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featuring Bertram Lynch and Robert Deane*

# Murder in Haiti

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*Anthony Boucher, NEW YORK TIMES*

by **JOHN W. VANDERCOOK**

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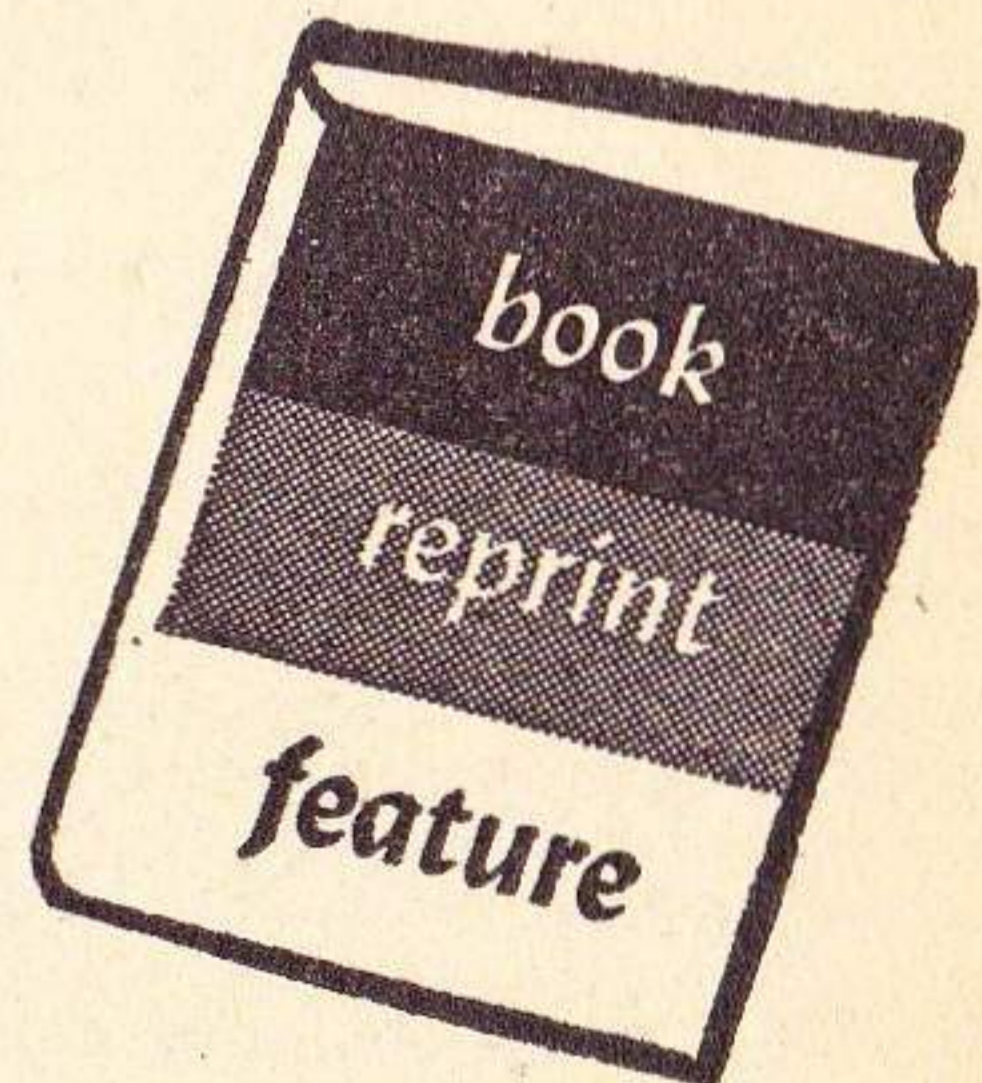


# Murder in Haiti

by John W. Vandercook

*John W. Vandercook is perhaps best known as a news commentator. He is also an extremely able mystery writer. In this mystery, his first in twenty years, Mr. Vandercook is at the top of his form, his reflexes as quick as ever, his footwork as nimble, his control as cool and his punches as decisive. In fact, his detective team of Bertram Lynch and Robert Deane seem sharper and sassier than ever.*

*“. . . smooth performance all the way. Suave and lively.” The Saturday Review*



## CHAPTER ONE

LYNCH AND I STOOD AT THE *Vittoria's* stern rail. The great white yacht with a sharply raked black funnel moved almost without sound over a glass-smooth summer sea.

I glanced at my watch. In fifteen minutes we were expected in the owner's cabin. In the cabin of the formidable and the elusive Viggo Sand. The English steward who was his personal attendant had said "cocktails." But the occasion had been so long postponed it had been made to seem more in the nature of an audience.

The *Vittoria* had left her temporary berth in an inconspicuous boat yard at City Island, New York, at dusk the night before and I had still to lay eyes on Lynch's employer—and my host. Yet I was in no hurry.

It was good to be with Lynch once more. I had neither seen nor heard from him (Lynch never wrote) for years. Now, again, this outwardly nondescript, gray-eyed gray-suited Englishman of middle height, middle class, and middle

age had struck across the usually serene skies of my life.

So here—unexpectedly, in a high state of bewilderment, and delightedly—I was.

By some process of persuasion, I still did not comprehend, Bertram Lynch, one-time chief of the Permanent Central Board of the old League of Nations, long-time operative of the British Secret Service, oft-time spy (I had deduced from his evasive silences), and Heaven knows what else, had got me included in this queer ship's queerer list of passengers. In the vague role of his "associate." Lynch was on a case. . . . If, then, there was one thing certain in an uncertain world it was that this moment of repose would not last long.

"Viggo Sand," Lynch said.

"Yes?"

"What d'you know about him?"

"Only what I've gleaned from the tabloids. Very little."

"On a disorderly planet," he said, "which has imposed its own rigid order on most lives, Sand is

almost the sole survivor of an extraordinary type. He fancies himself a 'man of mystery.' As you will shortly see for yourself. In the tradition of Basil Zaharoff, of Gulbenkian, of the elder Patiño. In so far as he has any permanent address, it is the Aviz in Lisbon. You know it?"

I nodded. I had once got as far, at least, as wandering self-consciously through the public rooms of that small, hushed, luridly over-decorated, and supremely luxurious hotel in the outskirts of the Portuguese capital.

"Quite. Then that at once tells you something"—Lynch jerked his head in the general direction of the yacht's bow—"of our host here. Among the guests of the Aviz have been numbered some of the most powerful men on earth. But men of a special breed. The secret men. Those who use their influence—and it is immense—to keep all references to themselves out of the press, not to get them in."

Lynch's gray eyes left my face—I am nearly a head taller—and with the cautious watchfulness which is the fixed, and necessary, habit of his life swiftly searched the deck in front of us. It was empty.

"It's astonishing how little I really have to tell you. Sand lets it be known that he was born in Sweden. But even that is not certain. At present, his official na-

tionality, I believe, is Portuguese. You observe a pattern? Sand has been most rigorously—and profitably—neutral during two world wars. I know one of his bank accounts is in Tangier, another is in Zurich. I do not know where else. Sand is reputed to pay no income tax. None! Not anywhere. He swims in many waters. Most of them dark waters. Where others barter in oil leases, Sand trades in whole sheikdoms. In the international black-money market. In armament. Anything to turn a pretty million. Yet so far as we—that's to say I, can discover, in not one of the countries my client has frequented has he a police record. Not so much as traffic violation. Sand and these singular people who're with him are on their way to the Caribbean. Where precisely, I don't know. His purpose—this much he has told me—is to recover a sum of money. It must be a very large one, or it would not interest Viggo Sand. I believe it is in specie." Lynch smiled. "I take it that it is buried, or at least concealed. Few people simply leave large sums lying about. As to its being pirate treasure, remember, our planet has been beset by other pirates than the buccaneers."

The suite of the *Vittoria's* owner, entered by a door marked with a discreet "A," extended all the way across the ship directly below

the bridge. The English steward in a white jacket who opened to our knock was as professionally commonplace as Lynch himself.

Viggo Sand did not rise when we came in. He had on a perfectly tailored suit of immaculate white flannel, a white silk shirt and a Nile-green tie. He sat in a massive, high-backed chair in a room so large and so splendid, in a massive, Scandinavian-cum-modern manner, it was like nothing I had ever seen afloat.

Though the back of his chair was half turned to a window bright with summer sunlight and his face was in partial shadow, one could no more be unaware of his presence or of the force of his personality than one could remain oblivious of an elephant. Yet the big body did not stir, the heavy head was motionless.

Lynch led me forward with uncharacteristic bustle.

"This is Mr. Deane, sir. Or perhaps I should say Professor Deane. When you suggested, Mr. Sand, it might be a sound idea if I was to have an associate, as I told Mr. Dibble, his was the first name that came into my head."

Lynch, I saw, was playing a role; simply that of a private detective anxious to please his boss and keep his job. A detective, one felt, not of the first rank.

After just the necessary interval lest there be any misunderstanding about which of us ranked

first, Viggo Sand, still without rising, extended his hand.

I found myself being examined by as chill and clear a pair of blue eyes as I've ever seen. Viggo Sand was broad-shouldered and deep-chested. The smooth and perfectly manicured hand which enveloped mine was immense—and cold. His hair, neatly parted in the middle, was somewhere between tow and gray. Though there was an extraordinary stillness about the big body, I somehow knew that it was capable of swift and powerful movement.

"So," said the big man. "I am glad, however belatedly, to meet you, Professor Deane. Or, like most of your countrymen, do you prefer the simple 'Mister'?"

"Mister, by all means."

Viggo Sand inclined his head. "Mr. Lynch came to me highly recommended," he said more politely. "So his word in its turn carried weight. He has told you, of course, of our little escapade?"

His English was as assured as the rest of him and only slightly accented. Undoubtedly, he knew half a dozen other languages.

"Merely that there's some sort of treasure hunt in the offing. And that it involves a yacht trip to the West Indies. I thought that inducement enough."

Sand deigned a distant smile. He took from a small table by his chair what looked like—what indeed was—a conductor's baton. It

was of ebony, polished from long use. Its ivory tip was yellow. He began to stroke and fondle it.

"It does not surprise you," he asked, "that upon so innocent an adventure I employ a detective?"

"Not particularly."

"Why not?"

I walked away from him and stood looking out of one of the two rectangular windows, at either side of a wall bookcase, which faced the *Vittoria's* bow.

"In the first place," I said rather tartly, "I am not persuaded of its innocence." (When I call on people, even on multimillionaires I like to be asked to sit down.)

"So?" said Viggo Sand.

"In the second place, it's been my observation that where large sums of money are involved, as I assume will be the case, particularly when that money is in concrete form, there is always an element of danger. It would seem to me only natural, Mr. Sand, that you would take precautions to protect yourself on this boat."

If I had annoyed the great man, his resonant and level voice gave no hint of it. There was even the suggestion of a chuckle

"Please, Mr. Deane! Not 'boat'! The *Vittoria*, her officers assure me, is a ship. I am afraid Mr. Lynch has to some degree misled you. And has underestimated his own duties. I have no need of bodyguards. Aboard my own ship my own person, I trust, will be

quite secure. My requirement is rather to have by me two trustworthy and disinterested men. I will not trouble you with details, but it is in the nature of this—this undertaking that I include among the passengers on this voyage certain persons about whom I have less information than I should like to have." He smiled.

"You are trustworthy, Mr. Deane."

"Entirely. And, up to this moment at least, disinterested."

"Reg?"

I started. The person to whom he spoke had entered the soft-carpeted room without my knowledge.

The tall, gracefully thin gentleman whom Lynch now bustled forward to introduce as Mr. Reginald Dibble, was exceedingly handsome. Even the most masculine observer could not fail to be aware of Mr. Dibble's fine cleft chin, his just-off-the-perpendicular forehead and truly splendid high-bridged nose. A Riviera sun tan, a yellow silk bandanna tucked in the open collar of a white shirt, and a pair of terra-cotta colored linen slacks added consciously to the effect.

Reginald Dibble's handshake was negligent. But his hazel eyes struck me as being only a degree less cold and intelligent than Sand's.

"By that diminutive," he said, "you may gather my suzerain lord



demands my opinion of you. I've already given it. I looked you up. I said you'd do."

Dibble flashed upon me a brilliant and charming smile. It was a pity it was as automatic as a subway gum machine.

"Though I've never been able to persuade him of it," he chatted on, "Viggio is an abominable host. He is convinced that all the role requires is that he should pay for everything. An admirable trait. I'd be the last to discourage it. But it adds to my simple duties."

As if on cue, the white-jacketed steward came in with a laden silver tray. Quickly he placed a low cocktail table before Sand's knees and whisked the necessary number of chairs in place around it.

Dibble distributed the drinks to the accompaniment of a cheerful rattle of the smallest of small talk. Not until he leaned back in his chair and began gently rolling a tall glass between his slender, sun-burned hands did he return to business.

"You believe then, Mr. Deane," said Dibble in his mocking-mannered voice, "you are qualified?"

"For what?"

"To keep us from bickering over Viggio's monstrous treasure? To keep the peace? To prevent a general slaughter?"

"To prevent, no. If you're bent on slaughter, Mr. Dibble, I am sure you'll have your way. You look a man of purpose."

"Oh, I am! I am indeed."

It amused me that this overly poised gentleman was slightly disconcerted.

"However," I went on, "While Mr. Lynch and I are aboard I don't think it would be too boastful to promise that anyone who fails to keep the peace will be caught at it. That reflection might act as a preventive."

"Are you greedy, Mr. Deane?"

"Greedy?"

