

# ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

*including BLACK MASK MAGAZINE*

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*The best of the new and the best of the old*

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## THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING MANUSCRIPT

*Let us recall a story we first told you in QUEEN'S QUORUM (of beloved memory) . . . Fifty years after the publication in 1895 of M. P. Shiel's PRINCE ZALESKI, which contained only three short stories, Mr. Shiel revived his fin-de-siècle sleuth by writing a fourth short story about the eccentric Prince. This fourth, and last, Zaleski story was written in October 1945, when the author was past 80, and its creation nearly cost Mr. Shiel his life. When the manuscript was finished, the author walked to Horsham post office to mail it to EQMM's First Annual Contest. Apparently the effort was too much for that grand old man: he fainted and was taken to a hospital. When he recovered, Mr. Shiel was uncertain whether or not he had actually mailed the manuscript. In any event, the story never reached the offices of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.*

*Mr. Shiel died on February 17, 1947, and the mystery of the missing manuscript seemed destined to remain a mystery forever. As we commented at that time, a truly precious possession — the only original Prince Zaleski manuscript extant — was lost to the world.*

*But the tale was not told.*

*Seven years passed after the writing of the fourth Zaleski story. Late in 1952 we received a letter from John Gawsworth, the distinguished English poet and the literary executor of M. P. Shiel. It seemed that the manuscript Mr. Shiel had tried to mail to EQMM in 1945 was not the original handwritten one but the original typescript prepared by the author's secretary or secretarial service. Mr. Gawsworth was sure of this because among the Shiel literary effects he had found a carbon copy of that typescript. Would we still be interested in the fourth adventure of Prince Zaleski? We would indeed! — and asked Mr. Gawsworth to send it post-haste, as an entry in EQMM's Eighth Annual Contest. Mr. Gawsworth did some editing of the duplicate typescript, chiefly cutting it and changing the end so that Prince Zaleski was restored to his original status of arm-chair detective; but the result, as Mr. Gawsworth himself expressed it, "is 98 per cent the Old Master."*

*So the return of Prince Zaleski was finally consummated — seven years after its transatlantic voyage was supposed to have begun — and we were happy and honored to give the story a Special Posthumous Award.*

*But still the tale was not told.*

Two more years passed. Early in 1954 we got a telephone call from David A. Randall, head of the rare book department at Scribner's, who had just received an advance copy of Catalogue 135 from the British booksellers, Elkin Mathews, Ltd. Mr. Randall read us over the phone Item 247 — which offered, believe it or not, the "original signed holograph manuscript" of the fourth Prince Zaleski story! It seemed that Mr. Gawsorth had made another discovery among the Shiel literary effects — the original handwritten version of "The Return of Prince Zaleski" from which the typescript had been copied.

Of course you know what happened next. Surely, of all people in the world, we had the closest tie to that original manuscript. We asked Mr. Randall to cable its purchase, and in due course the manuscript came into our hands. It consists of 45 small pages, written throughout in Mr. Shiel's fascinating, though slightly archaic, handwriting. And now the only holograph Prince Zaleski manuscript is part of the Ellery Queen collection; now, after nine years, the tale is told and a truly precious possession is no longer lost to the world.

As to the story itself, we hope you will welcome it to your heart in true connoisseur spirit. Remember that it was written by the Old Master a half century after the original Zaleski tales. And the Old Master was near the end of his brilliant career. You will find some of the redolent romanticism of the earlier tales, some of the bizarre bravado of style and flamboyant felony of conception. For, whatever his age, M. P. Shiel was himself an "original": his work was completely individual — in the sleuth genre he was *sui generis*.

## THE RETURN OF PRINCE ZALESKI

by M. P. SHIEL

THE MIST DRIBBLED A LITTLE DRIZZLE IN BITTER MOOD AS THE MURENA funeral moved through a London that turned up coat collars in response to that October blur. To Captain Campos of the Spanish Embassy, who was with me in my cab, I remarked, "All these people going about their little businesses have in them the same one care — an apprehension of death, a sense of *I may be the next*."

"Of a certainty," my diplomat friend answered, "evil is in the air — corrup-

tion like the offensive breath of vampires, and ghouls, and bats of darkness, that foully suck the blood of carcasses. This killing of Murena is the thirteenth within a month, and the seventh murder of a Spaniard."

"Inefficiency of the police!" I said. "Moreover, I think, in every case — your seven Spaniards and our six Londoners — the monster has left a note with his victim — as if the murderer were challenging us to catch him."

