

**AM I MY DARK
BROTHER'S KEEPER?**



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ROG PHILLIPS



J paused at the edge of the vacuous faced gaping crowd held back by the police on the sidewalk and lit a cigarette, inhaling deeply while I sorted the things in my mind that would go into the two-column spread. Larry, with his gleaming camera and conspicuous PRESS card in his hatband, paused just behind me like an obedient dog on a leash.

It was all there. Clara Armbrooster, with her face dead white and slack as though anesthetized, looking more like a corpse than her now late husband who was sprawled in the middle of a fifteen hundred dollar rug where he had fallen when she killed him. The slug had gone in just above his right eyeball and out the back of his head. Maybe you wonder why reporters on the crime detail can't eat brains and eggs for breakfast...

His last expression was still on his face. Looking at the contemptuous twist to his thin lips had made me feel like an eavesdropper. In life J. G. Armbrooster would never have let anyone see such an expression—except, as it now turned out, his wife.

J. G. the big shot, rumored to be possible Governor

timber in next year's election. Sixty, but one of those guys who radiate health and virility. Clara, thirty-eight, tops, the type of beauty that makes you wish she were your mother or your wife. They had been married only three years ago. Clara-Sue, her daughter, had flown home from college to be at the wedding. They would have gotten those pics out of the morgue. They'd be lying on the copy desk now for possible tie-in with what I phoned in. So would the shots of Clara-Sue the way she looked in her Cadillac when she committed suicide eight months ago—the ones we had never used. J. G. had been rumored governor timber even then, so instead of telling the public Clara-Sue had been pregnant, we had dished out a story about her being ill and despondent.

I tried to shut it out, but it came back with all its vividness. Clara Armbrooster, her voice lifeless and inaudible. "He told me he was the one. Maybe I could have taken it, but he boasted, gloated, said the only reason he married me in the first place was to get Sue when she was old enough. He—he didn't think I could shoot. I didn't either, but I did..."

I half turned toward the big house set back behind the trees. It would be an act of mercy to put Clara Armbrooster in the electric chair—but no jury on Earth would ever do anything but set her free.

I muttered an Anglo Saxon word and flicked my cigarette in a slow arc onto the green velvet lawn, and turned to bore through the crowd to my beat-up Ford, Larry hugging my wake. It was eight blocks to the corner drugstore and phone booths. I parked in front of the fire plug, knowing every available cop was at the murder scene. "Wait here," I told Larry. I started into the drugstore, then noticed the sign three doors away: GRUBER BREW. I would have a shot while I phoned in. I needed it. I had three in quick succession and took the fourth into the booth. I got the whole story out, knowing that the boys at the copy desk were taking it down, already beginning rewrite, composing headlines, sorting pics—and that the Old Man was listening in on

one of his phones in his plush office on the sixth floor.

“That’s it,” I finished, the harshness of my voice matching the snarl on my lips. I started to hang up.

“Wait, Jim.” It was the Old Man.

“Yeah?” I said, putting the phone back to my ear.

“Send your photographer back on the streetcar. I have another job for you out there. Not in your department, but Mary was turned down cold. It’s that holy man holed up in the Streeter estate. No paper in town has gotten to him. It’ll be a scoop.”

I did some mental geography. “Say!” I said. “The Streeter estate across the street and about two blocks north of Armbroo—”

“That’s right. Don’t take no for an answer. Get an interview.”

What he meant, of course, was that *he* wouldn’t take no for an answer.

I went out and told Larry to take the streetcar. Then I went in and had a few more shots. I could chew some chlorophyll gum maybe.

I thought of the job ahead. A holy man, huh... A fake, of course. A pious fake with a pot belly fed by the donations of widows. I tried to think what I had heard about him. The bartender, a fat Greek named Pete, filled my shot glass again, perspiring rancid olive oil in his quiet, friendly way...

The Streeter Estate I knew about, of course. Everybody did. Joshua Streeter, the corn and dairy king, had built his mansion when I was a kid, during the depression, in order—as old Josh put it—to give work to the needy.

There had been a mild boom in town until it boomeranged into a gold rush of out-of-towners by the hundreds arriving in town with their families, broke and hungry, hoping to go right to work on the Streeter mansion. When old Josh died in 1945 his widow continued to live there. Still did, so far as I knew. I'd never been in the place myself. I'd seen pictures in the roto gravure section, heard the stories about pink marble brought by boat all the way from African diamond country.

I'd always been curious about that place, so I didn't particularly mind the swami angle. It was as good a reason as any. He tied in with Mrs. Streeter. Rumor had it that the Streeter kids had tried a couple of years back to get her declared incompetent, and to get even with them she had cut them out of her will—left each of them a token half million or so as a parting insult. The rest, so rumor had it, would be left to various charities which changed from time to time as her interests jumped here and there.

The swami was her current fad.

I blinked at my shot glass. I had just drained it for God knows what umpteenth time and set it down. It was full again. Pete's fat fingers glistened like headless snakes as they delicately extracted a quarter and a nickel from the money on the counter in front of me. It reminded me that I hadn't seen Clara Armbrooster's face for maybe five minutes—which was good. I toyed with the shot glass, and watched a holstered police positive slip into view under my right elbow. I followed it up to its owner, a pink faced cop who was perspiring slightly.

"Thought you'd be in here," he said gently. "You'll have to move your car."

I remembered my job, gulped the shot and scooped my change into my pocket. "Thanks," I said vaguely.

“You happen to have some chorophyl gum on you? I didn’t think so,” I added at his puzzled shake. It was the wrong thing to have said, I realized, as I glanced back and saw his worried frown when I reached the door. I chuckled about it as I maneuvered across the sidewalk to the car.

It wasn’t until I was within sight of the Streeter place that I remembered I had forgotten to get the gum at the drugstore, but by then I knew it wouldn’t have helped. I would have had to drink a couple of bottles of air freshener and let the wick stick out of my mouth. I chuckled at the mental image of myself, then said, “To hell with the swami.”

