and I'd say that's a lot. Now this man you saw, if that makes you any happier in this jail, did he remind you of anyone?"

"I don't know. It's bothered me. I didn't get a good look, but there was something familiar—"

"You say he had some sort of machine beside him?"

Simon Ash was suddenly excited. "You've got it. That's it."

"That's what?"

"Who it was. Or who I thought it was. Mr. Partridge. He's some sort of a cousin of Mr. Harrison's. Screwball inventor."

"Miss Preston, I'll have to ask you more questions. Too many signposts keep pointing one way, and even

if that way's a blind alley I've got to go up it. When Mr. Partridge called on you yesterday afternoon, what did he do to you?"

"Do to me?" Faith's voice wavered. "What on earth do you mean?"

"It was obvious from your manner earlier that there was something about that scene you wanted to forget."

"He—Oh, no, I can't. Must I tell you, Mr. O'Brien?"

"Simon Ash says the jail is not bad after what he's heard of jails, but still—"

"All right, I'll tell you. But it was strange. I...I suppose I've known for a long time that Mr. Partridge was—well, you might say in love with me. But he's so much older than I am and he's very quiet and never said anything about it and—well, there it was, and I never gave it much thought one way or another. But yesterday—it was as though...as though he were possessed. All at once it seemed to burst out and there he was making love to me. Frightfully, horribly, I couldn't stand it. I ran away. That's all there was to it. But it was terrible."

"You pitched me a honey this time, Andy."

Lieutenant Jackson grinned. "Thought you'd appreciate it, Fergus."

"But look: What have you got against Ash but the physical set-up of a locked room? The oldest cliché in murderous fiction, and not unheard of in fact."

"Show me how to unlock this one and your Mr. Ash is a free man."

"Set that aside for the moment. But look at my suspect, whom we will call, for the sake of novelty, X. X is a mild-mannered, inoffensive man who stands to gain several million by Harrison's death. He shows up at the library just before the murder. He's a crackpot inventor, and he has one of his gadgets with him. He shows an alibi-conscious awareness of time. He tries to get the butler to think he called earlier. He calls a witness's attention ostentatiously to a radio time signal. And most important of all, psychologically, he changes. He stops being mild-mannered and inoffensive. He goes on the make for a girl with physical violence. The butler describes him as a different man; he's grown."

Jackson drew a note pad toward him. "Your X sounds worth questioning, to say the least. But this reticence isn't like you, Fergus. Why all this innuendo? Why aren't you telling me to get out of here and arrest him?"

Fergus was not quite his cocky self. "Because, you see, that alibi I mentioned—well, it's good. I can't crack it. It's perfect."

Lieutenant Jackson shoved the pad away. "Run away and play," he said wearily.

"It couldn't be phony at the other end?" Fergus urged. "Some gadget planted to produce those screams at five o'clock to give a fake time for the murder?"

Jackson shook his head. "Harrison finished tea around four-thirty. Stomach analysis shows the food had been digested just about a half-hour. No, he died at five o'clock, all right."

"X's alibi's perfect, then," Fergus repeated. "Unless . . . unless—" His green eyes blinked with amazed realization. "Oh, my dear God—" he said softly.

Mr. Partridge was finding life pleasant to lead. Of course this was only a transitional stage. At present he was merely the—what was the transitional stage between cocoon and fully developed insect? Larva? Imago? Pupa? Outside of his own electro-inventive field, Mr. Partridge was not a well-informed man. That must be remedied. But let the metaphor go. Say simply that he was now in the transition between the meek worm that had been Mr. Partridge and the Great Harrison Partridge who would emerge triumphant when Great-Uncle Max died and Faith forgot that poor foolish doomed young man.

Even Agatha he could tolerate more easily in this pleasant state, although he had nonetheless established permanent living quarters in his workroom. She had felt her own pleasure at the prospect of being an heiress, but had expressed it most properly by buying sumptuous mourning for Cousin Stanley—the most expensive clothes that she had bought in the past decade. And her hard edges were possibly softening a little—or was that the pleasing haze, almost like that of drunkenness, which now tended to soften all hard edges for Mr. Partridge's delighted eyes?

It was in the midst of some such reverie as this that Mr. Partridge, lolling idly in his workshop with an unaccustomed tray of whisky, ice and siphon beside him, casually overheard the radio announce the result of the fourth race at Hialeah and noted abstractedly that a horse named Karabali had paid forty-eight dollars and sixty cents on a two-dollar ticket. He had almost forgotten the only half-registered fact when the phone rang.