"Say, Señor Shiel," Campos suddenly said, "why should *you* not intervene? It is Inspector Chamberlain's suggestion to us that you approach your friend, Prince Zaleski, and ask his help."

"Well, well," I answered, "but then Zaleski, you understand, is a man who has deliberately elected to live a hermit existence. No man sees his face but his Nubian servant, Ham, who keeps his organ's wind-chests going and cooks his porridge. His address is a Mommouthshire abbey — mainly a ruin, Zaleski and Ham being its hermit monks. Still, I will think of it."

And I did. After watching that wounded body of Juan Murena lowered into its solitary crib, I wrote to Prince Zaleski, who presently sent me a "Come" of invitation; and, not without peril, I clambered over broken stone in a growing gloom to that apartment on high that was my anchorite's habitat, whereupon Zaleski sprang to welcome me in his brisk way, saying: "The very face I craved to see! You know, my friend, how Newton assumed that the velocity of light is infinite, and all we like geese have gone agabbling after. I have been thinking . . . You will now pull my semantic reactions into harmony with the facts, and make of me an intellect clean-shaven."

"I have come on a practical matter," I mentioned.

And he: "I *know* what you have come on; for my Ham, who reads 'the papers,' has told me of what is now rousing the outside world to commotion. But you will hardly, I think, find me eager to pit my wits against the lady's, who without doubt is an egregious priestess of outrage."

"Lady!" I exclaimed. "You say to me, Zaleski, that these demoniacal crimes are being committed by a woman?"

He answered, "Are they not womanly crimes? Half of them, anyway. There is a certain needless world-challenge, self-assertiveness, which is female. She even dares to publish her address."

Where did she dare? When? But now in came Ham, bearing trays, and we sat under the moonshine of a hanging *lampas* to one of Zaleski's repasts. That night long we talked of velocities, of space-time, entropy, and of Newton's *hypotheses non fingo* — of anything, in fact, but what was really interesting me.

It was the following afternoon before I could broach my subject again; when I said to Zaleski: "But, after all, in respect to those atrocities, it is a question of rescuing yet other lives from atrocity, so that the notion of duty comes in."

"Let it be so, then," he answered. "The relation between the woman, or

her wraith, and me, and between her wraith and Ham, is nearer than you know — whatever species of thing a 'wraith' may be. Certainly she is dreadful, and I have a dread of her, as I frankly said to one Chamberlain of the police when he succeeded in coming here. But you, Shiel, tell me the facts as you know them; perhaps we two will see some way out."

Whereupon I spent two hours of telling, with Zaleski reclining, smoking a narghile, his eyes shut, save when he sat sharply up with increasing interest. I began at the end with visiting Juan Murena, Press Secretary of the new Spanish King. Murena was in a waltzing mood that night at his Embassy's ball; he was talking in the ballroom with a group (two of the group being friends of mine), and he led the talk, his theme being the New Spain, as it often was, claiming Spain would be a World Power again and was romping straight to own an Empire such as it never before had owned. "I at least," he declared, "mean to live to see it." But he did not; just then a message came to him to say that somebody in the Code Writer's Room was waiting to see him, and thither Murena's doomed feet took him. That "somebody" was later said to be "a young man in an opera cloak." Whoever he was, there in that Code Writer's Room the patriotic Murena was found butchered, ghastly, his throat gashed, and in his grasp a scrap of paper scribbled on, as in all previous cases.

A reproduction of this scrap, taken from an article in the *Times* commenting on the crime, I handed to Zaleski. The scrap, as reproduced, read as follows:

My sting to the plotters. And you, investigating heads, leave off investigating. You think me weak enough to be netted by you? But the Mother is wise and wary, though venturesome to the point of challenging the penetrating head even dashing into showing the daring Gen her daring to say, "Here I am," showing her disdainful audacity.