But I knew I was going to see him. I was in the mood to see him. Who the hell did he think he was, anyway? A pot-bellied crook. That’s who he was. And he probably knew it, behind his oily fat face—no, that was Pete the bartender, and I’d forgotten to leave him a tip. Ought to go back.

I parked my Ford directly in front of the driveway to block the crook’s escape when he saw me coming. I got out and hung onto the door until the three story mansion settled into perspective through the square iron bars of the high fence.

The unexpected snarl of a wild animal raised my scalp two inches and destroyed the effect of at least six shots of Pete’s bourbon. I looked down and saw three Great Danes on the other side of the fence, glaring at me, foam on their muscular jowls. I had completely forgotten about those dogs! About a year and a half ago one of them had almost killed a census taker. Mrs. Streeter had settled out of court for somewhere around fifty thousand.

I snarled back at them through the bars, wondering if dogs left people who were loaded alone. Come to think of it, I’d never heard of a dog biting a drunk. I looked at them again, speculatively, and knew these three monsters were the exception that proved the rule. I should have phoned I was coming.

The big house showed no sign of movement. I explored the driveway gates and found no sign of a bell. I

started along the sidewalk toward the gate to the walk that divided the immense expanse of the lawn into two sections. The Great Danes paced me inside the fence with sinister silence.

At the gate I found a small phone box recessed into one of the stone columns. Sighing my relief, I lifted the receiver and pressed the button under the mouthpiece. A soft female voice spoke. "Hello?"

I cleared my throat. "Hello!" I said. "I'm down here at the gate."

"I know," the voice said with a touch of sarcasm. "What do you want?"

I hesitated. From the tone of that voice I knew the direct approach wouldn't work. Inspiration struck me. "I just came from the murder," I said. The silence that met this announcement encouraged me. "Get these dogs off my neck and let me in," I added.

The silence continued. I wondered if the woman had hung up. "Hello?" I said. "Are you there? Hello?" There was no answer. The line sounded dead. I slammed the receiver on the hook and patiently went through the task of getting a cigarette out and lit, all the time glaring at the dogs and talking to them with choice adjectives. They returned my glare with their large brown eyes. One of them growled and licked his chops with unmistakable meaning.

Suddenly all three dogs looked over their shoulders toward the house, questioningly. One of them whined softly. I looked toward the house but could see no sign of anything. Then the three Great Danes looked at me as though I were a chunk of raw beef they were going to have to pass up temporarily. The next moment they had turned, and were loping across the lawn with lazy motion, their powerful muscles working visibly under their skin, toward the corner of the house. What had changed their minds about me? I stared at them with blank astonishment.

An almost inaudible ringing crept into my consciousness. It was the phone. I lifted the receiver and barked, "Hello!" It was a new voice that answered. A man's. "You may open the gate and come along the

sidewalk to the front door, Mr. Dale,” he said. I muttered, “OK,” and hung up quick.

For the first dozen or so steps I wasn't too sure the sidewalk was wide enough to hold me. Undoubtedly I'd had a couple too many shots of that thirty cent bourbon.

Then it hit me. Just like that. The guy had spoken my name.

I was stone sober now.

Sure, there were a million ways it could have been done. Two, at least. The Old Man could have called up and told them who was coming, or with a pair of binoculars someone could have read the license plates on the Ford and checked the ownership. I told myself that as I went up toward the front of the house, and I believed me. But it didn't make the slightest difference. I remained sober.

Maybe it was the way it had come on top of the dogs taking off as though at some mysterious command. Still, even that was easily explained; a high frequency dog whistle, available in any pet shop.

I went up the front steps, and it was like going up the steps of a public library rather than a house. Everything was of marble or granite. Unless the place was torn down to make way for some superhighway of the future, the Streeter mansion would last a thousand years. The double front doors were ten feet high and gave the impression of being able to withstand a battering ram. I knocked, then saw the inconspicuous button in the frame, but the door was opening.

A butterball Japanese, incredibly short, blinked up at me with polite curiosity. “Come in, Mr. Dale,” he said, chopping his English with an ax. His was not the voice that had talked to me on the phone. “This way, please,” he said after closing the door. I was tempted to play leapfrog over him as I followed him down a hallway whose walls were sliding doors. But he would probably have caught me in mid jump with one pudgy finger and broken my neck. He gave that impression. I wondered what tailor had gone mad fitting him so per-

fectly and so artfully that an American business suit seemed to have been styled just for his type of figure...

He took me into a large room that I suppose would be called a drawing room. Maybe a library. Maybe a fabulous den. The cheapest article of furniture must have cost two hundred bucks. A lean man with the soft smoky skin coloring of a Hindu glanced up from a desk.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Dale." He reluctantly closed the book he had been reading. The Japanese judo expert bowed and backed out the door, closing it softly.

"I am His secretary," the Hindu said in too perfect English. "He has asked me to take you directly to Him." The caps were in the tone of his voice. He rose from the desk and came around to join me. His clothing was too perfect, his teeth too clean, his nails too manicured. I could almost see the banks of gleaming vacuum tubes, the geometrical pattern of wires, the blinking lights and fresh varnish of his perfect mind in the depths of his too large, too softly brown eyes. He probably had an I.Q. of 150. I didn't like him. Probably rich widows were impressed by him. He undoubtedly gave them the impression that it would be absurd to donate less than five thousand bucks to the Cause.

He led me out into the hall and up the carpeted stairs to the second floor, his new pastel cream colored socks flashing above his brightly polished shoes with their heels that showed no slightest sign of wear. I hated him.

He escorted me into a large room with enormously high and wide windows bordered by drapes that cost more than all the furniture I owned. There was an acre of rug at twelve bucks a yard, and five hundred to five thousand dollar pieces of furniture and statues and oil paintings and other stuff scattered around. It reminded me I'd better get my watch out of hock at the loan bank before next Wednesday or I'd have to pay another fifty cents interest.

"Hello, Jim."

I had been gawking at a pink marble statue of a nude girl. I jerked around guiltily and saw a woman

standing in a doorway. That is, at first glance I thought it was a woman. It seemed to be a woman about forty-five, whose bosom had become a belly, draped in a long dress of some off-yellow fabric.