He answered, and a grudging voice said, "You can sure pick 'em. That's damned near five grand you made on Karabali."

Mr. Partridge fumbled with vocal noises.

The voice went on, "What shall I do with it? Want to pick it up tonight or—"

Mr. Partridge had been making incredibly rapid mental calculations. "Leave it in my account for the moment," he said firmly. "Oh, and—I'm afraid I've mislaid your telephone number."

"Trinity 2897. Got any more hunches now?"

"Not at the moment. I'll let you know."

Mr. Partridge replaced the receiver and poured himself a stiff drink. When he had downed it, he went to the machine and traveled two hours back. He returned to the telephone, dialed TR 2897, and said, "I wish to place a bet on the fourth race at Hialeah."

The same voice said, "And who're you?"

"Partridge. Harrison Partridge."

"Look, brother. I don't take bets by phone unless I see some cash first, see?"

Mr. Partridge hastily recalculated. As a result the next half hour was as packed with action as the final moments of his great plan. He learned about accounts, he ascertained the bookmaker's address, he hurried to his bank and drew out an impressive five hundred dollars which he could ill spare, and he opened his account and placed a two-hundred-dollar bet which excited nothing but a badly concealed derision.

Then he took a long walk and mused over the problem. He recalled happen-ing on a story once in some magazine which proved that you could not use knowl-edge from the future of the outcome of races to make your fortune, because by interfering with your bet you would change the odds and alter the future. But he was not plucking from the future, he was going back into the past. The odds he had heard were already affected by what he had done. From his subjective point of view, he learned the result of his actions before he performed them. But in the objective physical temporospatial world, he performed those actions quite nor-mally and correctly before their results.

Mr. Partridge stopped dead on the sidewalk and a strolling couple ran head-long into him. He scarcely noticed the collision. He had had a dreadful thought. The sole acknowledged motive for his murder of Cousin Stanley had been to secure money for his researches. Now he learned that his machine, even in its present imperfect form, could provide him with untold money.

He had never needed to murder at all.

"My dearest Maureen," Fergus announced at the breakfast table, "I have discov-ered the world's first successful time machine."

His sister showed no signs of being impressed. "Have some more tomato juice," she suggested. "Want some tabasco in it? I didn't know that the delusions could survive into the hangover."

"But, Macushla," Fergus protested, "you've just listened to an announcement that no woman on earth has ever heard before."

"Fergus O'Brien, Mad Scientist." Maureen shook her head. "It isn't a role I'd cast you for. Sorry."

"If you'd listen before you crack wise, I said 'discovered.' Not 'invented.' It's the damndest thing that's ever happened to me in business. It hit me in a flash while I was talking to Andy. It's the perfect and only possible solution to a case. And who will ever believe me? Do you wonder that I went out and saturated myself last night?"

Maureen frowned. "You *mean* this?"

"It's the McCoy. Listen." And he briefly outlined the case. "Now what sticks out like a sore thumb is this: Harrison Partridge establishing an alibi. The radio time signal, the talk with the butler—I'll even lay odds that the murderer himself gave those screams so there'd be no question as to time of death. Then you rub up against the fact that the alibi, like the horrendous dream of the young girl from Peru, is perfectly true.

"But what does an alibi mean? It's my own nomination for the most misused word in the language. It's come to mean a disproof, an excuse. But strictly it means nothing but *elsewhere*. You know the classic gag: 'I wasn't there, this isn't the woman, and, anyway, she gave in.' Well, of those three redundant excuses, only the first is an alibi, an *elsewhere* statement. Now Partridge's claim of being else-where is true enough. And even if we could remove him from elsewhere and put him literally on the spot, he could say: 'I couldn't have left the room after the murder; the doors were all locked on the inside.' Sure he couldn't—not *at that time*. And his excuse is not an *elsewhere*, but an *elsewhen*."

Maureen refilled his coffee cup and her own. "Hush up a minute and let me think it over." At last she nodded slowly. "And he's an eccentric inventor and when the butler saw him he was carrying one of his gadgets."

"Which he still had when Simon Ash saw him vanish. He committed the mur-der, locked the doors, went back in time, walked out through them in their un-locked past, and went off to hear the five-o'clock radio bong at Faith Preston's."

"But you can't try to sell the police on that. Not even Andy."