"You would learn its meaning, Shiel?" Zaleski laid the newspaper clipping between us upon a small inlaid table of Algerian workmanship. "It is quite simple. Here we have a mother and a son, the son an adorer of the mother, who thinks it well to mystify the *investigating heads* who in turn have the fixed idea that the murders are all perpetrated by one person — to mystify those heads by embarrassing that fixed idea of theirs with a new concept that the murders may possibly have been done by two persons. Those *heads* are now certain to revert with even more fixity to the conviction that the perpetrator is one person — now certain to conclude that two is an untrue ruse of the perpetrator to disburden himself of half his criminality. It is rather a deep move of the mother; she even gives her address in cipher. The son, it appears, does not quite like giving an address; but then, in giving it, as in everything, he is acting under her direction. However, the reporter of the *Times* catches no glimpse of this giving of an address for the reason that his intellect is all occupied with the idea that the writer of the note was scribbling about a *moth*, whereas he was scribbling about a *Mother* — just the capital *M* alone should prove that *Mother* was meant, not *moth*. And the *her* of the script! It is not, as a matter of fact, the female moth that has the *daring* to *dash* itself into the *penetrating heat* (the reporter thinks *hea* to mean *heat*) of a candle's flame! It appears that the female moth emits a luminosity to tempt the male's mentation, as the female glowworm does, so that when the male catches sight of a light of Man, he thinks within himself, 'Here, by Heaven, is femininity!' and perniciously dashes himself to a flaming death. So, if *moth* was really meant in the script, not *her* but *him* should have been written! Nor is it as to *moth* and *Mother* alone that we have confusion in the reporter's *investigating head*: for, space being scanty in the scrap of paper, when the writer was near the end of some lines he made an estimate, in a dim light, as to whether he could get the next word in on that line, and ventured; but in three cases he failed to get the whole word in, so left out a last letter, or two, of the word. Hence in the reproduction of the note we have the syncopations *Moth*, *hea*, and *len*, the reporter thinking that the writer meant *moth*, *heat*, and *lent*, the whole for the reporter reading:

My sting to the plotters. And you, investigating heads, leave off investigating. You think me *weak* enough to be netted by you? But the *Moth* is wise and wary, though venturesome to the *point* of challenging the penetrating heat, even dashing into showing the *daring lent* her, *daring* to say, 'Here I am,' showing her disdainful audacity.

Then follows the curious geometric drawing, like a signature, giving her address and, I think, her name. But to read *heat* for *hea* can only be due to a preoccupation with the conviction that *Moth* means, not mother, but moth: for *hea* we should read, I easily see, not *heat*, but *head*, since we already have

*investigating heads* to guide us, nor can the heat of a candle's flame be described as *penetrating*. As for *len*, to read *lent* seems to me merely feeble. Shakespeare wrote 'The heavens such grace did lend her,' but why did the heavens lend? Why not give? Shakespeare wrote 'lend' simply because 'lend' happens to rhyme with commend. But to make *len* mean *lent*, the reporter actually assumes and adds a comma after *her* — a comma which is not in the reproduction of the note — ignoring that a lens is in the drawing of the signature. So for *len* I read, not *lent*, but *lens*, and I get for the whole note as follows:

My sting to the plotters. And you, investigating heads, leave off investigating. You think me *weak* enough to be netted by you? But the Mother is wise and wary, though venturesome to the *point* of challenging the penetrating head, even dashing into showing the daring *lens*, her daring to say, 'Here I am,' showing her disdainful audacity.

As to the signature, that is clearly the drawing of a double-convex lens having three parallel rays striking upon it, these meeting, as usual, at the principal focus of the lens. If the signature is in fact an address, these three rays can only be three streets, as the two curved sides of the lens can only be crescents; and the fact that the middle line is not continued through the center of the lens demonstrates that the drawing is not of a lens of glass or of light-rays, but depicts a system of streets. Moreover, certain words in the script are underlined, where the underlining is senseless, unless it means to emphasize a pun or double-meaning that indicates name and address: *weak* (or week), for instance, is underlined; *point* is underlined; *len* is underlined; and since *Here I am* means the writer's address, and since the number seven is associated with week, I read the hidden message of the signature as 'Mrs. Point, or Pointer, Number 7 Lens Street, or, more likely, Lens Crescent.' "

"But," I exclaimed, "that is the address of my friend, Lady Poynting — 7 Lens Crescent!"

"Ah?" said Zaleski, quiet satisfaction in his tone.

"Yes, widow of the Marquess of Markstow, a former Ambassador to Madrid, and then widow of Sir Peter Poynting, who was her first husband's attaché. She is a Spaniard, passionate and artistic, and every fourth Sunday she holds a reception that Society scrambles to attend. And yes! — she has a son, Carlos, by her first husband. He is the present Marquess of Markstow."

Zaleski, his eyes closed, now musingly said, "I divine, I know, her; for in some species of reverie six midnights ago I somehow experienced the visit of the apparition of a lady, and — in some way or other — I received the impression that this lady and I were destined to come into a mortal combat of wits. I wonder . . . it may have been no more than fancy, but I think that this Lady Poynting is overpatriotic."

"Well, hardly," I answered; "and yet I do not know, for the lady is undoubtedly strange. One Sunday I was the first of her guests to arrive and on approaching the chair in which she was seated, expected some species of greeting from her; but none came; and I had no idea that she might be asleep, for her eyes were open; but then she breathed audibly, like a person who is asleep, though staring at me."