The face was smooth, the mouth generous. The black hair was fairly long and rather sparse. It seemed to be a woman. Then it seemed to be a child. Then I remembered the voice, deep and calm, and I knew I was looking at a man.

Abruptly everything seemed different. Right...

"You probably wonder how I know your name," he said, coming into the room. "Shiki looked at your license plate through his binoculars. He gets a big kick out of doing that. He has a book that lists the license numbers in order and gives the names. He's got the routine down pat so that in less than five minutes he can give me the name and occupation and credit rating of anyone." He wagged his head. "You ought to pay that doctor bill. They're getting ready to sue you." He chuckled. I liked him. We looked into each other's eyes and chuckled. He sobered suddenly. "Want a drink?" he asked. "Mrs. Streeter spares no expense, God bless her. Just name it and Shiki will pop in with it in less than ten seconds. That's another of his virtues."

"A Singapore sling," I said. "Not the phony kind, but one made of gin and Dago Red like they serve in the places I trade at."

He blinked. "That sounds good," he said. He made a move to order it. Suddenly the door popped open and butterball popped in with a tray upon which two glasses of red fluid rested.

So butterball was Shiki...

The sling was authentic. I sipped it, trying my damndest to remember the name of this holy man. He sipped his and seemed to like it. He smacked his lips appreciatively. A daring light crept into his eyes. He gave me a sidelong glance. "Maybe you'd like to try my favorite," he suggested.

"Sure," I agreed. I looked around the room, feeling like I belonged here.

It took less than ten seconds this time—more nearly

five. Shiki's grin split his fat face as he handled the tray. The glasses were tall and slim and frosted, and lined with frozen snow. The liquid gave off a faint aroma of pineapple and watermelon. Something like evaporating liquid air hovered above the surface.

The holy man laughed good-naturedly, enjoying his little joke. I laughed too. I felt good. I felt like a millionaire. I sipped the drink, disappointed at its mildness but intrigued by its taste. A moment later fireballs and scintillating stars floated in front of my eyes. I took another sip.

The holy man and I looked at each other and laughed. We were a hundred thousand miles tall and the Earth was covered with a rug at twelve dollars a square yard.

"Shiki is all right," I said with conviction.

"He believes in living in the world," the holy man said. "By the way, how is Mrs. Armbrooster taking her husband's suicide?"

It took me a moment. Then I reverted in my thoughts to pure Anglo Saxon. And I felt like I was wading in I.Q. up to my neck—and had been ever since the dogs had whined in protest at some command I could neither hear nor sense. There was no sense of the supernatural. There couldn't be around this man who looked like a pot-bellied woman. Nothing around him could seem anything more than ordinary.

I took another sip of the liquid and said quite casually, "Suicide?" My eyes fixed on one drifting fireball and followed it until it vanished within the grand piano... "She's very much broken up," I said, having come to a sudden decision. "She insists she killed him. Of course, the evidence hasn't been examined as thoroughly yet as it will be. By the way, the reason I came over..." I looked at him questioningly and became silent. Inside, I felt the tingling of my own I.Q.

"Yes," he said. "Of course. The check." He sighed. "I'm sure it didn't occur to Julius that it would be worthless before it could possibly clear the bank. Kim will bring it in in a moment."

I looked expectantly toward the door. Sure enough, in a few seconds there was a polite knock, then the door opened and the Hindu fashion plate entered. There was no slip of paper in his hand though.

Kim and the holy man talked rapidly to each other in a foreign language. I got one thing out of it. This Kim used the word Rishi several times. It struck a chord. I remembered the holy man's name. Rishi Kapilanda.

Rishi turned to me apologetically. "I had assumed that Julius stopped on his way out after lunch and left the check with Kim. It seems he forgot. So—" he shrugged his shoulders under his yellow robe "—no check." His face lit up with a smile of comprehension. "But of course! He remembered it after he reached home. That is why you are here. You wished to know why Julius would have written that check as one of his last acts. You see, he felt very strongly that a temple should be built here. We talked of almost nothing else at lunch. Many people here feel that there should be a temple, but Julius, in his way, wished to feel he had done one special thing rather than just add to the building fund. He insisted that it be his money that bought the ground the temple would rest on."

"I see," I said carefully. "He left here at—?"

Rishi Kapilanda smiled. "Within a few moments one way or the other of one forty-five."

"How did he seem when he left?" I asked.

"At the time," Rishi said, "I thought his mood was one of impatience to get this business of buying the property completed. Now, perhaps..."

"You think that he had already made up his mind to kill himself?" I prompted.

Rishi Kapilanda's expression grew inscrutable. "I would say so," he said slowly. "In some dark recess of his tortured mind the decision to die had already been made. He may not have been conscious of it yet."

Abruptly I had a strong feeling that the interview was over. Rishi and Kim had not changed expressions. They seemed to be waiting for my next question. But an invisible barrier had thrust itself up so that I found it impossible to ask another thing.

“Thanks,” I said. I added, “maybe I’ll be back.”

“I am at your service any time,” Rishi said, his large mouth forming a generous smile. When I reached the door he added, “Please tell Clara, if you will, that I extend my deepest sympathy. I have never had the pleasure of meeting her, but...”

I grinned cynically as I hurried down the walk. The swami hadn’t fooled me. He was still after that money.

Behind the wheel in my Ford I got out a cigarette before starting the motor. The dogs came loping down toward the fence. They had been turned loose again. I watched them, and thought of Shiki the Japanese but-terball, who could probably break bones with the flick of a little finger; of Kim the secretary, with his electronic mind and perfection of dress; and of Rishi Kapilanda himself. I closed my eyes, and he appeared in my mind’s eye in vivid detail. His golden robe, straggly black hair, his large mouth and frank, almost childish-ly open face that hid a lazily superhuman intellect.

I grinned. My inspiration to say I had come from Armbrooster’s had hit the jackpot. I started the motor. The Old Man was going to like me. This was something that would rate a visit to his office on the sixth floor.