"I know. Damn it, I know."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to see Mr. Harrison Partridge. And I'm going to ask for an encore."

"Quite an establishment you've got here," Fergus observed to the plump bald little inventor.

Mr. Partridge smiled courteously. "I amuse myself with my small experiments," he admitted.

"I'm afraid I'm not much aware of the wonders of modern science. I'm looking forward to the more spectacular marvels, spaceships for instance, or time machines. But that wasn't what I came to talk about. Miss Preston tells me you're a friend of hers. I'm sure you're in sympathy with this attempt of hers to free young Ash."

"Oh, naturally. Most naturally. Anything that I can do to be of assistance—"

"It's just the most routine sort of question, but I'm groping for a lead. Now, aside from Ash and the butler, you seem to have been the last person to see Harrison alive. Could you tell me anything about him? How was he?"

"Perfectly normal, so far as I could observe. We talked about a new item which I had unearthed for his bibliography, and he expressed some small dissatisfaction with Ash's cataloging of late. I believe they had had words on the matter earlier."

"Bracket says you had one of your inventions with you?"

"Yes, a new, I thought, and highly improved frame for photostating rare books. My cousin, however, pointed out that the same improvements had recently been made by an Austrian *émigré* manufacturer. I abandoned the idea and reluctantly took apart my model."

"A shame. But that's part of the inventor's life, isn't it?"

"All too true. Was there anything else you wished to ask me?"

"No. Nothing really." There was an awkward pause. The smell of whisky was in the air, but Mr. Partridge proffered no hospitality. "Funny the results a murder will have, isn't it? To think how this frightful fact will benefit cancer research."

"Cancer research?" Mr. Partridge wrinkled his brows. "I did not know that that was among Stanley's beneficiaries."

"Not your cousin's, no. But Miss Preston tells me that old Max Harrison has decided that since his only direct descendant is dead, his fortune might as well go to the world. He's planning to set up a medical foundation to rival Rockefeller's, and specializing in cancer. I know his lawyer slightly; he mentioned he's going out there tomorrow."

"Indeed," said Mr. Partridge evenly.

Fergus paced. "If you can think of anything, Mr. Partridge, let me know. This seems like the perfect crime at last. A magnificent piece of work, if you can look at it like that." He looked around the room. "Excellent small workshop you've got here. You can imagine almost anything coming out of it."

"Even," Mr. Partridge ventured, "your spaceships and time machines?"

"Hardly a spaceship," said Fergus.

Mr. Partridge smiled as the young detective departed. He had, he thought, carried off a difficult interview in a masterly fashion. How neatly he had slipped in that creative bit about Stanley's dissatisfaction with Ash! How brilliantly he had improvised a plausible excuse for the machine he was carrying!

Not that the young man could have suspected anything. It was patently the most routine visit. It was almost a pity that this was the case. How pleasant it would be to fence with a detective—master against master. To have a Javert, a Porfir, a Maigret on his trail and to admire the brilliance with which the Great Harrison Partridge should baffle him.

Perhaps the perfect criminal should be suspected, even known, and yet unattainable—

The pleasure of this parrying encounter confirmed him in the belief that had grown in him overnight. It is true that it was a pity that Stanley Harrison had died needlessly. Mr. Partridge's reasoning had slipped for once; murder for profit had not been an essential part of the plan.

And yet what great work had ever been accomplished without death? Does not the bell ring the truer for the blood of the hapless workmen? Did not the ancients wisely believe that greatness must be founded upon a sacrifice? Not self-sacrifice, in the stupid Christian perversion of that belief, but a true sacrifice of another's flesh and blood.

So Stanley Harrison was the needful sacrifice from which should arise the Great Harrison Partridge. And were its effects not already visible? Would he be what he was today, would he so much as have emerged from the cocoon, purely by virtue of his discovery?

No, it was his great and irretrievable deed, the perfection of his crime, that had molded him. In blood is

greatness.

That ridiculous young man, prating of the perfection of the crime and never dreaming that—

Mr. Partridge paused and reviewed the conversation. There had twice been that curious insistence upon time machines. Then he had said—what was it?—"The crime was a magnificent piece of work," and then, "You can imagine almost anything coming out of this workshop." And the surprising news of Great-Uncle Max's new will—

Mr. Partridge smiled happily. He had been unpardonably dense. Here was his Javert, his Porfir. The young detective did indeed suspect him. And the reference to Max had been a temptation, a trap. The detective could not know how unneccessary that fortune had now become. He had thought to lure him into giving away his hand by an attempt at another crime.