Mr. Dibble returned my smile. "If the *Vittoria* hoisted two metric tons of gold aboard"—I heard Viggio Sand's tongue give a tiny click—"would it corrupt you? Would you betray or kill or do all manner of dreadful things to get your hands on some of it?"

I looked at him. For all the careful laughter which underlay his words, I thought that Mr. Reginald Dibble, for his part, would. I shook my head.

"Perhaps it's only because I've never been tempted. One never really knows, does one? But my chosen trade is a graduate-school teacher of medieval history. At New Haven, I am an amateur of criminology. I've found neither very profitable. Does that answer your question?"

"I think, then, Mr. Deane," Sand said to me in his quietly authoritative voice, "we understand each other?"

I regarded the great man with all the gumption I could muster.

"I am not sure, Mr. Sand, we do."

The blond eyebrows rose the fraction of an inch.

"So?"

"Correct me if I am wrong. You left Europe bound for the West Indies. At that time, I gather, the need for two 'disinterested and trustworthy' men had not occurred to you. However, instead of sailing directly for the islands, you put in at New York. You there sought the services of an experienced and dependable private detective. Mr. Lynch happened to be available, and you employed him. As a further measure of—what shall I say?—defense, you then advised him to bring along a partner. Not in crime, but in crime prevention. Here I am, and I am very grateful. I am, in effect, your guest, not your employe. Nevertheless, if Lynch and I are to earn our passage, I think we really should understand the situation. Not merely say we do?"

"What situation, Mr. Deane?" Viggo Sand's voice was so low I hardly heard him. His amiable smile had frozen.

"I, Mr. Sand, should like to know what occurred—presumably during the Atlantic crossing—which alarmed you. Bluntly, was some crime committed? If so, we should know of it."

Sand, with majestic grace, stood up. So, hastily, did I.

For a full ten seconds the cold

blue eyes looked over, at, and through me.

"So! I perceive, Mr. Deane, you are fanciful. As a trait in a fellow voyager, that may sometimes be amusing. I can only assure you, you are mistaken. If you attend only to what I say, and curb your fancy, I am confident we shall all do very well."

Viggo Sand bowed a full half-inch.

"Aboard the *Vittoria* we dine at seven-thirty."

We were dismissed.

The man's power, I confess, had shaken me. Its influence followed us so effectively, even after the door had closed behind us, that both Lynch and I were silent until we reached the open deck again.

"It couldn't be," I asked uneasily. "that *you* are nuts? Or could it?"

Lynch made an irreverent and spluttering sound—something like a Bronx cheer with a British accent.

"Phooey! Both the Foreign Office and the War Office have kept an eye on Sand for years. This is the first break, as you Americans say, that we have had. The cables which reached London were in our own code, so, though we did not know their source, we believed them. The proof, if you follow me, is that here we are.

"Of course he's lying! Someone

disappeared. I am confident that it was murder."

## CHAPTER TWO

THE *Vittoria* was two days out. Lynch and I stood again at our favorite post at the yacht's stern rail, our elbows on the rail. I, so to speak, aimed outward, looking down at the white wake. Lynch, who would preserve his habit of watchful caution while alone on an arctic ice floe, faced forward, with his elbows thrust behind him.

"Robert," Lynch observed, "we don't know anything."

"'Nothing,'" I agreed. "is practically an overstatement. Compared to our jolly shipmates, giraffes are loquacious."

There was a pause.

"We must find out," said Lynch briskly. "Everything."

"Quite!" I mimicked him. "Agreed. But how?"

"Stir 'em up. Set them against each other. Frighten 'em!"

I groaned. "Here we go!"

"Which of our companions," Lynch asked seriously, "in your opinion is—what shall I say?—the most susceptible? You follow me? Whose nerves, mind, call it what you will, if properly worked upon could most quickly be led to revelation? To indiscretion?"

Before I could consider that hard question, Lynch's elbow jogged mine. I turned around.

"Here, Bobby, comes your admirer in hot pursuit," he whispered. With a dreadful titter he straightened and walked away.

If he heard my fiercely hissed "Ass!" he gave no sign.

Miss Lily Wyndam's "hot-pursuit" struck me as being of roughly the same temperature as the Greenland Ice Cap. All that had occasioned Lynch's observation was the appearance of the young lady on the same deck as ourselves, almost half the yacht away. Even at that distance, however, she was worth any man's scrutiny.

Miss Wyndam was one of the two female passengers. The other, only some dozen years older than herself, was her stepmother. Like everyone else aboard, their status was by no means plain.

Certainly Lily wasn't. She was about twenty. She was one of the very few absolutely genuine, certified ash-blondes I had ever seen. (Even a graduate-school professor knows about hair roots, and I'd looked.) Though her figure was a shade too slim for robust tastes, it was nevertheless of the kind that . . . Well, it made one think. Her eyes were gray, her complexion without flaw. She dressed like a billion dollars. (Query: *whose?*)

At the moment she was standing in the narrow outside passageway which circled the yacht's cabins, looking out over the rail. She was wearing an elaborately simple

evening gown of palest yellow-green raw silk, a dress which emphasized the exquisite texture of the girl's skin, and, in slender Lily's case, frankly not much else. Her cigarette holder was long and was made of jade. If she was aware of my presence she gave no sign.

I strolled over and took my place beside her at the rail. I was old salt enough to know it was the starboard rail. In the west, though the sun had gone, the sky was still worth watching.

Through several draws on her cigarette, Lily disregarded me. Then she turned her face. If I had not decided the effect was studied, it would have been a nice face. Maybe it was anyway.

Having nothing special to say, I stayed silent. While she scrutinized me, Lily also took her time.

"You," she said at last, "are one of the house detectives, aren't you?"

"If you call this thing a house, yes."

"Nice work?"

"Not this way. If the decks should run with blood, it would be. I am hopeful. Or, under the circumstances, should I say sanguine?"

Lily missed my joke. A pity.

"You should have been with us on the way over."

"You mean the murder?"

Miss Wyndam's cigarette holder bobbed so she nearly lost it.

"Murder? What on earth are you talking about?"

"That is my information. You didn't even notice? How sophisticated can you be?"

"You," said Lily firmly, "are unmistakably nuts. You're exaggerating. I suppose you mean Braun's arm? That's what I meant."

"No, but I'm curious about that, too. Kindly tell all."

(I should explain that one of the passengers, a German named Manfred Braun, was carrying his right arm in a black silk sling.)

Miss Wyndam drew on her cigarette and looked thoughtfully out to sea.

"Possibly," she said guardedly. "What's your name?"

I was surprised. After fifty-some hours of being fellow yachtsmen it seemed to me Miss Wyndam should have known at least that much.

"Why, Deane."

Lily made a face at me. "Don't be preposterous. I know that. I can't call you 'Deane,' as if you were a butler."

"'Robert' would do."

"'Robert' sounds more like a footman than a butler, but let's not discuss your family's taste. Why do you want to know about Mr. Braun's arm?"

"Because it's my duty aboard this expensive craft," I explained, "to prevent crime. An uncongenial duty, I admit, because I am extremely fond of crime. From your

fragments of conversation, I deduced you know of some felony. Since you deny knowledge of any murder, no doubt because you are the guilty party, that leaves us with Herr Braun's game arm. *Quod erat demonstrandum.*"

"Don't underestimate me, Robert. I, too, have had an education. Incidentally, I understood your pun. I disapprove of it."

"I might add," I added, "that I am not just interested in Mr. Braun's arm. I'm also interested in the rest of him."

Lily nodded. This evening her tow-blond locks were drawn back and ended over her slender neck in a cluster of little curls. At her nod they jiggled. I was beginning to like Lily better.

"Me, too. But I haven't anything to tell you about him really. Not a thing. I only know he came aboard with the other freaks at Bremerhaven."

"Bremerhaven? Bremerhaven in Germany?"

"Is there one in Tibet? Yes. Didn't you know? This whatever-it-is of Viggo's started at Bremen. Not, you understand, that anyone has told me anything. But I know that that's where Souhani and Herr Braun and Herr Meer got on."

"The two Germans to whom you are so rude?"

Lily shrugged her slender shoulders. "Shouldn't one be?"

"I admit it took a fine discernment to note the difference."

Miss Wyndam's pretty mouth formed a perfect circle. "Oh! So you dislike me?"

"Until now. I'm weakening. I've even seen you being rude to Mr. Sand."

Lily laughed. "Dear Robert! How ingenuous you are. With the very rich one must either be rude or fawn on them. Rudeness is less undignified. I think they rather like it."

A chuckle in the deep shadows only inches from my ear made me leap almost overboard. The exquisite and, I was beginning to suspect, far from negligible creature beside me barely started. Lily's poise was equal even to this.

It was Viggo Sand.

When his big bland, blond face moved forward into the light which came through the louvered shutter of the cabin window behind us I saw, with relief, that it wore its habitual composure.

"So! About you, Lily, I like everything. Forgive me that I have overheard you." Our host raised and shook an immense, pale, and almost waggish finger.

"But I must instruct you both that on ships, in particular on little ships like the *Vittoria*, it is not always good judgment to have a private conversation outside a cabin window. Or even upon an unlighted deck on so inviting a summer evening."

I was blushing trying to remember what we had said.

"I was asking Miss Wyndam," I said, "about Mr. Braun's accident."

"Yes, a great pity," said Mr. Sand with no pity. "As is so often the situation in the North Atlantic, even in this season, we encountered some bad weather."

The strong fleshy mouth, dimly seen, produced the semblance of a deprecating smile. "My friends do not always understand that, although the *Vittoria* is of a heavy tonnage for a yacht, as an ocean liner it is sadly little. Mr. Braun fell and badly wrenched his shoulder. I am happy he tells me it is getting better."

"You have known Mr. Braun long?" I inquired.

Sand hesitated. "Mr. Braun, shall I say, is an old acquaintance."

Lily was at my left. I had my back partly turned to her and was facing Sand. He and I are of about equal height. Our faces were no more than two feet apart. Both were clearly visible in the light from the stateroom window.

Something out of the darkness shot past our noses, something which was short and glittered. It passed inches closer to Sand's face than to mine. A perceptible second later we heard a little splash in the sea below.

"What," demanded Sand, "was that?" His normally bass voice had deepened a half-octave. His normally white face was paler still.

"That," said Lily Wyndam,

with careful self-control, "was a knife. A—A kind of dagger! I saw it quite distinctly."

"Where," I asked hoarsely, "did it come from?"

Lily pointed. "From there. It must have been back there. But I didn't see anyone."

"Nor I." I stared toward the darkness, the apparent emptiness of the afterdeck.

"Well, well, well!" I contributed helpfully.

"Mr. Deane!"

Sand's hands were clutching the rail. I saw that the big man was shaking. His words were as brusque as a sergeant-major's.

Belatedly, I leapt to action. I had forgotten. After all I *was* the yacht dick. I sped round the corner of the cabin housing. The stern deck, not surprisingly, was empty. Taking its rubber-tread steps three at a time, I leapt up the ladderlike stairway to the upper boat deck. Though, up there, there were many shadows and places of concealment, I contrived to look in all of them. No one there. I pounded back down the companionway to the deck on which we had been standing, and went around the opposite side. I was beginning to slow down. But in another moment I had circled the promenade deck, too, and was back where I had started.

Viggo Sand and Lily were standing now, not at the rail, but with their backs against the white-

painted sheet-iron wall. Sand had evidently reached through the near-by window and pushed the shutter open to let out more light.

"I found no trace of the assailant," I reported.

Good heavens, what a silly way to talk. I was self-conscious.

"I shall, however, at once consult with Mr. Lynch," I declaimed. "I am confident we shall lay him by the heels." (That sounded even worse!)

Sand stared at me and moved in a ponderous nod. "So. If, Mr. Deane, you will be good enough to accompany me to my cabin?"

The *millionnaire*, as the French call his breed, extended his elbow as an indication I was to take his arm.

Mr. Viggo Sand was shaking. Mr. Viggo Sand, I perceived, was good and scared.

Neither of us spoke until I had led him along the deck and to the door of his own suite. With a murmured "Thank you," he entered with some precipitation. The key turned in the lock.

I lit a cigarette and walked back the way we had come. My role as man-hunter had become just the least bit difficult.

The trouble was that in all my life I had known, or even known of, only one complete master of the difficult art of knife throwing. That master was Bertram Lynch. He had learned it, he once told me, in Marseilles. He was con-

vinced that, for his needs, the knife was the perfect weapon. Like his peculiar trade, it was silent, secret. And almost impossible to associate with anyone so invincibly British as himself.

Lynch, I gathered, was losing no time in his resolve to "stir 'em up."

To my surprise, Lily Wyndam was still on deck. A pale shape in the darkness and the glow of her cigarette in its long holder showed she was now at the stern rail.

I was greeted with some warmth.

"A gallant pair of stinkers, I must say!"

"Who? Me?"

"No. You're not a pair, big as you are. I mean you and Viggo. Darting off like that, leaving me alone with a murderer at large. I think modern men are just dicky!"

"I'm terribly sorry. I just didn't think—"

"That is easy to believe."

"Now you mention it, if you're afraid of murderers—"

"A little thing like murderers? Goodness, no! Mice, yes. But murderers—"

"Then," I persisted, "Why didn't you go in, instead of hanging around out here?"

"There's no one on this barge who knows me well enough to murder me. Except Viggo. And I had my eye on him. Who do you think it was?"

I shrugged.

"An honest answer, Deane. An honest answer. Since you're not pressed, then, I'll tell you why I lingered here to chat with you."

"Yes?"

"To tell you that Viggo is an unmitigated liar. About Braun."

"No accident?"