M. M. Blish, Publisher. I read the lettering on the door and then opened it and strode into the reception room. The two gorgeously blonde secretaries glanced casually in my direction, then sat up, their eyes widening in speculation. They were recalling, no doubt, that the last time I had come in through that door had been with the little black book that broke the crime syndicate. The time before that? I’d located the hideout of the number three communist bigshot. All of the six or seven times I had walked through that door had been high spots in my life. I wasn’t too sure this was the same.

“Should I stop the presses?” the blonde named Hilda whispered excitedly.

“Uh-uh,” I said. I knew she’d already given the Old Man a secret signal. I went across the reception room to his door and went in. He was sitting behind his half

acre of gleaming walnut puffing on a new cigar to get it lit. He looked questioningly at me across the flame of his lighter. I turned and closed the door carefully.

I sat with one leg on the corner of his desk while I told him everything. He interrupted me once while he picked up a phone and told the photo lab to send up prints of the Armbrooster case with a blowup of the face. The prints arrived seconds after I finished talking. He studied the prints in silence. I didn't have to look. I remembered the powder burns.

Abruptly the Old Man got on the phone again. During the next ten minutes he talked with four psychiatrists. Two of them arrived within the next twenty minutes. We got the whole thing laid out in time for a six o'clock special edition. It hinted at new evidence. The psychiatrists did their stuff with authoritative "statements" about people under shock believing they had pulled the trigger. It was the kind of scoop a newspaper dreams of getting. Human interest plus! We reconstructed what we figured must have happened. Clara Armbrooster had watched her husband shoot himself, or had come into the room immediately afterwards. She had picked up the gun where it had fallen, without realizing she was picking it up. She had blacked out for an instant, and come to with the gun in her hand and a feeling that she must have done it.

At six o'clock I was in Moriarty's Restaurant blowing myself to a steak when the news kid came in with the extra. I bought it and read it with great satisfaction—especially at the sight of my byline. That would go all over the country.

I read it through for the third time over my coffee. It didn't sound quite right. Something began to nag at the back of my mind.

That something nagged all during the evening — at Marty's where I lapped up a few drinks and the envy of my fellow fourth estaters, and in the privacy of my apartment where I looked at my furniture with a new realization that its beauty was strictly lower class.

The early morning sun was streaming through the windows when I woke up. Something had suddenly

clicked in my mind. I knew what had been nagging at me. The expression on Armbrooster's face. The arrogant twist of his lips. The exposed evil, trapped there by death.

Julius Armbrooster had not killed himself.

I lay there in the half light, sweat dampening my forehead. What had ever made me think for a moment that Armbrooster had killed himself?

I must have been under some kind of spell. It was the swami's doing. Or had it been something in that drink Shiki had cooked up? The whole afternoon, looking back at it now, seemed distorted and unreal, in the cool quiet sanity of the early morning.

Without turning on the light I reached out and got a cigarette. After it was lit I lay there, smoking, trying to think...

Trying to think! The seven o'clock newscast took it on from last night's six o'clock special edition scoop. The Governor of the state had personally stepped in. Clara Armbrooster had been released from jail by seven thirty under the care of her doctor.

Jimmy Dale, newspaper reporter, was the hero of the day. He alone had not believed the evidence. He alone had realized what a crime of injustice was being committed against a sick woman who did not know what she was saying, and against the memory of one of the noblest men who had ever lived, whose tribulations and responsibilities had grown too much for him to bear, and who in a moment of weakness and despair had taken his own life.

That part, of course, was plain whitewash.

I continued to try to think. Only Jimmy Dale had not believed the evidence—and now only Jimmy Dale believed the evidence! Over my tenth cup of coffee and twentieth cigarette I tried to picture what would happen if I went downtown and said, "Look here, I was wrong yesterday. Clara Armbrooster did shoot her husband." For the fiftieth time my mind balked at visualizing it.

No one would believe it. Perhaps even Clara Arm-

brooster wouldn't believe it now. I could visualize the doctors working on her, proving to her with page and verse just what had "happened."

And always, just on the fringe of my mental imagery, was the wide mouth, smooth complexion, and long straggly black hair of Rishi Kapilanda, his whole expression conveying the thought, "Why not?"

Why not indeed? What could be gained now by switching it back to a case of murder? Nothing. Clara Armbrooster would be acquitted, but for the rest of her life she would have terrible mental scars that nothing could erase.

But this way, with the doctors convincing her she had imagined shooting her husband, there would be no scars, only grief that time would heal. I had to admit to myself that if it worked it would be the ideal answer for the living. Mrs. Arbbrooster had been given a raw deal by life. She deserved a break. Facts, truth, were of secondary importance in the face of that.

Out of the maelstrom of my confused thoughts emerged the thing that was really bothering me. I had been played for a sucker. The taste of that realization was in my mouth, along with the bitterness of too much strong black coffee and too many cigarettes. It was in my throat, impossible to swallow. Shiki the butterball floated in front of me, his pig-like Japanese eyes laughing at me, calling me sucker, while he served me drinks out of heaven with the aroma of pineapple and watermelon. Kim, the Hindu, mocked me with his mechanically perfect mind and dress, treating me with the deference reserved only for a prize sucker. Rishi Kapilanda mocked me with his lazy superiority. What nationality was he? Hindu? Tibetan? Norwegian? It was impossible to tell—except that he wasn't English or German or French.

So I was feeling race prejudice. So it rankled more to be played for a sucker successfully by a foreigner.

I slammed out of my apartment and down to the street, where I jabbed the motor of my beat up Ford into life and shot viciously into the morning traffic. I was already half an hour late to work, and I didn't give a

damn.

When I got to work there was a note from the Old Man on my desk. It was an order to get the write-up of Rishi Kapilanda ready for the Sunday supplement, leaving out any connection with the “other affair,” and playing it up very favorably.

I glared at the memo, then with a constrictive movement crumpled it up and threw it toward the waste basket. It was the last straw.

There followed one of the worst days of my life, and yet it should have been one of the best. Every envious glance of a fellow reporter, every admiring glance, every word of congratulation on my scoop, added to it. Another thing—something I hadn’t realized at the time—the way the Old Man had insisted the scoop be handled, hinting at information overlooked by the police without elaborating, had given the impression that I had done the whole thing unaided except for experts I had called in to back up my theory of what had happened.