And yet, was any fortune ever unnecessary? And a challenge like that—so direct a challenge—could one resist it?

Mr. Partridge found himself considering all the difficulties. Great-Uncle Max would have to be murdered today, if he planned on seeing his lawyer tomorrow. The sooner the better. Perhaps his habitual after-lunch siesta would be the best time. He was always alone then, dozing in his favorite corner of that large estate in the hills.

Bother! A snag. No electric plugs there. The portable model was out. And yet—Yes, of course. It could be done the other way. With Stanley, he had committed his crime, then gone back and prepared his alibi. But here he could just as well establish the alibi, then go back and commit the murder, sending himself back by the large machine here with wider range. No need for the locked-room effect. That was pleasing, but not essential.

An alibi for one o'clock in the afternoon. He did not care to use Faith again. He did not want to see her in his larval stage. He might obtain another traffic ticket. Surely the police would be as good as—

The police. But how perfect. Ideal. To go to headquarters and ask to see the detective working on the Harrison case. Tell him, as a remembered afterthought, about Cousin Stanley's supposed quarrel with Ash. Be with him at the time Great-Uncle Max is to be murdered.

At twelve thirty Mr. Partridge left his house for the central police station.

Fergus could hear the old man's snores from his coign of vigilance. Getting into Maxwell Harrison's hermitlike retreat had been a simple job. The newspapers had for years so thoroughly covered the old boy's peculiarities that you knew in advance all you needed to know—his daily habits, his loathing for bodyguards, his favorite spot for napping.

The sun was warm and the hills were peaceful. There was a purling stream at the deep bottom of the gully beside Fergus. Old Maxwell Harrison did well to sleep in such perfect solitude.

Fergus was on his third cigarette before he heard a sound. It was a very little sound, the turning of a pebble, perhaps; but here in this loneliness any sound that was not a snore or a stream seemed infinitely loud.

Fergus flipped his cigarette into the depths of the gully and moved, as noise-lessly as was possible, toward the sound, screening himself behind scraggly bushes.

The sight, even though expected, was nonetheless startling in this quiet re-treat: a plump bald man of middle age advancing on tiptoe with a long knife gleaming in his upraised hand.

Fergus flung himself forward. His left hand caught the knife-brandishing wrist and his right pinioned Mr. Partridge's other arm behind him. The face of Mr. Partridge, that had been so bland a mask of serene exaltation as he advanced to his prey, twisted itself into something between rage and terror.

His body twisted itself, too. It was an instinctive, untrained movement, but timed so nicely by accident that it tore his knife hand free from Fergus' grip and allowed it to plunge downward.

The twist of Fergus' body was deft and conscious, but it was not quite enough to avoid a stinging flesh wound in the shoulder. He felt warm blood trickling down his back. Involuntarily he released his grip on Mr. Partridge's other arm.

Mr. Partridge hesitated for a moment, as though uncertain whether his knife should taste of Great-Uncle Max or first dispose of Fergus. The hesitation was understandable, but fatal. Fergus sprang forward in a flying tackle aimed at Mr. Partridge's knees. Mr. Partridge lifted his foot to kick that advancing green-eyed face. He swung and felt his balance going. Then the detective's shoulder struck him. He was toppling, falling over backward, falling, falling—

The old man was still snoring when Fergus returned from his climb down the gully. There was no doubt that Harrison Partridge was dead. No living head could loll so limply on its neck.

And Fergus had killed him. Call it an accident, call it self-defense, call it what you will. Fergus had brought him to a trap, and in that trap he had died.

The brand of Cain may be worn in varying manners. To Mr. Partridge it had assumed the guise of an inspiring panache, a banner with a strange device. But Fergus wore his brand with a difference.

He could not blame himself morally, perhaps, for Mr. Partridge's death. But he could blame himself for professional failure in that death. He had no more proof than before to free Simon Ash, and he had burdened himself with a killing.

For murder can spread in concentric circles, and Fergus O'Brien, who had set out to trap a murderer, now found himself being one.

Fergus hesitated in front of Mr. Partridge's workshop. It was his last chance. There might be evidence here—the machine itself or some document that could prove his theory even to the skeptical eye of Detective Lieutenant A. Jackson. House-breaking would be a small offense to add to his record now. The window on the left, he thought—

"Hi!" said Lieutenant Jackson cheerfully. "You on his trail, too?"