"Accident, my eye. Do you want to hear my story? If this yacht is going to get dangerous, I'd better tell you."

"Fire when you're ready."

Lily Wyndam peered carefully into the surrounding gloom. The stars were out, and the tar-black sea was faintly luminous. With accustomed eyes one could now see quite clearly. It was an enchanting night. The combined smell of the salt air and Lily was delightful.

We had the afterdeck to ourselves. This time there was obviously no one in hearing.

"We were about halfway over," said Lily. "As Viggo said in his one burst of honesty, it was rather stormy. The *Vittoria* was jumping about like one of those absurd Mexican beans. I suppose it was very late at night. Threeish. Anyway, I was sound asleep."

"How pretty you must look!"

"Down, Rover," said Lily matter-of-factly. "I no doubt do. I heard someone running: someone who stumbled with a bang against my door. The first thing I did, naturally, was to reach out to turn on the light by my bed. It didn't

go on. Nothing happened. So I went to the door and opened it just the least bit and peeked out. That big, mean-looking German—Heitzig, I think his name is—who is the night watchman or something, was rattling Braun's doorknob. He had a flashlight. The next minute, Viggo appeared. He had a flashlight too. He was wearing, one could hardly help but notice, bright red pajamas. He looked like a fire truck. Then Braun managed to get his door open from inside and came wobbling out into the corridor. You gather there were no lights there either? Apparently the main switch had failed."

"Or someone had pulled it."

"You will soon, Robert, be at the top of your profession. Where was I? Stop interrupting. Oh, yes! About the time Viggo showed up, Braun came out. He was deadly white. The watchman had to reach out and hold him. All this time, you understand, I was peeking with natural girlish curiosity through the crack in my door."

"Yes?" I urged.

"Yes, indeed. In a minute they bundled Braun back into his cabin, and then the watchman went and got Reg Dibble. Why Dibble? you may well ask. But the Dibble, as you may or may not know, is ever at Viggo's right hand. That impressive nose is into everything. Reg at least used some glimmering of sense and went and fetched the



Innocuous Norwegian, Dr. Lund—as you know, Viggo's Royal Physician. Dr. Lund's cabin is just between yours and mine.

"In fact," said Lily reflectively. "I have wondered if he didn't see me."

Lily was silent for a moment. Her slight body trembled as if a chill wind had blown on it. Then she went on.

"There was some very hushed and whispery coming and going while, I suppose, Braun got himself swabbed off and tied up. He needed it.

"He needed it," she repeated. "He was a mess. During that minute he reeled out into the corridor both the torches were on him, and I had a good look at him. Our Germanic playmate was wearing white pajamas. About half of him was covered with blood."

Lily gestured. "With his right hand he was holding his left shoulder, like this. The blood came from there. He must have been stabbed. I'm sure if there had been a shot, I would have heard it. He certainly hadn't fallen. Falls aren't that gory. Braun didn't appear all the next day. The day after, he'd rigged up that black sling; and the official story was that he'd come a cropper in the storm."

"What, Mademoiselle Poviot, are your deductions?"

"Picking my brains, Robert? Oh well, you must find them

where you can. I think Braun was being burglarized and had the bad luck to wake up and the burglar let him have it."

"Burglarized? What of?"

"How should I know? Herr Braun may, of course, be the custodian of the ruby from the eye of the sacred idol. Or on the other hand, he may not. What I had in mind was that someone was trying to find out just who and what Mr. Manfred Braun really is. Possibly by thumbing through his private papers. And was interrupted."

There was a pause. "You know," I observed, "I think I'd better see Lynch. And start detecting."

### CHAPTER THREE

A WORD on the arrangement of the *Vittoria's* cabins. Up through the mid-section of the ship rose a solid central structure. Sand's suite was forward. At either side of the mid-structure ran two narrow corridors, thickly carpeted, and equipped with brass handrails, to be clutched when the ship was bucking.

On to those two corridors gave the doors of the guest cabins, ten in all, five to a side.

Lynch was fully dressed. He also gave me the impression he had lost his mind. At my entrance he flapped his arms, he violently shook his head, he contorted his

features, he tapped a lean forefinger vigorously against his lips.

I got it, I was to weigh my words.

"Lynch," I said solemnly, "a criminal attempt has been made on the life of Mr. Sand. I have—er—made a preliminary search of the ship, but I need your help. In any case I wished, of course, to consult you."

"Of course."

I didn't think, myself, it sounded so good. A bit on the stiff side. But Lynch seemed satisfied.

"Quite," he said. "We'll make a start at once."

This time, for variety's sake, we chose the top boatdeck, a place, in the summer's night, of bulky, sinister shapes of tarpaulin-covered lifeboats, a mummy-wrapped speedboat, and giant, scoop-shaped ventilators.

"What," I demanded, in a hoarse whisper, "was the point of all that? D'you think Sand has your cabin wired?"

"Think? I'm sure of it. A small microphone concealed in the base of the table lamp. I've checked. All the cabins are. Nothing new. A permanent installation. In a business way, most useful, I imagine, to our host. The *Vittoria*, as you know, carries amazing radio equipment. Sand can telephone from shipboard to any number in the world. That's even been reported in the press. I presume while he was at it he had all the

cabins wired to a central listening post. Probably in his own cabin."

For Lynch this was a detailed speech. I knew him well. It meant he was embarrassed.

"Look you, Bertram. You heaved that knife at us, didn't you?"

"Lost it, too," Lynch grumbled. "Went right overboard. Fortunately, I carry a spare. A perfectly balanced knife's not easily come by."

"You could have buried the thing in either Sand's head or mine, you idiot! You're not all that good, you know!"

"Nonsense, I never miss. Or very rarely."

"Anyway, what was the big idea?"

"This ship," said Lynch briskly, "does fourteen knots. We'll be in the West Indies in about five days. And we still know substantially nothing. There's no time to lose. That answer your question?"

I thought this over. "So," I said with heavy sarcasm, "after due reflection—after, in fact, what must have been all of five minutes of reflection—you decided that the character aboard—what was it you said?—who was the most 'susceptible,' the one most easily moved to telling all, was that notorious 'fraidy-cat and bundle of neuroses Viggo Sand?'"

"Quite!" said Lynch defensively.

As we paced the lonely stretch

of the top deck I repeated the substance of what Lily had told me.

"The Braun affair, Robert, wants looking into."

"There's something else," I declared, "we have to look into. And no fooling."

"What?"

"Go through the motions of searching for the mysterious knife thrower. When a murderous assassin tries to make away with our eminent employer right under our noses—or, anyway, mine—I do feel the above-mentioned employer has a right to expect his hired help to do something more than take a stroll on deck and then go to bed and read a couple of good books."

Lynch made an impatient, clicking sound with his tongue. "A bore!"

"Solving the mystery, I agree, shouldn't be much of a tax on you. I solved it in about ten seconds."

"What I'll do," said Lynch, "is this. I shall call on Mr. Sand in his cabin. I've no doubt I will be admitted. What time is it? About eleven? Under the circumstances he will not yet have retired. I shall report to him the progress we have made."

"That I would like to hear."

"Certainly. You have closely questioned Miss Wyndam. You have commented on her unusual powers of observation. You and I have consulted. We have made a close study of the scene. We have

reached the conclusion that Mr. Sand was not the intended victim, but yourself. He may, or may not, agree. In either case, Sand's alarm that there is an unknown criminal aboard will be increased. First, though, as further proof of our—er—devotion to duty—and for our own instruction—I think we should call on the Captain."

"Carey?"

"I believe that is his name."

Other than the most formal handshake on our coming aboard in New York, neither Lynch nor I had held any communication with him. Since that first ten minutes, I had not seen him. The salaried captain of Viggo Sand's great yacht apparently had his whole being here aloft. Certainly he did not take his meals, or fraternize, with the passengers.

The louvered, varnished door opened almost at once to Lynch's peremptory knock. Carey peered out and showed no immediate disposition to let us pass. He was tall, broad-shouldered, and lean-hipped, a brunette Irishman with small, unfriendly black eyes, a perpetually blue jaw, and lank black hair.

"We should like to have a talk with you, Captain," said Lynch briskly. "A matter of ship's business. Be good enough to let us in." Carey moved aside.

"I want to see your crew list, Captain," said Lynch. "And ask you some questions."

"And by whose authority?" The black eyes which stared at us were hostile.

"I need none. Though I will have the owner instruct you if you require it." By raising his crisp, flat voice a little, Lynch gave it added authority, almost, indeed, a note of bullying.

"You know Mr. Deane's and my function aboard here: to guard against sinister incidents. Such an incident has occurred tonight."

"You're an Englishman, aren't you?" the irrelevance was informative. The black Irishman's thin red mouth was stiff with hatred.

"I am! And you, Captain, I take it, do not go ashore in British ports?"

The shot, as they say, went home. In the center of each of Carey's cadaverous and sallow cheeks appeared a bright red patch.

"Or Irish, either?" Lynch snapped.

"What do you want?"

"I told you. The crew list. And all the information you can give me. There has been a knife throwing. Fortunately, a miss. I will not trouble you with details, Captain. At least until I have talked with Mr. Sand.

"The knife," Lynch went on unblushingly, "as no doubt you know, when used as a throwing weapon, is generally associated with the Mediterranean races. Have you any Sicilians aboard? Spaniards? Marseillais?"

Carey got up, went to his desk, unlocked a drawer, and took out a brown leather loose-leaf ledger. He shoved it, open, across the table to Lynch.

"See for yourself," he growled. "Twenty-two men, counting officers and the steward's crew. Eleven nationalities. Two Nansen passports. Three stateless. Sand likes a mixed bag. So do I. I know nothing bad of any of 'em. Nor nothing good. Take your pick."

While I did mental arithmetic, reckoning the yacht's pay roll, Lynch studied the page before him. The Captain crossed his arms over his chest, leaned back, and stared into space. He had not relented, and I was certain Lynch had made a dangerous enemy; but apparently for the time being Carey had decided to behave himself.

"Very precise, Captain. Very precise," said Lynch approvingly. "You will be good enough to furnish me with a copy of this list. I note a number of your men have been with you for some time. I do not see your name? How long have you been with the *Vittoria*, Carey?"

"Nine years."

"As Captain?"

"As Captain."

"And Dr. Lund? I do not see his name here."

"It's Sand's fancy to count Lund as a passenger. If he pays him, as I have no doubt, he attends to it himself. I have naught to do with

it. Dr. Persen before him was the same."

"Dr. Lund joined the *Vittoria* on this voyage?"

Carey dourly nodded. "He did. Dr. Persen was took sick all of a sudden. In Bremen. And this Lund chap just happened to be on hand. Or so he said."

"Another matter." Lynch put a firm forefinger at a name in the book before him and ran it across the page.

"This Heitzig. Wilhelm Heitzig. Born Hamburg. Age 32. Signed on, I observe, the same year as you did, Captain. A German. During the war. A deserter?"

"That, you will have to ask him."

"I see," Lynch persisted, "Heitzig is carried on your pay roll as a watchman. On a yacht, a vessel of this size, is that not unusual? Isn't it more customary to assign the duty of the ship's night patrol to ordinary seamen in rotation?"

"It is. But Sand, mister, is not a usual man. Nor does he have usual ways. This ship comes as near as no matter to being Sand's office. There are times when important people sleep aboard here—" Carey cut his loquacity short. "It's no business of mine. Nor yours."

Lynch rose. "Quite. I shall wish to question you again, Captain. I know I can count upon your cooperation!"

To the accompaniment of a low growl from Carey, we departed—

my contribution to the festivities, I reflected, having reached an all-time low. Not once had I opened my mouth. I trusted Carey was impressed by strong and silent men.

As we closed the door of the cabin behind us, blinking for an instant as our eyes accustomed themselves again to the starlit dark, we became aware of a man walking away from us through the deep shadows between the ship's boats. He was halfway down the outside companionway to the promenade deck when we caught up with him. We ended at the bottom of it in a polite but mutually peering and suspicious huddle.

The man was one of the trio Lily Wyndam had unkindly described as "freaks," who had joined the yacht in Germany. A tall, youngish-looking Teuton somewhere in his later thirties, he was so blond, so blue-eyed, so entirely devoid of any back to his head that he could well have served as the model for a Hitler-era propaganda poster. For all I knew, he had. The creature gloried in the name of Siegfried Meer.

In our mealtime and other brief encounters during the two days since we had sailed, he had been punctiliously polite. Every time one passed him on deck, he bowed. You could see the effort it required for him not to click his heels together. Siegfried's English

was of the careful variety learned, one suspected, in a good German school, but little practiced.

"A lovely night," I offered.

Meer gave a choppy bow and agreed. "A lovely night."

That topic being exhausted, there was a slight pause.

Meer, I was sure, was by no means negligible. The lithe body had a look of training, of both swift and enduring strength. The eyes too close together, the fair skin, the thin, insensitive mouth, a sharpness of the high Prussian cheekbones, were those of a fanatic.

Meer glanced up at the starlit summer sky. "Even at this season, gentlemen, it is pleasant, is it not, to be going to the southward? The tropical West Indian islands are very beautiful, I am told."

"You were in the Navy, Herr Meer?" Lynch interjected. "A submariner?"

Even in the three-quarters darkness I could detect Meer's astonishment. He literally fell back a step. His recovery was rapid.

"Oh, no, you are mistaken. The little knowledge I have of the sea is that when I was a boy and then a youth my good father let me do much sailing in a small boat. It is a pleasant hobby."

"You lived near the sea, then?" Lynch said.

Having, in effect, already said so, our water-borne Siegfried had to agree.

"You know my country well, then?"