At noon someone laid a late edition morning paper in front of me with a paragraph circled in red. An opposition paper. The paragraph stated that I had performed one of the most brilliant bits of sheer deduction in the entire history of journalism.

At twelve fifteen a sealed memo was tossed onto my desk. It was a notice that I had received a ten dollar a week raise, with a P.S. to get the article on Rishi Kapilanda out of the way by two o’clock.

I had been working on it all morning. My wastebasket was overflowing with it. I had to write an article saying nice things about a man. I had a total block against even thinking of something nice to say about him.

Sticking a fresh sheet of paper in the typewriter, I rattled out a heading. RISHI KAPILANDA, THE PARK AVENUE HOLY MAN. I went to lunch.

Seven shots of bourbon and three saltine crackers spread with cheese later, it was a quarter to three. I hadn’t enjoyed the bourbon. It didn’t smell like pineap-

ple and watermelon, it smelled like spoiled cabbage and stale bread. It didn't create fireworks in front of my eyes, it gave me heartburn. My Anglo Saxon got a fluid workout. It didn't help my frame of mind a bit.

I got back to my desk at five minutes to three. There was a memo waiting for me. "The Old Man wants to see you," it said in Gerty's scrawl. The time marked on it was two thirty.

"Fine!" I muttered. I glared at my typewriter. No one had touched it.

There were people in the Old Man's office. Three of them. One was Big George Gahagan, the D. A. The second was Marty Donovan, his assistant. The third was a stranger.

The Old Man grinned at me around his cigar. "Where you been, Jim? Out to lunch?" he said. He winked elaborately. "The D.A. wants to know how you did it."

"Yeah," Big George said mildly. He probably wasn't more than six feet six with shoulders four feet wide and two feet thick, but he gave the impression of filling the room with his bulk. He had quick eyes and an intellectual face, which made him a successful politician instead of a wrestler.

I took out a cigarette, taking my time about lighting it. I was teetering on the edge of undoing everything. I teetered over. "One thing," I said, forcing the words out of my throat, "did you study the expression on Armbrooster's face?"

The words were literally scooped out of my mouth by the stranger. "Yes," he said. "I wanted to hear him say it. This reporter is a marvel. No one else recognized the fact that it was an expression of *self* contempt."

I opened and closed my mouth like a fish. I became aware that the Old Man was smiling at me. "This is Dr. Eugene Montmarquette, the eminent authority on facial expressions," he explained.

"Yes," the doctor said emphatically, "and I want to congratulate you. I am frank to admit that even I myself would have undoubtedly missed the correct nature of Armbrooster's expression if the District Attorney had

not picked it as the one item refuting your theory, and asked my opinion.” He snapped his fingers as an advance punctuation for his next remark. “Ordinarily, just like that, I would have said it was an expression of projection rather than introspection—which it was.”

I glanced at the Old Man. His eyes twinkled at me. I took a deep drag on my cigarette and took it out and studied its glowing end. I could have sat down on the floor right there and cried in front of all of them. They weren't real; they were puppets, dangled in front of me by a superior, sadistic, pot-bellied, baby-faced old woman of a man, to drive in deeper the fact that I was a complete sucker. The opening statement of my argument against myself had been snatched from my teeth to prove I was right before I could take another breath. And by whom? A circumlocutious, self-important self-styled Authority with an infallible, inflexible insanely maddening tone of voice that made my ears twitch. Next he would adopt me as his colleague. I saw it coming. His eyes were fixed on me like a cat's on a rat-hole, or a B girl's on a guy who has just gotten a twenty changed to pay for his drink. With a military snap he extracted a card from his vest pocket and held it out to me. I was forced to take it.

“My card,” he explained. “I would most certainly like to have you come over some evening very soon to examine some faces in my collection. I would like—in fact, I need—the opinion of an outside authority...”

“Thanks,” I said dryly. “I won't lose the card.” Mentally he stepped back two paces into the ranks, satisfied. I glanced questioningly at Big George and Marty, then said to the Old Man, “I haven't got this article done yet.” I nodded my head respectfully at the geometrical center of the group and walked out.

The two blondes stared at me like I was Eisenhower as I went through the reception room. In the hall I paused for a second and sighed with a mixture of too many things to straighten out. I dropped my cigarette and stepped on it before entering the elevator, and lit another when I got on the second floor.

When I pushed the flimsy door to my own cubicle

and stepped through the doorway I stopped — and stopped breathing.

The impeccably dressed figure sitting in the chair beside my desk turned, and Kim's features rearranged themselves with perfect mental precision into a friendly smile.

"Ah," he said with cultured inflexion, "Mr. Dale."

"Ah," I said, going around to my chair. "Kim."

I glanced at the typewriter. It had been moved up a space for easier reading of what was written. I glanced down at the wastepaper basket. Some of the sheets had been smoothed out and re-crumpled.

"What brings you here?" I asked, looking him in the eye.

He blinked innocently. Extracting an envelope from his inside breast pocket and laying it on my desk, he said, "I was instructed to bring you this. It could have—ah—been mailed, but since I had to come into town on an errand..."

"Of course," I said, making no move to touch it.

"And now," he said, standing up.

"Of course," I said, grinning up at him.

He bowed imperceptibly. At the door he turned. For the first time his expression and movements didn't seem entirely governed by a mental machine. "You handled it—very well," he said. Then he was gone.

The next second Gertie burst through the door. "Get on the ball, Jimmie," she said. "Jack was after that article for the Sunday Sup." She giggled. "Some of that stuff in the waste basket is good. Why'd you throw it away?"

So Kim hadn't been snooping! I hated him for not being guilty. "Okay, okay," I growled.

When she was gone I picked up the envelope. I turned it over, glaring at it.

There was nothing on the outside, not even my name. It was unsealed. I hesitated. The envelope was fat, as though there were several sheets of paper in it. I considered the possibility of simply throwing the thing in the waste basket and forgetting it. It wouldn't work. It would prey on my mind. Eventually I would fish it

out of the waste basket and see what was in it.