And Zaleski: "Abnormal, you see. What is she like, this lady?"

"Forty-five to fifty years old, tall, thin, colorless, dry as chips, some little faded hairs at the lip corners; some of her tones quite bass in quality; her breath has a faint odor of humanity, of damp earth, of oak leaves, and she gives an impression of shivering or fluttering — whether she actually shivers I don't know, but somehow she gives that impression."

"But *the* characteristic of her face," Zaleski continued, his eyes still closed, in the voice of one entranced, "is that the top of her forehead, the bottom of her forehead, the lips, and the chin are all in one straight line when seen in profile — with only the nose projecting beyond the dead verticality of the face. And she has a mania which she preaches. Am I not right?"

"Yes," I answered, "her face is certainly as you say; and I suppose that her antipathy to all her countrymen, save Carlists, might be called a mania."

"So that," Zaleski said, "while we two are comfortably chatting here, the life of some outcast in the East End of London is steadily approaching death's door. It seems that we should make a move, Shiel."

Zaleski spread a map of London before me; a ring in red ink marked a small central area.

"Make a move?" I asked.

"Yes, for you must understand that, unless we successfully intervene, an assassination will take place tomorrow at about two hours after midnight on a certain Dene Street, near a certain charity Shelter there," — he pointed to the spot — "as the dates, hours, and places of the murders of the six London outcasts tell us. For the murderer's motive in assassinating those Londoners of both sexes and of the lowest class is not obscure, but stares us in the face: that motive is simply to throw dust in the eyes, and conceal the motive for the assassination of the seven Spaniards; for all the murders are either of London prostitutes and beggars, or of Spaniards, with the Spaniards being all officials, politicians, people of influence, serving the new King. The motive for killing them would have been evident, if their killings were not complicated, obscured, by the murders of London wastrels. And the *order* in which the murders have occurred cries out for our attention: first a Spaniard, *then* a London prostitute, beggar, or thief, like a sound and its echo, the Spaniards being 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, while the Londoners were 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12. Now, if it is assumed, as it has been, that the murders were all committed by one person,



how inscrutable the motive of that person becomes! But you and I now perceive that the murders were done by two persons — by a son and by a mother, the mother's to make the motive of the son's inscrutable. Hence our need for making a move at once, for as I have noted and pointed out, all the murders of Londoners have occurred in the early-morning hours near a charity Shelter on Dene Street, of which Shelter the woman-assassin is, I feel sure, an official; she poses, no doubt, as a philanthropist, and is thus above suspicion."

Now Zaleski called aloud: "Ham, come!"

It was with a face of care that the Negro appeared; he had probably been listening to our talk, for he addressed his master, saying, "Do not go to her!"

"But suppose I thought that I must, Ham," — from the Prince.

And Ham: "Oh, good God, do not! I have a feeling — I have seen her face in a dream. Go and you never come back! Hear me this once — do not go!"

"It is true there is danger," Zaleski said smiling. It was clear that he was pleased by his servant's loyal concern. "But it is not danger to us, Ham."

The Prince moved to his ivory escritoire where he penned a few words on a sheet of paper and handed it to his anxious Ham, with the order to take my trap and drive with the message in all haste to the nearest telegraph office.

"That message," he said, resuming his place amid the cushions, "is the last word on the murders, and will, no doubt, insure their end. And now, Shiel, let us sit together and talk of more cosmic matters."

"But this murder that is to occur!" I protested.

"Quite so," said Zaleski calmly. "If our good Inspector Chamberlain is swift, it will be avoided. I have suggested a decoy to him — to surround Dene Street until dawn — and a search warrant for 7 Lens Crescent. Be at ease, Shiel — *la justice dérangerà ton enfer*. This little affair is over. Let us now go on to matters of real concern, I beg. I see you, alas, far too seldom."

The suicide of Lady Poynting by a knife thrust to the heart when she was cornered in a mews off Dene Street, and the execution of her son, the Marquess of Markstow, with a silken rope, as befitted his rank, after Inspector Chamberlain had secured ample evidences of guilt in their rooms, including even a list of future victims, were "Society Sensations" that kept chatter long busy.

The *Times* announcing that a grateful King of Spain had bestowed the Golden Fleece on Zaleski, I wrote to congratulate him. He replied: "I sent it back, suggesting your name. Mundane affairs are not for me. Come soon, with or without a problem. How do you explain Wallace's *On Miracles* or that Ham is mastering the Art of the Omelette?"

But, alas, I was destined never to see my friend again . . .