"Yes," said Lynch. "Very well. Very well indeed." There was something grimly unflattering in the way he said it. After another pause, Meer bowed again.

"Then I shall leave you, my gentlemen. I trust that you will sleep well. Good night."

"Gute Nacht, Herr Meer."

We were only a few paces from our respective destinations. The German went to his cabin—G, at the after end of the corridor on the port side. Lynch led the way to mine.

As he opened my door and I followed him, Lynch began talking. And moving.

"Not entirely satisfactory, Deane, of course," he declared rather loudly. "But I feel we have made progress. Great progress. We'll make a further check-up tomorrow. But I am confident we will clear this little matter up."

As he was delivering himself of these not particularly choice gems of monologue, Lynch was darting soft-footedly about my room. Opening the closet door, he rapidly inspected my wardrobe; removed a pair of gray flannel trousers from a hanger; eyed them; and gave an approving nod. Then, with gross disregard for my property, he tiptoed across the cabin and tightly wrapped the base of the fixed lamp on the bedside table with my trousers. The lamp,

which I now really noticed for the first time, was a bronze affair with an elaborately wrought, openwork base. It was in these bases, as Lynch had told me—there is a lamp of the same type and same position in each cabin—that our less than genial host had installed his microphones. I was sure they must be used only on rare occasion; Viggo Sand must have better things to do than listen in to every casual remark, every snore, grunt and gargle of his eight guests. But Lynch was taking no chances.

After he had propped a few books against the trousers to hold them in place, he relaxed and lit a cigarette.

"A most satisfactory talk. Don't you agree?"

"Which?"

"With Herr Siegfried Meer."

"Go on. Show off. Why did you guess a submariner?"

Lynch looked pleased that I had asked. "Meer seems to me to have the bearing of an officer. I found his look at the stars revealing. It was automatic. It was also expert. He was checking the ship's course. Yet neither his eyes nor his skin have the weathered, hardened look of the usual naval officer. I therefore deduced the submarine service." Lynch smiled.

"His reaction gave me the impression I was right. I suggest to you, Bobby, purely as a speculation, that Meer's association with submarines may give us a hint as

to the nature, possibly even the purpose, of this 'treasure.' Think it over.

"Now I shall go and have my interview with Mr. Sand. I shan't be long about it. Wait for me. Put on a dark shirt if you have one. And rubber-soled shoes." He smiled as he only did when he was up to no good.

"You and I have a matter to attend to. I'll be back in an hour. Or possibly longer. When the yacht is safely bedded down."

With a brief nod of farewell, Lynch softly opened the door and vanished through it.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

AT THE END of two hours I reached the conclusion the passengers of the *Vittoria* "bedded down" slowly. At the end of three I was sound asleep, my long legs outstretched, my book reposing on my stomach, my mouth, I fear, wide open.

Lynch roused me with an unkind toe.

"Sorry to be so long about it, but Braun and Dr. Lund have only just turned in."

While I put on what I presume was supposed to be protective coloration, Lynch perched on the edge of the bed. (The *Vittoria*, mark you, sported beds, not berths.) My trousers were still wrapped around the base of the

lamp, and so he could speak freely.

"You may not have observed, but forward of the lounge, opening out of the stairwell, is a small room which Sand uses as an office: as one would expect, a most luxurious room. The door is never locked."

"That surprises me."

Lynch's commonplace, unmemorable face assumed an expression of superiority.

"It does not, on reflection, surprise me. Viggo Sand's operations are of so grandiose and secret a character, and so frequently, I suspect, illegal, that I would expect him to be allergic to documents of any sort. He is certainly not the man to trust important papers to the feeble security of a locked safe. It is concealed. I would even say it is fairly cleverly concealed. But I have located it." Lynch beamed. "I suggest, Bobby, that you and I devote the remainder of our evening to trying to break into it."

I held my head. "Jeepers, Lynch—"

"Understand me. I doubt if I will be successful. Efficient safe-cracking, I regret to say, is not one of my accomplishments. But I propose to scar it so unmistakably that Sand at last will be convinced that he must—how shall I put it?—that he must consolidate his front. Stiffen his guard. And give us, his guardians, far more de-

tailed information about these people and his errand. We could, of course," Lynch added confidently, "find it out for ourselves. But time is short."

"Why," I inquired feebly, "do you need me?"

Lynch smiled. "Every safe-cracker, Bobby, needs a lookout. At this hour"—it was three o'clock—"the only prowler we need fear is the watchman Heitzig. So far as I have been able to check, he keeps no regular schedule. If we complete our little business, well and good. If Heitzig interrupts us, I want you to take care of him with this."

He produced from his hip pocket a well worn leather pad, flat on one side and rounded on the other, tightly filled with small buckshot, and attached to a leather loop about six inches long. I accepted it gingerly.

"Your luggage," I remarked bitterly, "must have been of unusual interest to the U.S. Customs."

"In London," Lynch explained matter-of-factly, "this is called a 'sap.' A most effective, and generally a harmless, weapon. You know how to use it?"

"My education has been neglected."

"Quite simple. Link the loop over your right wrist. Hold the pad lightly between your thumb and forefinger. If Heitzig, or anyone else—er—intrudes, swing your right arm smartly up, then



down, with wrist motion, letting go of the pad just a few inches before you make contact. Just above the ear is a good spot. Don't be timid about it. On the other hand, don't overdo it. I scarcely have to say, be most careful not to be seen. Keep behind him. All clear? Ready?"

Lynch went ahead. The thick carpets in the passageway absorbed all sound. Behind each door we passed, there was the strong sense of living presence though nothing gave tangible proof of it. The ship itself was very much alive. The throb of the powerful engines was unceasing. Their vibration gave everything one touched a faint and eerie pulsebeat. Somewhere, both aloft and in the engine room, men must be at work and wide awake.

With a thief's caution and technique, Lynch grasped the polished brass doorknob of Sand's study with both hands, bore down on it, and slowly turned. There was no click. The door opened with only the faintest squeak. We entered, and Lynch gently closed it again, leaving us in total darkness.

When my nerve-racking friend turned on his pocket torch it seemed to be brighter than an airport searchlight. Silently, he took me by the elbow and placed me against the wall in such a position that, if anyone opened the door, I should be behind it. Obediently,

I held the blackjack ready for instant use. And quit breathing for the rest of the evening.

Lynch, with the curious precision of movement which never failed to impress me, went at once behind the desk. His light picked out one of the conventional brass plaques which can be found somewhere on every ship: an incised plate noting the vessel's name, and—though I could not read it at such a distance—no doubt the date of its construction, the yard where it was built, the name of the architect, and so on. This one was mounted on a mahogany board screwed against the wall. Or so it appeared.

Lynch propped the torch on the desk so that its beam picked out the plaque and some of the wall around it. Next, moving very quickly, he produced from his trousers a cold chisel and a small but businesslike hammer with a steel handle about four inches long. He put the bit of the chisel against the edge of the mahogany board where it joined the wall and gave it one light tap. The board swung open on hinges, set invisibly at its right-hand edge. Behind it was a small recessed wall safe of conventional appearance. From where I stood it looked fairly formidable.

Lynch held the flashlight close to it for a moment, and I saw him shake his head as if he agreed with me. He then made what in

my harassed state I thought was a hell of a lot of noise.

The flash propped back on the desk again, he proceeded with chisel and hammer to assault first the safe's turning knob, then the paintwork along the slit where the safe opened: something it was clearly not going to do just now.

So intent was I on what Lynch was doing, and on my concern at the racket he was making, I came very close to failing in my own duty. The door beside me was half open before I became aware of it. In the next second, a tall man came into the room.

My reflexes functioned, if my mind did not. Automatically—instantaneously—I raised the sap and brought it down hard. There was a soft thud as the sandbag came in contact with a skull; a grunt, a slow sigh, and, somehow surprisingly the man fell forward.

Lynch was beside me in a second. Dropping to one knee, he turned my victim over, then let him go again. It was the watchman, Heitzig.

He dusted his knees. "Excellent, Bobby! Excellent," he whispered. "You have a natural gift. We've done all I intended." He touched my shoulder to—quite needlessly—hurry me.

"Go at once to your cabin. Get these clothes off, put them safely away, and go to bed. Don't turn your light on. I've no doubt we'll be called in due course."

As we quit Sand's study Lynch left the door deliberately open. In the vague blue light anyone passing would plainly see the big German prone on the carpet.

Lynch left me on the deck above.

With the speed of one of those accelerated sequences in an old Mack Sennett comedy, I got out of my clothes, into pajamas, and in bed. I found I was blowing like a stranded whale. An interminable time dragged by. I was afraid to make my cabin or myself conspicuous even by turning on a light to read. I base the brilliant deduction that at some point I must have slept on the fact that I was waked up. By the phone. My watch said five-thirty.

It was Lynch.

"Deane? Mr. Sand's study has been broken into. An attack has been made on the watchman, Heitzig. Can you come at once?" His tone was its briskest and most businesslike.

"The study," he informed me, "is just off the forward stairwell. By the entrance to the lounge. Mr. Sand has just called me. Can you join me there?"

The room seemed full of people. The majestic bulk of Sand in a Persian brocade bathrobe almost filled the door. Near him, fully uniformed, even to their caps, were Captain Carey and a stocky young

Hollander I knew to be the Second Mate. Lynch and Sven Lund, the mild-mannered, self-contained little Norwegian who was the ship's doctor, were kneeling over Heitzig.

When I saw him my stomach—and my heart—turned over. Heitzig was badly hurt. Clotted blood marked a break in the skin just above the right temple. It had run down his cheek and dried. That whole side of his forehead was beginning to discolor. His eyes were partly open, but he had not recovered consciousness. He was breathing jerkily.

Something was very, very wrong.

If I hadn't entirely lost my memory, I had struck the watchman on the back of the head. There was the door itself for proof. I had stood behind it. As he had come through it, his left side had been toward me. That injured right temple had been turned away from me. Had he struck something in falling? It was impossible. There was nothing on the floor, no piece of furniture within two yards of him.

Lynch's face was devoid of all expression.

"A hard blow," Dr. Lund said softly. "If the man's skull were not so thick I would say his condition might be serious. As it is, I anticipate no great danger."

"Will you trepan, Doctor?" Lynch asked.

Lund regarded him with the

slight distaste medical men always display at professional talk by laymen. "If it should prove necessary. Of course."

Dr. Lund lowered Heitzig's head and shoulders quickly to the carpet and stood up. For a Norwegian—for, at any rate, what I imagined to be the Norwegian type—Dr. Lund was well below the average in both height and girth, a slight man with pale skin, pale eyes, pale lips, and pale, gray-blond hair cut evenly and neatly over his whole head at about half an inch in length. A withdrawn man who nevertheless gave me an impression of high intelligence.

He was instructing Captain Carey to summon two men with a stretcher and take Heitzig to the below-decks cabin set aside as the ship's hospital.

When he had finished, Lynch, who had remained on his knees peering at the injured man, spoke again.

"Doctor! The nature of the weapon?"

Dr. Lund looked down at him reflectively, then shook his head. "It would be difficult to say."

Lynch was sharply persistent. "Would you agree, Dr. Lund, from your observation that this man was struck with something in the nature of—say, a small hammer? a metallic object of some sort with a clearly defined point of impact of perhaps a centimeter and a half in diameter?"

Dr. Lund smiled. "You are very observant, Mr. Lynch. It is possible, of course. Perhaps when I have made a more thorough examination I may be able to confirm your opinion. My experience in forensic medicine is limited."

For the first time, I looked at the safe. The mahogany board with the brass plaque still swung wide as Lynch had left it. But the safe itself was not at all as Lynch had left it. I walked behind the desk to examine it more closely.

Lynch had merely tapped and scratched at it. Someone else—unless, as I did not for a moment think, Lynch had come back for another try after I had gone to my room—had made a much more exhaustive attempt. And had also failed. Some much finer and stronger instrument than Lynch's cold chisel had worked at the narrow slit where the safe's door closed until little lips of the hardened steel had been turned up. The single knob by which the combination was dialed had been attacked so vigorously it had actually been bent a little. It was the work of an amateur, but of an amateur with resolution. And—when I thought of the noise he must have made at it—of cool and reckless courage.

For the first time, Viggo Sand spoke. His smooth, strong voice, at least, betrayed no emotion. "Mr. Deane. Mr. Lynch. We must discuss these matters."

For an instant the millionaire looked around him with an odd helplessness. Captain Carey had left us to get help. The young Second Mate had withdrawn unobtrusively to a corner.

"Mr. de Jongh. You will escort me."

When Heitzig had been carried off under Dr. Lund's supervision on a short-legged canvas stretcher, Lynch closed the door after them. We then both set about examining the study. Haunted, as always upon the *Vittoria*, by the possibility that Viggo Sand might have the means—and the desire—to tune in on us, we exchanged only the most meager and necessary words.

By the kind of wordless understanding I am told two ants enjoy, still bathrobed and disheveled, we went at once when we had finished to the after end of the promenade deck. It was only a little after six of an exquisite summer morning. The glassy sea under the ship's hull had turned from gray-green to deepest blue. We were in the Gulf Stream. There was already a hint of the tropics in the air.

"How badly hurt do you think he is?" I started.

"Very."

I was startled. "Do you think he'll die?"

"I think it is entirely possible."

"That will be murder."

Lynch turned upon me an im-

personal but baleful stare. "Someone aboard this yacht, Robert, is making use of me!"

"The word I had in mind was 'monkey.'"

Lynch nodded. "I accept it."

He looked down for a moment at the appetizing white coil in the blue water of the white yacht's twin propellers, then straightened and became brisk.