I took out the folded paper and unfolded it. There were several crisp fifty dollar bills. There was handwriting on the sheet of bond paper that the bills were wrapped in. It began, "Dear Jim:" and ended with Rishi Kapilanda's signature.

It read, "Thank you for the wonderful way you handled everything. I know you would not accept money for having done it, so I have enclosed only the amount of that doctor bill you owe. I hope you will accept it. My debt of gratitude is very great. If I may be of assistance to you in any way at any time, please call on me."

With fingers that were shaking with rage, I counted the fifties. There were twelve of them. Six hundred bucks. The bill they were supposed to pay was exactly five hundred and fifty.

Yes, I was supposed to pay the bill, and maybe get drunk on the extra fifty—and feel grateful. I had been played for a sucker. Now I was rewarded.

Maybe I was irrational about it. When I was fifteen an aunt of mine took me to the dentist and had my teeth fixed. She paid the bill. A couple of weeks later she asked me to weed her garden, and when I didn't want to she reminded me of all she had done for me. I had a phobia against being bought. Or bought off. That made me irrational about it. Maybe somebody else would have paid off his doctor bill and felt quite smug about the extra fifty. Maybe someone else—but I wasn't someone else.

I shoved the stack of fifty dollar bills in my pocket and went down to the parking lot and got into my car. I knew what I was going to do with them. I was going to get a lot of satisfaction out of it, too. I was going to throw them at that baby face with its wide, smiling mouth. Maybe butterball would break some of my bones afterward, but it would be worth it. I would feel better. Just the thought of doing it made me feel better.

They had me sewed up. I'd had to swallow too much, and there had been no way of retaliating. Now I knew exactly what to do.

I got a ticket for crashing a red light and going fifty

in a thirty-five mile zone on the way out to the Streeter Mansion. It made me feel even better. The die was cast after that.

When I got there I stopped at the curb and got out. The dogs were at the fence, threatening. I jabbed the button under the phone recessed in the pillar beside the gate. I stood so I could be seen from the house. After a minute the dogs looked toward the house, then bounded away. This time I heard the click that unlocked the gate. I shoved it open and slammed it behind me.

Then I strode up the walk toward the mansion.

The money was hot in my pocket. A part of my mind screamed at me that all I had to do was behave in a civilized manner and I could keep the dough.

Sure. I could keep the dough—but not my self respect. It went even deeper than that. Racial respect, maybe. Maybe even deeper than that. Maybe the swami was the symbol of my aunt. Freud would have a field day with me if he were alive. He could write a book about me. I sneered at Freud and went up the marble steps.

Shiki let me in. His smile evaporated temporarily when he saw my expression. I pushed past him. Probably before I left this place he would get his chance to work me over—but not before I had done what I came here to do.

I heard the front door close quickly as I reached the foot of the carpeted stairs. I took them two at a time, sure that Shiki was padding after me even though I didn't glance back.

I twisted the knob and pushed open the door to the room where I had been before. I stepped inside. At first I didn't see Rishi Kapilanda. I closed the door behind me while my eyes searched. Then I saw him.

He was standing at one of the high windows, his back to me. His yellow robe hung loosely from his shoulders to the floor. The sun shone in through the window, around and past him, outlining his head and figure so that it seemed to be an aura of light emanat-

ing from him. He was motionless, and if I had not seen him before I would have taken him for a statue from some ancient culture.

“Rishi!” I snapped. When he didn’t move I said, “Damn you, turn around!” I had the money in my hand, ready to fling it into his face.

Another long second he remained motionless. Then something happened that I saw, but even as I saw it I couldn’t be sure. Something seemed to have gone wrong with my eyes. They were uncoordinated. There were two Rishi Kapilandas, partly super-imposed. One had always been there. The other seemed to have arrived abruptly from a long ways off. The two figures moved together until they were one, as though my eyes were slowly coordinating again.

Rishi Kapilanda slowly turned toward me. He wore an expression of puzzlement. When he saw me his expression changed to surprised comprehension. “Oh, hello there,” he said. “I didn’t hear you come in.” His wide mouth smiled. A twinkle appeared in his eyes. “I was—a thousand miles away.”

I held out the money. “I can’t take this,” I said harshly. I was hating myself for not having thrown it at him. I had intended to.

Kapilanda looked at the money in my hand. “Oh,” he said. “The money. Please keep it, Jim. It gave me great pleasure to send it to you.” He glanced past my shoulder. “Ah, Shiki,” he said. “Tea would be in order. Yes, I think tea would be nice. We can talk better over tea.”

The butterball Jap bowed slightly. His expertly tailored business suit seemed so foreign to his shape as to be almost invisible. In its place I could see a ghostly cowl and loose robe, more natural to him. He was seething underneath. It was obvious in his eyes. He turned back to Rishi.

This time I threw the money in his face. It hit with an audible splat, then separated into individual bills that scattered on the rug. “I told you I wasn’t taking your money,” I said. “Furthermore, when I leave here I’m going to prove Armbrooster was shot by his wife if

it's the last thing I ever do."

Rishi Kapilanda blinked at me. He touched his face where the money had struck with a finger. "What a strange reaction," he said. "You hate me. I wonder why."

"Maybe you don't understand the occidental mind," I said bitterly. Then I added, "In a lot of ways."

"No," he said. "It goes deeper than that. I think I know why. We can go into it later. First, why are you so sure now that Julius Armbrooster didn't kill himself?"

"You know he didn't," I said.

"I know only this," Rishi Kapilanda said. "He was filled with so strong a hatred for himself that he was determined not to live another day. It had grown on him slowly. It burst into consciousness quite suddenly, here in this room. Regardless of how he met his death, it was suicide."

"His wife shot him," I said.

"Then he chose the wrong way to die. Perhaps some perverted sense of justice drove him to that course. In his confused state he may have thought that giving her an illusion of having inflicted revenge would make her feel better."

"Words!" I sneered.

Rishi shook his head. "Not words. Understanding of the hearts of men. Understanding of the tremendous depths of confusion that drive them in so many different directions at once. Let me tell you..."