Fergus tried to seem his usual jaunty self. "Hi, Andy. So you've finally got around to suspecting Partridge?"

"Is he your mysterious X? I thought he might be."

"And that's what brings you out here?"

"No. He roused my professional suspicions all by himself. Came into the office an hour ago with the damndest cock-and-bull story about some vital evidence he'd forgotten. Stanley Harrison's last words, it seems, were about a quarrel with Simon Ash. It didn't ring good—seemed like a deliberate effort to strengthen the case against Ash. As soon as I could get free, I decided to come out and have a further chat with the lad."

"I doubt if he's home," said Fergus.

"We can try." Jackson rapped on the door of the workshop. It was opened by Mr. Partridge.

Mr. Partridge held in one hand the remains of a large open-face ham sandwich. When he had opened the door, he picked up with the other hand the remains of a large whisky and soda. He needed sustenance before this bright new adventure. Fresh light gleamed in his eyes as he saw the two men standing there. His Javert! Two Javerts! The unofficial detective who had so brilliantly challenged him, and the official one who was to provide his alibi.

He hardly heeded the opening words of the official detective nor the look of dazed bewilderment on the face of the other. He opened his lips and the Great Harrison Partridge, shedding the last vestigial vestments of the cocoon, spoke:

"You may know the truth for what good it will do you. The life of the man Ash means nothing to me. I can triumph over him even though he live. I killed Stanley Harrison. Take that statement and do with it what you can. I know that an uncorroborated confession is useless to you. If you can prove it, you may have me. And I shall soon commit another sacrifice, and you are powerless to stop me. Because, you see, you are already too late." He laughed softly.

Mr. Partridge closed the door and locked it. He finished the sandwich and the whisky, hardly noticing the poundings on the door. He picked up the knife and went to his machine. His face was a bland mask of serene exaltation.

Lieutenant Jackson hurled himself against the door, a second too late. It was a matter of minutes before he and a finally aroused Fergus had broken it down.

"He's gone," Jackson stated puzzledly. "There must be a trick exit somewhere."

"'Locked room,' " Fergus murmured. His shoulder ached, and the charge against the door had set it bleeding again.

"What's that?"

"Nothing. Look, Andy. When do you go off duty?"

"Strictly speaking, I'm off now. I was making this checkup on my own time."

"Then let us, in the name of seventeen assorted demigods of drunkenness, go drown our confusions."

Fergus was still asleep when Lieutenant Jackson's phone call came the next morning. His sister woke him, and watched him come into acute and painful wakefulness as he listened, nodding and muttering, "Yes," or "I'll be—"

Maureen waited till he had hung up, groped about, and found and lighted a cigarette. Then she said, "Well?"

"Remember that Harrison case I was telling you about yesterday?"

"The time-machine stuff? Yes."

"My murderer, Mr. Partridge—they found him in a gully out on his great-uncle's estate. Apparently slipped and killed himself while attempting his second murder—that's the way Andy sees it. Had a knife with him. So, in view of that and a sort of confession he made yesterday, Andy's turning Simon Ash loose. He still doesn't see how Partridge worked the first murder, but he doesn't have to bring it into court now."

"Well? What's the matter? Isn't that fine?"

"Matter? Look, Maureen Macushla. I killed Partridge. I didn't mean to, and maybe you could call it justifiable; but I did. I killed him at one o'clock yesterday afternoon. Andy and I saw him at two; he was then eating a ham sandwich and drinking whisky. The stomach analysis proves that he died half an hour after that meal, when I was with Andy starting out on a bender of bewilderment. So you see?"

"You mean he went back afterward to kill his uncle and then you . . . you saw him after you'd killed him only before he went back to be killed? Oh, how awful."

"Not just that, my sweeting. This is the humor of it: The time alibi, the elsewhere that gave the perfect cover up for Partridge's murder—it gives exactly the same ideal alibi to his own murderer."

Maureen started to speak and stopped. "Oh!" she gasped.

"What?"

"The time machine. It must still be there—somewhere—mustn't it? Shouldn't you—"

Fergus laughed, and not at comedy. "That's the payoff of perfection on this opus. I gather Partridge and his sister didn't love each other too dearly. You know what her first reaction was to the news of his death? After one official tear and one official sob, she went and smashed the hell out of his workshop."