"Come with me. We'll wake the passengers. All of them. It may at least tell us who needs waking. We'll tell 'em to assemble in the lounge. Something may come of it."

"One thing I can guarantee will come of it," I offered, "is that Sand will be sore as hell. They aren't 'passengers,' you know. They're guests. And strictly speaking, neither of us has a scrap of authority."

"I trust he will be. I shall summon Sand last. Sand must be made to realize I am more than a tame servant. I have been. But my status changes with the commission of a crime. We—er—private investigators have a sworn duty to uphold the law. Haven't we?"

We started with the right-hand corridor. My stateroom was first. Next came that of Dr. Lund. Without knocking, Lynch tried the knob. The door was not locked, and he swung it open.

The Norwegian, unexpectedly, was not with his patient but at

home. He was fully dressed, even to a dull-looking little brown bow tie, and was sitting in the armchair. At our intrusion he looked up in mild surprise.

"Doctor," said Lynch sharply, "if you will be so good. Please come to the lounge in ten minutes. I am sure you will understand. We must get to the bottom of this affair without delay."

Dr. Lund smiled politely and inclined his head. "Certainly." I noticed he had spread those almost disturbingly scrubbed-looking hands in his lap in a gesture of concealment. The action, more or less automatic as it was, failed of its purpose.

At this early hour of a summer's morning—it was not yet seven—Dr. Lund was reading a packet of old letters.

The next cabin was Lily Wyndam's. Cabin D.

I raised my hand to knock, but Lynch forestalled me. Again he reached for the knob, and found that Lily, too, had trustingly—or invitingly—left her door unlocked.

Lily at least, I deduced, had not been prowling about cracking safes and knocking out night watchmen. Or, if she had, it had not given her insomnia. She was asleep. She was wearing the filmiest and costliest of pale blue nightgowns. Nylon, I believe. She was sleeping on her back, her pretty, blondest of blond heads

nestled in a pillow. The night had been warm. She had thrown all the covers on the floor. It was a pleasure.

Lynch and I, I fear, forgot our hurry. It was a full minute before Lily Wyndam awoke. I am sure neither of us had made a sound. Her long-lashed gray eyes simply opened and looked at us. Lily was one of those rare people who when they wake, are wide awake with no jarring transition. To discover us staring at her from the door disconcerted her not at all. She didn't even jump.

"What," inquired Lily amiably, "is this, a raid? Or are you just looking? Having fun?"

"Yes." I summoned what dignity I could. "But that isn't the purpose of this visit."

Lily nodded on her pillow. "This visit," she emphasized.

"Not at all! What we came to say was that there has been another—well, another incident—"

Lily propped herself happily on her elbows. "More crime?"

"And," I persisted, "all hands are required to assemble downstairs in the lounge. Don't dress. Or anyway, don't do any more dressing than will take ten minutes. We like you as you are."

I closed the door. Lynch's virtuous soul, I felt, had been somewhat scarred by being included in that last "we." In any case, at the next cabin, that of Lily's stepmother, he deigned to knock.

After some vaguely silken rustling, Mrs. Wyndam opened her door. I was puzzled that at such an hour she had not called, "Who is it?" But she hadn't.

Mrs. Wyndam looked scarcely a dozen years older than her stepdaughter. But it is true that her appearance, even at this hour, was the product of much art.

Not unnaturally, Mrs. Wyndam looked at us in some surprise. She was shorter than Lily and somewhat rounder in the right places. She was holding about herself a most becoming robe of the thinnest, golden-yellow antique velvet.

Lynch nudged me to do the talking.

I bowed with all the old world elegance my uncombed hair and rumpled bathrobe and pajamas would permit.

"We are sorry to disturb you, Mrs. Wyndam. But this is most important. There has been a disturbing occurrence. A member of the crew has been badly hurt. There is some mystery about it."

Mrs. Beth Wyndam treated us to a sweet and helpless smile. "Oh, what a shame!" She shook her head a little.

"But I can't really see what that has to do with *me*."

"I am afraid we can make no exceptions. We are asking everyone to come downstairs to the lounge. At once. It's most important. You won't have to dress."

I closed the door firmly before Mrs. Wyndam had a chance to say "me" again.

Next on the line was Manfred Braun. I tried the knob. No dice. In view of the scene during the voyage over which Lily Wyndam had described to me, it was hardly surprising. Lynch knocked, waited a moment, then pounded like a storm trooper making a midnight arrest. There was a grunt, a shout-ed: "Wer ist dort?"

After I had announced my name there was a shuffling, the sound of a key turning in the lock, then the sound of the sliding of a bolt. Herr Braun had learned to value his privacy.

The middle-aged, alert-looking, but somehow nondescript German (Lily Wyndam's description of him as a "private secretary" was amusingly apt) either was a good actor or had been thoroughly asleep. He looked two-thirds asleep right now. His thinning hair was ruffled. Without the glasses which he usually wore, he was blinking owlshly. He was in white cotton pajamas and was barefoot. The sling he wore by day was absent.

"Excuse," he mumbled. "Sometimes. It is old habit. I do not get to sleep until very late. So in the mornings, then . . . What is it you want?"

We told him. Braun looked appropriately worried and agreed to do as he was bid.

Reginald Dibble was in bathrobe and Riviera sandals with a soft scarf tied becomingly around his throat. His naturally wavy hair was combed. His smooth cheeks had been lightly powdered. Sand, he said, had called him on the phone and told him what had happened.

The cabin adjoining Dibble's was unoccupied. The next door was locked, but was promptly opened at our knock.

If there are degrees of nothingness, we knew even less about Mr. Paul Souhani than about the others. I had the impression, though I would have been hard put to it to say on what I based it, that the rest of the *Vittoria's* guests, including Sand himself, were almost equally in the dark about him.

Mr. Paul Souhani looked to be somewhere in his early fifties; but he was deep-chested and, though his hands were soft and well tended, he looked strong. By keeping his squarish, somewhat swarthy face fixed in a polite, perpetual half-smile, Souhani succeeded in robbing it of any expression whatsoever. He might have been a priest in mufti. Or a banker. Or a member of some diplomatic mission.

I hadn't even been able to decide on his nationality. During the past two days he had spoken three languages, English, German, and French, all with an accent neither Lynch nor I could place. The one

thing Souhani did not resemble in any conceivable way was a seeker after buried treasure.

He greeted us with a polite smile. He was in undershirt and trousers. Bits of lather here and there about his face indicated we had caught him in the midst of shaving. With a polite smile he heard our explanations. With the same smile and an assenting bow he agreed to come to the lounge at once.

When I swung open the door (unlocked) of the cabin of Herr Siegfried Meer, I nearly caught him smack in the rump with it. I regretted that I hadn't.

Siggy, the Nordic god, was doing callisthenics. In white shorts and nothing else. He looked, I may say, very muscular. Far from being embarrassed at being caught in that activity, Meer started at once to tell us all about it. We had to interrupt him to explain why we had dropped in on him.

We had put off Sand till last. We found him fully dressed in a faultlessly fitting, sky-blue suit of soft, dovelike flannel. Though the costume was of the dimensions of a tent, I had to concede that, on his commanding frame, with a white silk shirt and a matching tie, the effect was both original and elegant. It certainly made Lynch and me, still in our disheveled and inexpensive bathrobes, feel more than ever at the bottom of the social ladder. Sand's always pallid

skin, I thought, was a shade paler now; but he seemed entirely self-possessed.

When obedient to Lynch's whispered instructions I told Sand of the assembly I had summoned, his big hands clenched once in anger: the instinctive anger of a man who is not accustomed to anyone but himself giving orders. However, he was worried. Beneath his mask, he was badly worried. The fists relaxed. When I urged the importance of losing no time in breasting the Vittoria's crime wave he was compelled to agree.

Since the original ten-minute dead line we had set was already more than up, we descended to the lounge at once.

#### CHAPTER FIVE

WHEN a sleepy-looking steward carrying a dustcloth and wearing a white mess jacket appeared from the dining room and stopped in open-mouthed astonishment at discovering the lounge populous at so improbable an hour, Lynch sent him to fetch Captain Carey and Second Mate de Jongh.

While we waited, Lynch managed to whisper to me: "You start things off. Then I'll take over. I'm going to have to improvise a bit."

Dr. Lund came in and settled himself with an air of professional detachment in a straight chair.



Braun, looking worried and alert behind his glinting eyeglasses and now thoroughly awake, was next. He had chosen to garb himself for the occasion—of all things—in a battered trench coat a couple of sizes too small for him.

Captain Carey and Mate de Jongh brought up the tail of the procession.

Lynch confronted Carey. "Captain? You have brought us that crew list?"

Carey glowered and looked at Sand. He got no aid nor comfort from him. Though the *Vittoria's* owner had heard, he gave no sign of either approval or disapproval. I felt he was still dealing inwardly with the unprecedented situation of having others in command and hadn't yet made up his mind what to do about it.

Carey shook his head. "No, I have not, mister."

"Then will you get it, please?"

The black Irishman turned a deeper shade of black, spun on his heel, and departed.

Lynch and I exchanged looks. He gave an imperceptible nod. The proceedings were to begin.

Everyone was seated, and everyone was looking at me. The only faces which did not appear to be devoid of all expression were Dibble's and Lily Wyndam's. Lily was beaming upon me with a kind of burlesque of maternal hopefulness. Dibble at least wore an interested and civilized smile.

"Thank you all for coming," I began. "I am sure, when you learn what's happened, you'll see the reason for it. Sometime during the night someone, quite possibly someone who is now in this room, made an attempt to burglarize a private safe in Mr. Sand's office. It is Mr. Lynch's and my impression that the purpose of that attempt" (I thought I'd do a little improvising myself) "was to get possession of certain papers. Papers touching on the purpose and destination of this trip.

"The attempt, I may say, failed. The safe is a stout one. That is," I amended hastily, "it was not opened. Perhaps the reason it wasn't was that the intruder appears to have been interrupted. We surmise that the night watchman—a German named Wilhelm Heitzig who, I understand, has been employed by Mr. Sand for many years—saw or heard something and went into the study to investigate. Before he could draw his own gun or make the thief his prisoner, Heitzig was brutally struck down. With a hard instrument something in the nature of a small hammer." I paused dramatically.

"Perhaps," I said, "—er—a small hammer."

I distinctly heard Lily Wyndam titter, and hastened on.

"The blow on the temple was one of extreme violence. The attack was, of course, clearly crimi-

nal in intent. If Heitzig dies I do not have to tell you that the name of the crime is murder. I will be entirely plain with you. If Heitzig does die, despite our remoteness at the moment from the usual mechanisms of the law, it is the intention of Mr. Lynch and myself that someone shall hang for it."

I paused. I had meant to make an impression.

"I don't have to point out to you," I went on, "that with a murderer at large we are all of us in danger. I have asked Mr. Lynch to conduct the questioning. I take it for granted that all of us want to get to the bottom of this. All of us—but one."

I sat down, gave Lynch the nod to take over, and hoped that I looked like the Master Mind. I found myself wishing that at some point during that busy morning I had had a chance to comb my hair.

Lynch took a straight chair from against the wall, set it down in a corner of the room, and straddled it with his arms crossed on the chair's back, his firm, rather sharp chin all but resting on his arms and his gray eyes resting nowhere. The comfortable places the others had found for themselves in softly enveloping chairs and on divans made nearly all twist their necks awkwardly around to look at him. The simple trick produced the first show of self-consciousness I had observed.

"First," he said incisively, "let's see what we're up against. Dr. Lund? Will Heitzig die?"

The Norwegian looked up quietly. "I cannot yet say. The man has a strong physique. The blow, as Mr. Deane said, was severe. It is"—Dr. Lund sought for a second the English phrase—"touch and go."

"Very good," Lynch snapped. "Here at sea, most unfortunately, no better doctor is available. I strongly advise you to do your best." He smiled a singularly ugly smile. "If Heitzig lives, the assailant, I assure you, will have good reason to be grateful."

Dr. Lund was as motionless as if he had been put in a deep freeze. But at the gratuitous insult a flush swept upward from his throat until his ordinarily pale face was a shade of purple. Everyone in the room was looking at him—most of them, I felt, with sympathy.

With the self-control of which usually only persons who have endured much are capable, Dr. Lund kept his temper. He said simply, "Thank you."

Dr. Lund stood up. "If you have finished with me? I should like to go to my patient."

Lynch nodded indifferently. "If anything further occurs to us we will call you back." The dignified little Norwegian physician bowed stiffly to the room in general and went away.

It was clear to me why Lynch had ridden him so hard: Lund just happened to be first. Lynch was serving warning that he was not conducting a polite tea party. If the roughness spread consternation among the others, that was his intention.

"Herr Braun?"

The German in the ancient, greasy trench coat had slumped almost out of sight in a huge armchair. He managed nevertheless to start.

"Was—" Braun hastily changed languages. "Yes? What is it?"

"You have the habit of staying up very late. I should also judge you have the habit of attention. Especially"—Lynch smartly slapped his own left shoulder—"since this. Since you were stabbed. Did you hear anything?"

I was doing my best to earn my keep by watching faces. Several in the group looked surprised—surprised, I sensed, rather by Lynch's knowledge than by the fact itself. Paul Souhani and Viggo Sand managed to keep their masterly composure.

Only Beth Wyndam showed real astonishment. And fear.

Braun reflected and shook his head. "No. At one o'clock I heard nothing."

"Never mind the time. Dr. Lund is probably wrong. At any time?"