He became silent, and turned from me again, looking out the window. I looked down at the money scattered on the floor. For some reason I stooped down and picked it up. I took it over and laid it on the piano keys.

"You see," Rishi Kapilanda said without turning from the window, "Julius Armbrooster's trouble didn't really begin until a few months ago when he fell in love with his wife."

"You're crazy!" I said.

"Can you possibly imagine what such a clean thing as love would do to a man like him? There are things you, as a newspaper man, do not believe in; but I can tell you that this is true—Julius Armbrooster is what

is known as a black brother. For most of us the path of life is upward toward the light. We may lose our way, and for a few lifetimes we may go backwards before we turn once again, by instinct, toward the good.

“But there are others who consciously and deliberately seek the opposite of light. Life after life, down through the days and nights of Brahma, on world after world, whatever their physical form, they—desecrate. They are born into the world, are children, then become men. By seemingly miraculous circumstance they go to work, rising to power, gathering the forces of darkness about them. Such men as Hitler do not just happen. The slaving beasts that rally at such a man’s call are not just there by chance, ‘good’ citizens gone wrong, the ‘sheep that strayed from the fold.’ No, they are much more than that.” Rishi Kapilanda turned suddenly and looked at me. “Why do you tremble, Jim?” he asked, all concern.

I hadn’t realized it, but I was shaking like a leaf. “I’m not trembling!” I grated. “I just need a drink. I’m getting out of here. Your money is over on the piano.”

I started for the door. A few feet from it I stopped. Every nerve in my body screamed for me to get out, run, run, RUN! My feet wouldn’t move.

“Can you picture it?” Rishi Kapilanda went on after a moment. “Julius Armbrooster was such a man. If he had gone on living he would have been governor of this state, then perhaps president. What he might have done, we can’t guess. Destroyed constitutional government? Plunged us into the final war? At any rate, he fell in love. I’m not talking about a physical love, or even affection. I’m talking about something divine. He was helpless against it. There was nothing in his makeup to combat it. It ate into him like corrosive acid, tearing him apart. He was forced by desperation to escape it, and he did—but in escaping he tried desperately to keep from losing the object of his love in the only way open to him. Karma. If he could get Clara to kill him, she would be bound to him. Do you see that, Jim?”

I didn’t answer. All this was impossible to believe.

Consciously I was seeing how persuasive Rishi Kapilanda really was. He had the power to get his hooks into you, play on your basic superstitions, make you forget you were living in a scientific age. Right now, for example, on the conscious level I knew all this; but something within me that was outside my conscious mind was in the throes of utter terror, evidently. I took out a cigarette and lit it, looking at my trembling fingers as though they didn't belong to me.

"If he could get her to *believe* she killed him, it would be the same thing," Rishi went on. "It would *amount* to the same thing. Physical events play little part at such a time."

Shiki chose that moment to open the door and come in, balancing a large tray on the tips of his fat, stubby fingers.

Rishi Kapilanda spoke to him in a choppy tongue that must have been Japanese. Shiki glanced at me with cold eyes, set the tray down, and darted from the room. Almost immediately he returned with a water glass half full of liquid and thrust it at me. I tasted it. It was straight bourbon. I took a deep gulp and felt the stuff burn all the way down.

As it seeped into my bloodstream I began to relax. My case of nerves had been due to hangover, I decided. Sure, that was it. I felt better.

I had never tasted tea quite like this. Faintly sweet, it had a subtle perfume that seemed a part of the flavor. It soothed my throat. In my stomach it rested with a sense of comfort.

Shiki had departed. Rishi Kapilanda sat across the small table from me, looking more than ever like a heavysset woman not particular about her hair. Only his voice belied appearances.

The glass of bourbon and the cup of tea, I decided, made a nice, well balanced meal. I sipped them alternately. For a minute or so I tried to think of what Rishi had been saying. I couldn't recall a single word. It had been something important. I should remember.

I gave up the effort and relaxed. Gradually things came back to me. I became aware of my surroundings.

Colors seemed enhanced, sounds unnaturally clear as they are after a refreshing rain in the country.

Abruptly I remembered the question that had grown in my mind. “The thing I want to know,” I said, “is, if Julius Armbrooster was what you call a black brother, did he know it? I’ve often wondered about that reincarnation business. When do you make up your mind you’re the reincarnation of King Louis the Thirteenth or whatever you decide you are?” Suddenly I was trembling again. I sprawled out to give an appearance of total relaxation so it wouldn’t show.

“I don’t believe he knew,” Kapilanda answered thoughtfully. “Of course, with a being such as he, it is often impossible to tell what they have become aware of. Such creatures seldom become aware of their true nature until they have attained full evil in this life. The fact that he fell in love indicates that he was still of two natures. He died, torn between the two natures, not knowing the force within him that had torn him apart.”

“Uh...” I said. I failed in my effort to ask the question uppermost in my mind.

“You see,” Rishi Kapilanda said conversationally, “it isn’t a question of making up your mind. There are people who do, of course. They talk themselves into the belief that they were this person or that person in a former life. Most of the time they are deluded. They cling to their delusions because they feel they would have nothing if they abandoned them.”

“If that isn’t making up your mind, what is it?” I demanded. “You, for instance. Do you think you were some other person in a past life? If you do, when and how did you begin to think that?” He smiled at me with his wide smile. “What I am driving at,” I said, “is that at three o’clock on a certain Friday you would say—and mean it—that so far as you knew personally, you had never lived before this life. Then at four o’clock you are just as positive that two hundred years ago you were so -and-so. You had to make up your mind to it some way. I think it’s the road to madness—like a pyromaniac setting his first building on fire. At three o’clock he’s normal. At five o’clock the fire trucks are there putting

out the fire, and the pyromaniac is in the crowd, conscious of the fact that he did it. Or take a murderer. Until he pulls the trigger, he's not a murderer. Once he squeezes the trigger, there's no turning back for him. Isn't it that way? Once you decide definitely you were Nero and you fiddled while Rome burned, you're sunk. You're crazy from then on."