Braun nodded. "Yes. Though probably it is nothing. By my watch three o'clock it was. I

thought I heard the footsteps going past my door. I thought—*verstehen Sie?*—they were too *soft*. The door of my cabin I opened. Just as soft. The corridor was in blue darkness. But I did think I saw two men. A short man and a tall man. They were going out of sight." Braun raised his arm and pointed. "Up there. No doubt two members of the crew. It was hardly more than an impression."

I wasn't feeling at all well. Short man and tall man indeed! Was Braun kidding us? Then my impression that I had heard the soft opening and closing of a door hadn't been an illusion.

If Lynch wasn't too pleased he didn't show it. "Quite. Before that hour? After it? Anything else?"

"Nein. Nothing else."

Lynch looked balefully about him. "Anyone else hear anything during the night? Anything at all?"

There were various headshakes. Silence. Lynch went on.

"The next point. Who found Heitzig?"

The young Dutchman de Jongh, who had found a small chair behind a big chair, timidly raised his hand like a boy in school.

"Speak up, then."

Second Mate de Jongh stood up for his recitation, his chin slightly raised, his arms stiffly at his sides.

"It was 5:23, sir. Ship's time. I was going past the owner's office door—Mr. Sand's, that is, sir. I saw Heitzig lying there. I went at

once to Captain Carey's cabin and reported."

"If we suppose, mister," said Lynch, "that Heitzig was lying there for three hours or more, isn't it surprising no one came upon him before you did?"

De Jongh shook his head. "Only the watchman would be apt to find him, sir."

"Thank you, Mr. de Jongh. That is very helpful. By your reckoning then, the—er—misfortune could have overtaken Heitzig at any time after midnight? And certainly before four A.M.?"

"Yes, sir."

As de Jongh was finishing, Captain Carey reentered the lounge and stood with his arms folded just inside the door. I was not even aware that Lynch had seen him until—without bothering to turn his head—he swung his left arm out and backward and peremptorily snapped his fingers.

"The list, please!"

Startled, Captain Carey took a folded paper from an inside breast pocket, stepped forward, and put it into the detective's outstretched hand.

Lynch—as they say of actors—had his audience with him. Silence was absolute as he crackled the paper open. It was an ordinary sheet of typewriter paper. I saw him run his thumb down the left-hand margin as if he was counting.

"I see, Captain," said Lynch coldly and very clearly, "you have

omitted the name of the man who went overboard?"

Lynch was "improvising" with a vengeance. But I had not an instant's doubt he had scored a bull's-eye.

Carey uttered a kind of grunt. His mouth opened. Once he had got it open, all he could think of doing with it was nervously to wet his lips. The composure of Mr. Viggo Sand at last was shaken. The resplendent sky-blue-garbed gentleman on the dove-gray French couch stiffened as if he had received an electric shock.

"I asked you a question, Captain?" Lynch barked.

"Yessir!" For the moment Captain Carey's toughness had gone out of him like rawhide soaked in hot water.

At last Lynch twisted around to glare at him. "When it happened, Captain, did you log it? Make any written record or report of any kind?"

Carey looked to Sand for help. But Viggo Sand was now gazing at the floor. Carey was on his own.

"No, and I did not."

"You might begin to remedy it, Captain, by typing out a detailed report. I advise, a *most* detailed report. Then have it delivered to Mr. Deane.

"Not now!"

Carey had made a move to go. Lynch's abrupt order stopped him in his tracks.

This particular Englishman,

largely by means of the twin bludgeons of fear and of surprise, had subjugated the renegade Irishman—for a few brief minutes. He had done it publicly. I did not envy him. Carey looked to me like a man with a long memory, and a mind like a long knife.

Rather elaborately, Lynch now forgot him. With lightning speed he caught my eye. He was saying as plain as speech: "Here goes. Wish me luck!" I figuratively crossed my fingers. Lynch was going to do some wide and handsome guessing.

His gray eyes moving slowly from face to face, his chin thrust forward on his crossed arms on the back of the straight chair he straddled, he now addressed us in flat and level tones.

"You have followed? Since the *Vittoria* left Southampton this voyage has been marked by three incidents: the stabbing of Herr Braun; the disappearance of the seaman during the Atlantic crossing; now, this morning, the attempt on Mr. Sand's life and the attack on Wilhelm Heitzig. Those occurrences may, or may not, be connected. Probably they are. Mr. Deane and I will tell you in due time. But there is surely no question in the mind of anyone that they have given this venture a very different complexion."

"The first secret Mr. Deane and I shall bring into the open is the purpose of this voyage."

I peeked out of the corner of my eye at Viggo Sand. He had been listening in an attitude of attention with his hands folded between his knees, his big head bent a little, his eyes on the carpet. At the detective's last words his head shot up as if it had been on strings. His lips opened. Lynch was not even looking at him.

"The cache of bullion and coin which Mr. Sand hopes to recover," said Lynch clearly, "has an official market value of approximately two million, seven hundred thousand dollars. That is just under a million pounds. On the black market of the Continent it probably could be disposed of for a sum more nearly approaching five million dollars." He paused to see if any comment was forthcoming.

Only one was. From Lily Wyndam. I heard her say clearly:

"Goody!"

Since no one, at least, had contradicted him, my reckless friend went farther out upon his limb.

"That bullion," declared Lynch for all the world as if he knew, "was put ashore on the island to which we are now going from a German submarine during the closing days of the last war.

"But one thing I would like to point out. No part of it belongs to any one of us. We would do well to remember it."

Abruptly Lynch stood up. "Mr. Deane and I will see to it there is no confusion on that score.

Thank you. I think that is all."

Whereupon, like the uncured ham he is at heart, Lynch smiled upon all of us, bowed jerkily, and went away.

With less dignity I followed him.

The fact is, I fled.

One of the many amenities the *Vittoria* provided, if one wished, was breakfast in one's cabin. Food, shower, and clean clothes wrought some improvement. I sought Lynch in Cabin K. Evidently he was expecting me. The base of his table lamp was already swathed in a spare blanket.

"Well, well, well!" I commented, and sat down.

Lynch grinned with an amazing combination of cockiness and sheepishness.

"Aren't you the fancy crystal gazer? You ought to wear a turban!"

"Now don't be unfair, Bobby." Lynch was as mild as baby tea. "Of course, large deductions from scant evidence are a practice I usually abhor. But the risk had to be taken."

"'Scant' evidence, my eye. We hadn't any."

"In the legal meaning of the words, perhaps not. Say rather, material on which to base deduction. You will recall Dibble's slip in New York about 'two metric tons' of gold? I simply computed that in terms of money. I grant

you my surmise about Meer being a submariner was a guess. No more. But consider. This trip and, one must assume, this venture, began in Germany. The three newcomers aboard the *Vittoria*, the three who appear to have had no previous acquaintance with Sand, Braun, Meer, and Souhani—you learned from Miss Wyndam—all joined the yacht at Bremerhaven. Now what 'treasure' of such consequence could possibly have German origin? We do not have to consider that Sand would be interested in parchment maps and ancient Spanish doubloons. We agree, Sand is not a romantic.

"Remember! All German *surface* shipping was swept from the seas or bottled up in continental ports almost from the beginning of the war. Nor, while the Axis fortunes were favorable, was there the slightest chance so large a quantity of gold could have left Germany either by legal or illegal means. You follow?"

I nodded. "Thus far I limp along."

"However! As the defeat of the Nazis became inevitable you may recall there were persistent rumors that measures were being taken to secrete some portion of the German national gold reserve somewhere abroad. Those rumors were never verified. But I may tell you that in Intelligence we took them seriously. That fund, it was supposed, would be for the use of Hit-

ler himself or for whatever chiefs of the Nazi party might escape. Its ultimate purpose would be the reconstruction of the Nazi party."

"And you think that that's what we're on the track of now?"

"I think," said Lynch briskly, "it is entirely possible. You will see then why, if any part of that surmise is correct, the rest must follow. I don't have to remind you that long-range German submarines moved freely across the Atlantic right until the war's end. The Caribbean was one of their favorite hunting grounds. At least, no one contradicted me."

About four o'clock one of the natty sailors sought me out and handed me a folded paper: the report on the disappearance of the seaman during the Atlantic crossing which Lynch had demanded from Captain Carey. We went to Lynch's cabin to read it.

The report was clear, crisp, factual: Able Seaman Friedrich Brunke, born Stuttgart, Germany, forty-six years before, had been assigned to the post of forepeak lookout on the eight-to-midnight watch on the evening of June 16th. That station, Carey explained now, was not usually occupied; but the night was stormy, and there was a good deal of fog. It was Brunke's duty to report to the bridge before going forward.

When he did not appear, the

officer of the watch, after waiting a quarter of an hour, phoned down from the chartroom to inquire what had become of him. It was learned that Brunke had left the crew's quarters below decks some twenty minutes before eight. It was recalled that he had said something to one of his companions about going on deck for a smoke. The practice was not unusual: smoking on watch was forbidden, and so the sailors frequently took a stroll on deck for a last puff before going on duty.

Friedrich Brunke was never seen again.

He was regarded as a trustworthy man. So far as could be ascertained, he had no enemies among the crew. As to Mr. Sand's guests, there was no reason to think that any of them were even aware of Brunke's existence. He had been with the yacht four years and was believed to be devoted to Mr. Sand and to Mr. Sand's interests.

There Carey's report ended.

Lynch and I regarded each other thoughtfully.

"Odd?" I suggested.

"Very odd."

"Which reminds me. When you sprung this in the morning, was it pure clairvoyance? If so, much as it goes against the grain, I have to congratulate you, Swami Lynch—"

"Not at all! Last night I counted the crew list Carey showed us in his cabin. Since we had taken him

by surprise, it was evidently the master list. I then counted the supposed copy he gave me in the lounge this morning. It was one short. That confirmed, I thought, the information we had in London."

A tap at the door made us both start. It was Sand's personal steward.

"Mr. Sand's compliments," he announced, "and will Mr. Deane and Mr. Lynch be so good as to join him for cocktails in his cabin?"

We instructed him to say we would.

## CHAPTER SIX

LYNCH seemed unmoved. But then Lynch always seemed unmoved.

I confess to apprehension. If Viggo Sand thoroughly disapproved of the job we had done in uncovering the *Vittoria's* secrets I had no doubt that man of power could make mincemeat of us without much effort. If we had really annoyed him, he could always have us dropped overboard with a brick tied to us, like two unwanted kittens. After all, there was precedent for it. . . . On the other hand, if Lynch's performance had genuinely impressed him, he might cover us with compliments—grip us warmly by both hands . . .

He did neither. Mr. Viggo Sand,

we soon learned, had not got where and what he had by betraying his emotions. The only difference we could detect in his manner toward us was perhaps a fraction of a degree greater warmth. As if we had been with the Company a little longer. But by his very calmness he made one thing plain. If we thought we had taken the ball from Mr. Sand, we were mistaken.

The only other occupant of the sumptuous living room of Sand's suite was Siegfried Meer.

His afternoon's sunning, I observed with satisfaction, was already turning him the color of a boiled ham. Siggy was in for a bad night. He seemed nervous. He was standing in the exact center of the room and didn't know what to do with his hands. He jerked heels-together military bows at us when we came in, but did not speak.

Sand redeposited his great bulk in an immense chair, took his conductor's baton from a side table, and gestured with it for us to make ourselves comfortable. His expression was as benign as a Dutch uncle's. Or as a professional executioner's.

"I thought you might be interested," blandly remarked Sand in the understatement of the year, "in knowing something further of our plans. Captain Carey tells me we will reach our destination"—he glanced at a paper-thin, carved gold watch on his big wrist—"in



about fifty hours. Toward sunset. Herr Meer"—he pointed with the baton to the young German without looking at him—"will show you the position on a map."

Meer didn't strike me as being clearly galvanized by this opportunity to express himself. Stiffly and with a grudging slowness he stepped to a big blond-wood desk in a corner and began to flatten with his hands a roll of stiff white paper which lay on it. Lynch and I joined him and looked over his shoulders.

"It is a United States Navy Hydrographic Office chart of Haiti," Meer needlessly informed us. "Number 948. Also you will, sirs, notice, of the so-called Windward Passage."

Meer put a finger on the northernmost tip of the great west-jutting peninsula of the island of Haiti.

"This," said the German with an air of cold detachment, "is the Mole St. Nicolas." He wasn't liking this. Siggy was not of a confiding type.

"An anchorage there is here of a great excellency. It is known only to myself."

"Isn't that rather extraordinary?" Lynch inquired.

"It is an extraordinary anchorage!"

With the knuckles of his right hand Meer then tapped the chart, taking in an area of a couple of hundred square miles.

"The cases are here."

"How many?" Lynch barked.

"Twenty," Meer had answered without thinking. He frowned with annoyance, then seemed to decide that the information was not after all of great consequence.

Lynch looked at the ceiling. "Let's see. That works out at about 220 pounds a case. Allowing for the weight of the chests themselves, say about 250 pounds apiece. Right?"

Meer grudgingly nodded.

"Remarkable thing about gold," observed Lynch conversationally. "The average layman is too apt to exaggerate its value. These days when we don't see much of it, many a bank robber makes the mistake of imagining that if he could just fill his pockets he would walk off a millionaire. Fact is, one pound avoirdupois of pure gold is only worth about six hundred and fifteen dollars.

"Assume there's no use asking, Herr Meer, precisely where the chests are? Can't say I blame you. We'll learn that all in good time. It's of no matter really, so long as Mr. Sand knows."

The millionaire moved his baton and his head in twin negative gestures.

"You are under a misunderstanding, Mr. Lynch. I do not."

Lynch sat forward. His eyes widened in astonishment. "You don't, sir? That is inconceivable! You will forgive my saying so.

Aren't you putting a good deal of dependence on Mr. Meer? Suppose something happens to him?"

The smooth muscles of Viggo Sand's face softened into a smile.

"So? But I am not so innocent of this world's affairs, Mr. Lynch, as you may think. It was a part of our agreement, of course, that Herr Meer would put down in writing in the greatest, the most full detail, the exact location of these chests. That record was given me by Herr Meer himself. It is an article of our understanding that the envelope will be unopened if Herr Meer, as surely we have no reason to doubt will be true, will be able to lead me, or my deputies, to this cache, to these chests, himself."

Lynch was undisturbed. "What assurance have you, sir, that those instructions are complete? The details accurate?"

There was total and corrosive silence. Good old Lynch. Spreading sweetness and light and mutual confidence wherever he went on his earthly journey.

Lynch filled the void by appreciatively sipping his Martini and going on as casually as if he were talking of only the most distant and impersonal of things.

"Queer situation? Follow me? If Mr. Meer's instructions are complete, then Mr. Sand really has no further use of our friend here. Hasn't had, since the moment that envelope was sealed. But then of

course Mr. Sand has no way of knowing, has he? With Mr. Meer the situation is somewhat different. He does need Mr. Sand. Or rather, the *Vittoria*. To reach Haiti. Then to transport his share of the chests back to Germany. Short of an act of piracy and taking full possession of the ship, it's hard, isn't it, to see how that would be possible without Mr. Sand? Indeed, a *most* interesting situation. Mr. Deane and I are grateful to have some share in it.

"If the question is not indiscreet, Mr. Meer," asked Lynch—that soul of discretion!—"does anyone else share your knowledge?"

"Nein! No one!"

Lynch nodded. "Naturally you were very careful. But surely some other officers were present? A good deal of manpower must have been needed to carry twenty chests to their hiding place. Some of the submarine's ordinary seamen, I presume. What became of them? I suppose it was not very long afterward that you surfaced somewhere and surrendered to the Allies?"

Meer had again sat down. This almost brought him up all standing again.

"It iss not so! The *U-976* was not never surrendered!" He actually recited those ridiculous numerals with as much reverence as if he had been saying "*Golden Hind*" or "*Endeavour*." "We returned to the North Sea. She wass zunk!"

Meer stiffened himself still further.

"My commander went down with her. Heroically! I, with a mission to perform, I went ashore. And so the others. Only Commander Hellmuth and myself knew the mission, what it was. Commander Hellmuth had been to Mole St. Nicolas before. He had had duty there. This place was his advice to Admiral Donitz. The work took just one night. No person saw us. The men did not know where we were.

"I gave them orders," Meer explained, "that they were to forget it, what they had done. They were good German seamen." He stopped. His recital was complete.

The hesitating, muttered recital, it seemed to me, had raised at least as many questions as it had answered. I had particularly liked that bit about instructing the men who had toted those twenty chestfuls of gold not to think about it. The wonderful thing was that, by golly, probably they hadn't! . . . There was no use crowding our advantage.

The phone tinkled.

With the grace of a man half his size, Sand hoisted himself from the depths of the great chair and went to the desk.

His conversation, verbatim, and with pauses, went like this: "Yes? . . . So? . . . So? . . . Yes? . . . Good"

That, in the detective business,

is the kind of promising material you so often have to work with. But Sand was in a confiding mood.

"It was Dr. Lund. He tells me that Heitzig's chances to live have now a little improved. He is not certain, but he is more hopeful. Dr. Lund has operated."

"Operated?" Lynch echoed. "Alone?"

"There is an Italian in the engine-room crew who was at one time an orderly in a large hospital in Milano," said Sand indifferently. "I believe he is supposed to be efficient."

"I understand, sir," said Lynch, "that this is Dr. Lund's first voyage with you?"

Viggo Sand actually chuckled. "Mr. Lynch, you must know everything, must you not? So? Yes. You are right. For many years my physician on the *Vittoria* has been Dr. Orne Persen—like Dr. Lund, a Norwegian, from Oslo. Just before we were leaving Bremen Dr. Persen was taken ill. I do not know, but it was some agonizing pain." Sand touched his stomach. "Dr. Lund, I understand, was an old friend. He was in Germany on holiday. He had visited Dr. Persen on the yacht. It was Dr. Persen's advice Dr. Lund be taken in his place. For this one voyage. Persen recommended him most highly. I trust he knows his business. At sea one is glad to know there is a physician of ability in call."

"And this Dr. Persen?" Lynch persisted.

"I had Mr. Dibble telephone the hospital in Bremen. From the yacht. He has recovered. He is all right. He will rejoin me on our return to Germany." Sand opened his eyes very wide.

"And now, Mr. Lynch, you know everything!"

Lynch smiled. Economically. "Perhaps not quite, sir. But enough to go on with, shall we say?"

The party, such as it was, then broke up.

Frankly, I was somewhat overwhelmed. From deductions from the skimpiest of clues and a few slips of speech, but largely by the most outrageous bluff, Lynch had cracked one of the most closely guarded secrets of our time. We now knew that toward the war's end the Nazi leaders—if not Hitler himself, as had been rumored—had indeed dispatched a treasure half across the world. We knew its value. We knew that it was stored in twenty chests. We knew the number of the U-boat which had carried it, the name of the little port in Schleswig from which the submarine had sailed; we knew the name of its commander. We knew, within at least a relatively small circle on the big map of the world, where that cache was now hidden.

What was most extraordinary was that the hard-bitten principals

in the affair were letting us carry that information around in our heads almost as if it didn't greatly matter to them. I didn't like it.

I said as much to Lynch when we were alone.

He didn't either.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

IT OFTEN happens, Lynch tells me, after the commission of a crime. There is a kind of lull such as traditionally comes in the center of a cyclone. Heaven knows, life aboard the *Vittoria* at best was never rollicking. But such as it was it went quietly on.

I sought out Lily Wyndam. She took a good deal of seeking. I was hurt. Even with my specialized interests aboard the *Vittoria* I was frequently starved for conversation. What must then be the state of mind, among so odd and uncommunicative a group, of a lovely young girl like Lily? It surprised me that she had not sought me out. When at last I trapped her in a deck chair wedged behind a boat-deck ventilator I said so.

Her eyes widened in amazement "Why?"

I perched with what dignity I could on the chair's extension beside her sandaled feet. She was gradually toasting to a lovely brown.

"If," I said, "you don't know, it is difficult for me to tell you."

"Difficult? I'd say it was impossible."

"Where have you been keeping yourself?"

"Mostly in my cabin. Reading. Just lying about. If you are entertaining any dreams, Robert, of a dear little cottage with me over the washtubs, it is only fair to tell you I am extremely lazy. A good thing, too, aboard this barge." Lily snuggled her bare ankles to make more room for me. "Also, if you'd like to know, I am being relentlessly pursued. And I don't like it."

"Who?"

She made a face. "Siegfried."

"This incomprehensible passion of Siggy's for you might be turned to some account."

"Whose? Yours?"

"Well, yes. But not entirely. In behalf of a noble cause. What I've been wanting to talk to you about. Though I haven't made up my mind yet. Whether I should."

"Your telegraphic style commands attention. But I would like to know what you are talking about. Let's go to my cabin?"

"Ha!"

"What do you mean, 'Ha'? It's broad daylight. You could always scream?"

"No, no, no. I only meant that your cabin is no place for confidences. None of 'em are." I took pleasure in telling Lily Wyndam that doubtless her room, like everyone else's, could be listened-into. She was indignant.

"Why, the peeping Tom! If 'peeping' is the word I want? When I think of the frightful noise I make in cleaning my teeth!" Her delicate young features set grimly.

The storm passed. Lily smiled at me. "Then we'll have to make do with here. No wonder you haven't come to call. What was it you wanted to talk about but weren't sure you would?"

"About what's going on around here. The purpose of this trip, and so on. You got some of it from Lynch's performance in the lounge, but there's a lot more. I will, as we say in academic haunts, outline my problem."

"Oh, do! Under *headings*?"

"Yes. (1) This thing is so super-colossal I think someone beside Lynch and myself, outside Sand and the inner circle so to speak, should know as much of the story as we do. In the public interest."

She nodded intelligently, and I went on.

"(2) It's very unhealthy knowledge, and I don't know if I have any right to burden you with it. And (3) can I trust you?"

In spite of my smile Lily Wyndam looked hurt and serious.

"Nothing personal."

"Of course, you don't know anything about me, do you? For all you know I might be Viggo's pet spy, mightn't I? Or mistress?"

"I'd find it remarkably hard to believe either."

Surprisingly, Lily's pert gray eyes briefly filmed with tears. "Thank you." She blinked impatiently and smiled once more.

"Under the circumstances I suppose it's a fair question. You mean, what are Beth and I doing on this yacht? The little tale is quickly told. We are a couple of international bums. In a modest way, I suppose you could call us blackmailers."

"How come?"

"Beth had a good deal of money from her first husband. In American investments. When she married my father and the war was on he made her sell them and buy British stocks and things instead. Then when the currency restrictions were put on and Beth discovered she could only spend twenty-five pounds a year outside England she was wild. So when Viggo offered to manipulate things so she could get all her money out of England and spend it where she pleased she was naturally enchanted. I can't say I really blame her. There's no special reason why Beth should be a British patriot. I think Viggo also had some scheme so she wouldn't have to pay income tax."

Lily embraced a bare knee with her slender hands.

"From there on things get complicated. I can't be very clear. Instead of checks just coming in, Beth now seems to have to go to Viggo. Or to one of his agents. He

has them, of course, all over the world. She won't talk to me about it, but I've the most distinct impression there was never what a lawyer would call an 'accounting.' I've wondered sometimes if dear Viggo didn't just pocket it, and doles it back to us when Beth insists. You can see what I meant by being blackmailers?"

"It works both ways. Whatever the arrangement was, it was certainly illegal. If Viggo isn't very nice to Beth she can expose him. And if she isn't nice to him he can expose her. So we sort of take it out in board and keep by traveling about with Viggo whenever we feel we need fresh air. On the whole, you see," she ended, "we are rather harmless and unimportant."

"As for you, I don't think you're in the least harmless. Without half trying I can see how you would be, could be very important indeed."

Lily elaborately pulled her skirt down farther over her knees.

"Let's talk of crime."

With the most careful instructions that never except in the direst emergency must she ever hint at what she knew, I told Lily all that Lynch and I had learned. The telling relieved me. And left me with a permanent and nagging worry.

About four o'clock the next afternoon, piling blue mountains

appeared on the horizon dead ahead—Haiti.

As we drew near, the western promontory of that great island took clearer shape. Yellow-green, brooding mountains dropped almost sheer to the sea. Only at long intervals did a tiny beach at the mouth of a wooded ravine leading back through the cliffs, or a cluster of thatched huts, suggest human habitation. There were no towns of any consequence in this part of Haiti.

At six-thirty we were in the Windward Passage. The arid, brightly colored hills of Cuba were faintly visible to the west. The *Vittoria* was now close inshore. We saw Sand's personal steward going from person to person about the decks. At last he reached us.

"Dinner this evening will be as usual, sirs. At seven-thirty. Black tie."

When he had gone, Lynch and I exchanged quizzical glances. A neat trick. The dining salon was below decks, without so much as a porthole to the outer world. This evening there was to be no grabbing a bologna sandwich, then running back on deck for a better look. By getting the full culinary treatment, the captive-guests of the *Vittoria* were to be kept nicely out of sight as the yacht came to her berth. Sand's kitchen staff was French. By the time we had swallowed our way through six courses, three wines, and armag-

nac, the ship's engines would be silent.

And short of open defiance there wasn't much that we could do about it. Even Lynch agreed that, for the present, Sand had been "stirred up" enough. Stir the big man any more, and he might bite.

Only Meer was absent.

As we worked our way—I admit it was easy—through Crème Glacée, Caneton à l'Orange, Asperges à la Sauce Hollandaise, Salade Française, Soufflé Grand Marnier, and all the fixin's, we felt the yacht's powerful engines cut down to half-speed; to slow, to reverse, to slow ahead again, and finally stop.

Through the ship's soundproofing we could then hear the distant chug and rattle of the windlasses. And finally—unexpectedly—the faint thump and jar as the yacht's hull seemed to come to rest against some solid substance. As for instance—here at the end of nowhere—a pier! One sound was conspicuously absent: the unmistakable clatter of an anchor chain.

Happily Lynch and I had insisted from the first that we did not play bridge. Otherwise we should never have escaped. Short of slugging us, a method which I am sure crossed Viggo Sand's mind, there was nothing, then, to keep us from going aloft to have a look.

As I opened the door at the top of the companionway to go out on deck I found myself struggling

with the folds of a heavy canvas drapery. After a moment's frightened shadow boxing, I got it. The *Vittoria* was blacked out.

Outside there was not a light to be seen. Not so much as the glow of a cigarette. A little groping showed us that a square of thick canvas had been fixed over each cabin window. It was a good thing, in this climate, the *Vittoria* was air-conditioned.

"Left over from the war, I presume," Lynch offered.

"Also," I suggested, "effectively disposing of any last lingering doubt this expedition isn't as illicit as reefer pushing in St. Bartholomew's. What's he going to do by daylight?"

"Perhaps run out to sea again. We shall see."

In a few minutes our eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, and it seemed less nearly total. We were close inshore. Incredibly close. From the port rail we were staring at the sheer wall of a cliff not more than fifty feet away. We were so close we had to crane our necks to see the top of it. Peering down, we could see the yacht was moored by fore and aft cables flat alongside what—in this remote, unlikely place—to judge by the straightness of the line, must be some sort of quay. The *Vittoria* was lying in a narrow rectangular basin, or slip, which even at night one could see had been carefully and massively engineered.