Rishi Kapilanda nodded solemnly. "That's true, for that type of person," he said. "Unfortunately there are too many of them. You asked about me. I was a student of a very great teacher who taught eternal vigilance against self delusion, and the path to *self realization*. But let's go back to what we were talking about. When and how do you first realize who you are? It is the wrong way of phrasing the question, *because you always know who you are*. That is the basic truth. Even a person suffering from amnesia, with no memory of his past life in this body, knows who he is—somewhere within his mind. The part that knows is cut off temporarily, that is all. There is a split. The mind is divided because, perhaps, one part has expelled the other, refusing to admit its existence. When that happens the other part can do little about it. It learns to function alone. When it tries to unite with its counterpart, it discovers that all it accomplishes is to build up terrific stress. The lower psyche is overcome with nameless terror. It trembles, and knows not why. It cringes, imagining all sorts of things. *It refuses to open itself to the influx of union.*"

I could feel my trembling increase. What he had said fit like a glove.

"You speak of conscious mind," Rishi Kapilanda went on, unaware of the tensions that shook me like a leaf. "What is the conscious mind? You are aware of *one* conscious mind—the one you consider your own. But what of actions and decisions and words that seem to happen without your volition? You look at them afterwards, and *if they had happened in someone else you would say they had been carefully thought out*. Intelligent. Because they took place within your mind, but not within your consciousness, you think they were

impulsive. You do not admit that there might be another conscious mind within your makeup, *carefully and consciously thinking things out*. A mind not yet joined to you, but nevertheless you.”

I gulped half of what was left of the bourbon. In a few seconds it steadied me. I said: “Speaking of Julius Armbrooster, of course, what if the conscious part of you is still good, or trying to be, and that unconscious part is evil incarnate? Then? You can’t accept it *unless* you plunge to the depth of degradation.”

Rishi Kapilanda frowned in thought. “I see what you mean,” he said. “But often you can. Given the right moment, the right emotional rapport, the two parts of the schism can unite, even though it involves emotional storm beyond description.”

“Am I a black brother?” I blurted. To cover up I grinned and took out a cigarette, lighting it with fingers that shook. “Some people would say that all newspaper reporters are the blackest of the black, you know.”

Rishi Kapilanda laughed. “You a black brother?” he echoed. His mood changed abruptly to humbleness. “You are greater than I,” he said. “In this country today are many such as you, guiding the course of history toward the Eternal Light. In all walks of life... The part of you that is eternal recognized the need of Clara Armbrooster and did what had to be done to rescue her from the clutches of the damned. Is that not enough proof as to your nature?”

“What about you?” I asked, finishing the bourbon in one gulp and setting the empty glass down.

He didn’t answer. After a moment I glanced up at him. He was smiling at me, but it was a different smile than I had seen before. A sort of soft luminescence seemed to surround him, emanating from every cell of his body.

It was the bourbon, of course. I thought, *You’re getting hazy around the edges, fella*, but I didn’t say it.

I wasn’t trembling any more. I felt good. I could see now that the way things turned out were the best. Clara Armbrooster deserved a break. No question about it. A mood was settling over me. I could give this Park

Avenue swami a nice write-up, if I could just hold the mood. I had all the dope.

This stuff about reincarnation was strictly for the sucker trade, of course. I would play it down in my article. No need to bring in anything about the Armbrooster case, either.

It was all getting clear in my mind. I ought to get down to my desk and dash it off while I was in the mood.

I glanced at my watch and gave a start. "It's getting late," I said. "I have to get back to the office." I got to my feet.

Rishi Kapilanda rose and went over to the piano and picked up the money. "Please take it," he said. "I have so little real pleasure in life."

"Well..." I weakened. After all, he wasn't my aunt. And it wasn't as if I were doing anything for him because of the money. I had already made up my mind.

We shook hands. Then I left.

After I started my car and had gone several blocks I thought of another question. What about people who never know if they are the incarnation of someone? *Are they?*

Kapilanda would probably say yes, I decided. It didn't matter, really.

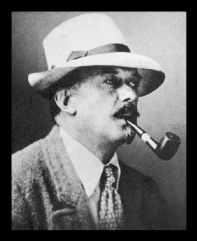
I tried to imagine myself *knowing* I had been John Jones who died September eighteenth, 1902. Or Genghis Khan who almost conquered the world.

But what if I were? What difference did it make? I was still Jimmy Dale, newspaper reporter, with a job to do.

I slid the car into the fast traffic on the arterial. The tires hummed a higher and higher pitch as the distant line of skyscrapers advanced to meet me.

"Damn!" I exclaimed suddenly. I had intended finding out what that brand of tea was. It had really hit the spot. Oh well, I could probably get it some other time....

The Scrutinies of Simon Iff



Aleister Crowley (1875 – 1947) is remembered paradoxically as one of the 20th century’s greatest minds, and as a scoundrel who dabbled in dangerous drugs and “black magic.” He achieved renown early in life as a mountain climber and adventurer and as a brilliant and prolific writer. His works include fiction, poetry, philosophy, psychology, theology, translations of classic Oriental spiritual texts, scholarly texts on the Western occult tradition, essays on politics and society, literary criticism, plays, novels and short stories. Aleister Crowley’s “occult detective” character was introduced in **The Scrutinies of Simon Iff**, a series of six stories published in 1917 and 1918 in *The International*, a New York monthly. Iff is featured in 17 additional stories that remained unpublished during Crowley’s lifetime, and in his 1935 novel, *Moonchild*. In these tales Crowley uses the medium of the classical detective story to subtly impart the secret doctrines of his revolutionary occult philosophy.

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“Julius Armbrooster is what is known as a black brother. For most of us the path of life is upward toward the light. We may lose our way, and for a few lifetimes we may go backwards before we turn once again, by instinct, toward the good. But there are others who consciously and deliberately seek the opposite of light. Life after life, down through the days and nights of Brahma, on world after world, whatever their physical form, they desecrate. They are born into the world, are children, then become men. By seemingly miraculous circumstance they go to work, rising to power, gathering the forces of darkness about them. The slaving beasts that rally at such a man’s call are not just there by chance, ‘good’ citizens gone wrong, the ‘sheep that strayed from the fold.’ No, they are much more than that.”