Our soft-footed, fascinated promenade brought us around again to the moored, port side. Forward of the cabins, near the rail, a human shape loomed up out of the dark. As we approached, it barred our way.

I recognized the man. It was one of the sailors, a big Portuguese with a dragoon's mustache. He had his feet wide apart. He was holding horizontally across his chest an army rifle. Complete with bayonet.

"Excuse, señhores. It is my instruction. No one is to pass."

Peering past him I could now see the sailor stood before a break in the rail, beyond which a companionway had been let down to the quay below.

"Oh, it's you, Gonçalves?" said Lynch cheerfully. "Good evening. Señor Meer has gone ashore then?"

"Yes, sir."

We moved off as if we couldn't possibly care less.

Out of earshot, Lynch whispered in my ear, "Bobby, we've got to go ashore, at once!"

"I have an allergy," I whispered back, "to bayonets. How?"

It filled me with no amazement to receive no answer.

We resumed our stroll. Except for the guard at the head of the companionway we seemed to have the deck to ourselves. From the port rail—at a point near the stern as far from cap-a-pie-armed



Mr. Gonçalves as we could get—we resumed our unprofitable scrutiny of the cliff wall.

The quarter of an hour or so on deck had made a world of difference. We could now make out some details of the rock's face, the dark outline of runty trees which clung to it. If some cherubim cared to come along and lift us from the *Vittoria* and deposit us on Haiti—I saw no other way of making it—we might be able to feel our way around. It was maddening.

I raised a foot to rest it on the bottom rung of the ship's rail and missed. My groping foot in its thin evening pumps had got entangled with something. I bent down to feel it with my hands. Where we were standing, a conventional round life preserver hung from a rack against the railing. On a brass hook in the center of the ring there usually hung a coil of thin but strong Manila rope by which the life preserver could be hauled in if it were used. With my fingers I investigated further. That line was not in place. It hung, doubled, over the ship's side, down toward the quay. I nudged Lynch.

Crouching, he repeated my investigations. He rose and put his lips close to my ear.

"Get into rough clothes as quickly as you can. Dark clothes. What you wore the other night will do. Whoever gets here first had best go straight down. Meet below. It's dark enough. Right?"

"Right."

I hastened to my cabin.

From my door to the rope was only a few steps. I took them swiftly. It was unlikely that the sailor Gonçalves, on guard at the head of the companionway two-thirds of the ship's length forward, would see me, dressed as I now was in dark trousers and a gray pullover. Except for him the yacht's decks appeared to be deserted.

Quickly and silently I climbed over the rail, gripped the doubled line, with a little scrambling got my rubber-soled feet against the ship's side, and began down.

Lynch was ahead of me. With a sure hand he guided me to my feet. The *Vittoria* had been warped in so that she lay only about eighteen inches from the smooth, seaweed-slippery side of the quay. Under my feet was flat concrete; around my ankles, disconcertingly, was a tangle of vines. Most of them had thorns. Lynch pulled my head to him so his mouth was only an inch from my ear.

"If it's a submarine slip," he whispered, "it's been here a long time. Puzzling. It's a cement quay. But apparently almost completely overgrown. We'll have to move carefully."

Logic indicated we head inland. Toward the enclosed end of the narrow rectangle of open wa-

ter in which the yacht lay. Meer must have gone in that direction. For the simple reason there seemed nowhere else to go.

As may possibly have been observed before, the human eye is a remarkable organism. In a few minutes our pupils must have dilated still further. The white side of the yacht acted as a reflector. Happily, too, we were close to the sea. Though this part of Haiti was generally dry, and the riotous undergrowth which had crept over the sea wall caught and tore at our legs and ankles and, for all our caution, swished and rustled, it did not snap and crackle. It was wet with the night dew.

Keeping to the extreme edge of the quay, we worked our way forward. Once I stepped on a slippery leaf and almost shot into the water. The worst bit was when we passed the foot of the companionway—at the head of which stood the armed and vigilant Gonçalves. I let Lynch gain on me a dozen feet or so, so that we'd not go clattering by together.

Lynch made it. Anyway, his obscure shape vanished from my sight, and there was no hubbub.

After I had passed the line of the ship's bow I breathed more easily. A few rods farther along, Lynch plucked at me out of the darkness, and hauled my head down to whisper instructions.

"I've found a path of sorts. It seems to lead up. We'd best try it."

He took my hand and slowly pulled me after him. A path, it plainly was. Though we couldn't see it, our feet at once detected the difference. He had stumbled on a place where the concrete was clear of vines. We still had to shuffle and go warily, for the space was narrow—no more than a couple of feet wide. After a minute or two we were off the concrete and on bare earth. The path began to climb steeply. By the feel, it was an ordinary forest trail, damp, sometimes slippery, made irregular by obtruding rocks and roots but indisputably a path, which must be used fairly often, it being the only one.

We could see almost nothing, but we were now climbing through a thick scrub forest. The way was as steep as a stairway. I was puffing like a donkey engine. Lynch, darn him, who is a good twenty years my senior, was scrambling ahead as easily as a Rocky Mountain goat.

On an unobstructed trail and far enough away from the yacht not to worry about small sounds, we made fairly rapid progress. At the end of perhaps five minutes we were no longer climbing. We paused briefly.

The path leveled out. Some yards ahead the darkness became more luminous. In another mo-

ment we were out of the tangle of scrub forest and were in the open.

It was very puzzling. A few yards ahead of us, in the uncertain starlight, was a kind of gate, or portal: an interval wide enough for a truck to enter between two low but massively constructed walls. These walls, which came only about to the line of our waists, apparently stretched away in both directions for a considerable distance.

On a hunch, I began to feel with my hands along the top of one wall. It was nearly three feet thick. Like the quay below, it was thickly overgrown with every sort of tropical vine, weed, and dry, coarse grass. But out of the overgrowth thrust a symmetrical forest of thin steel rods. They were so corroded and weakened by rust that one broke in my fingers.

There was no mistaking what the rods were. They were the exposed skeleton of an unfinished piece of reenforced concrete construction. Whoever had built those walls and had left that topless portal, had been interrupted and had left the job undone.

I showed Lynch my discovery. He indicated his interest and appreciation with an emphatic grunt. Though I could scarcely see him, I sensed he was on the trail of some idea. He was preoccupied and thinking hard.

"Let's wait here a bit," he whispered. "No use breaking our necks.

Or, for that matter, sticking them out too far. There's a late moon due tonight." He peered at the radium dial of his wrist watch.

"I think fairly soon."

We sat down just where we were. The tough, sun-withered grass was close as if—as was entirely possible—it had been cropped by local goats. We were silent.

Twenty minutes passed. They seemed interminable. Neither of us moved or spoke. But the wait was worth it. Gradually the stars began to pale. The amorphous shapes about us became more distinct. As a precaution we hunched closer within the shadow of the unfinished wall.

Then, quite suddenly the last quarter of a waning moon topped the jagged pinnacles of the far-off Haitian range and the whole island was washed in silver light. We could see quite clearly.

The unfinished wall behind which we were now crouching was the northern boundary of a fortress. An unfinished fortress. Through the wide opening to which we had come, a stone ramp descended to a central floor, or enclosure, some dozen feet lower down. Though much of it was cluttered with weeds and vines and even a few small trees had managed to take root, enough of the enclosure remained clear to show its massive concrete construction.

Lynch gripped my knee. "I've got it!" he whispered excitedly. "I've remembered. I know where we are. Sure of it! Tell you later."

I poked him sharply with an elbow. He froze to attention.

A blob of shadow on that western rampart had risen and materialized into the shape of a standing man. Its back was to us. For a long minute it stood motionless, clearly outlined against the sky. Because we expected him to be here and because the figure was tall and had wide shoulders and thin hips I was certain it was Meer.

He turned, matter-of-factly crossed the upper platform, and began to descend one of the stone stairways. For a moment we lost sight of him. Then Herr Siegfried Meer unconcernedly snapped on a flashlight.

With it he—and we, by craning our necks so they almost became unstuck—proceeded carefully to examine the vertical face of the structure which supported the higher platform.

We now saw what we had not been able to see before, that at the bottom of each of the flights of steps was a deeply recessed door—a door, it seemed to me at that distance, and in the flashlight's beam, of steel or iron. If, as I suspected, the tier above provided emplacement for siege guns—guns which from that position would most effectively control the

Windward Passage—those doors might be the entrances to the chambers for the storage of shells: what another generation would have called powder magazines.

Carefully, but with little hesitation, the white beam of the flashlight played over the first door, the one farthest to the left. Then the second. The third. All were alike.

At the fourth door, Meer came to a full stop. If a black silhouette and a flashlight can show astonishment and doubt, they showed it. The reason was evident from where we were. The outlines of the other doors, except for a certain amount of tropic growth which clung to them, had been plainly visible. And easily accessible to anyone who might have their keys. Door No. 4 was totally obscured by a pile of rocks. A loose rubble of stones had been laid all the way to its top, entirely filling the frame.

Meer studied it with his flashlight from top to bottom. Then he returned to examine Door No. 3.

"Siggy," I whispered to Lynch, "seems to be a mite confused. Something new has been added."

It was Lynch's turn to elbow me. He jabbed a pointing finger excitedly.

Meer was not alone. My persistent feeling had been right. A figure was plainly visible in the moonlight. Had we not been so intent on watching Meer, we must have seen it long before.

I say "figure." It was a man, of course. But in that place and that uncertain light both Lynch and I felt, I think, for a fleeting moment that it was not human. He was huge. Gigantic. There was something shapeless about him. It was no one from the yacht.

He was making his way with catlike slowness and in perfect silence across the great central enclosure. One was somehow aware without telling that he knew it well. He avoided the square black pits and the tangle of wild growth with the ease of complete familiarity.

He was advancing behind Meer, who was still busy with his flashlight. The huge apparition was only a yard away when the German heard him.

Meer spun round with a violent start. For a split second the beam of his flashlight played whitely on a face almost lost in a great tangle of blond beard and a mane of unkempt hair. Meer screamed—the piercing, agonized, nerve-jangling scream of a terrified woman. At the same instant the big man uttered a great cry. It was like a cry of recognition. Suddenly—it is difficult to express—the quality of his movement changed. Until that instant, it had been as if he were merely curious. When Meer turned toward him, with the moonlight on his face, the huge body instantly became galvanized with fury. With a wild cry he

flung himself upon Meer. The flashlight spun high in the air and came down and smashed upon the stones. And Lynch and I began to run.

It all happened at once.

My foot caught in a bramble, and I sprawled painfully. But I was up at once. Lynch got there first, I an instant later. We were none too soon.

The two men were in a thrashing muddle on the ground, the bearded giant uppermost. He had both hands around Meer's throat and was pounding his head murderously upon the stones. He was shouting over and over, in a kind of savage roar: "*Dieb! Verrater! Morder!*"

We hurled ourselves upon him.

I got hold of one arm, Lynch the other. It was like seizing the trunk of a stout tree. The man gave an animal-like grunt of surprise, with a jerk dislodged me so I almost fell. I distinctly heard:

"*Verdammung!*" Lynch clung like a bull terrier.

With both of us hanging on, the big man staggered to his feet. He had let go of Meer. He was in a kind of smock and loose trousers so ragged they were nearly in ribbons, explaining my first impression of shapelessness. He was barefoot. In our close embrace the creature stank.

A mannered, self-possessed voice at our elbows said: "Like me to lend a hand?"

It was the most startling thing that had happened yet. Lynch and I let go the malodorous Golem as if we had been stabbed. With an animal-like cry he whirled his arms in the air, turned, and ran away in the direction from which he had come. In an astonishingly short time he had vanished as mysteriously as he had appeared.

The voice belonged to Reginald Dibble. Not two yards from us in the moonlight, he looked very unruffled in what seemed to be a negligee shirt of some dark material and conventional gray flannels. He was—of all things—smoking a cigarette. His attention was on Siegfried Meer.

Amazingly, the German was not unconscious. Panting, dazed, almost helpless, he struggled to his feet and half leaned against the concrete wall near one of the iron doors.

Again, so many things happened in swift succession it is difficult for me to get them in proper order. There was a red flash; a reverberating boom which then seemed to echo for many seconds through the hills; and an even louder—and closer—*clang* of metal; the angry, insectlike *zzzz*-ing of fragments of lead bounding about amid the rocks.

Someone had shot at us. At which one, it was impossible to say.

With a coolness and precision of action of which I would never

have thought him capable, Dibble jerked a small revolver from a hip pocket, leveled it, and fired.

"You saw where it came from?" Lynch demanded.

Dibble waved his revolver. Its nickel plating glittered. "Yes. Over there. By that opening in the wall. Where you chaps came in."

"It wasn't, then—" Lynch gestured.

"Your wee friend? Not possibly. It came from a quite different direction."

Lynch, still puffing, was glaring at Reg Dibble.

"And where by the way in hell," he asked confusedly, "were you?"

Dibble made a final gesture with his female-sized gun before putting it away.

"On one of those sets of steps there. Quite comfortable, thank you. Viggo sent me ashore with what one might call a 'watching brief.' I'd frankly no idea there'd be so much to watch."

"Any of you," I muttered, "care to recommend a good private sanitarium?"

In the process of mentally feeling ourselves all over to see if we had been shot, all of us had for the moment forgotten Meer.

He was half crouched near the iron door against which the bullet had struck. Both hands covered his face. He was sobbing hysterically.

Lynch recovered himself. He reached the German in one stride, seized his wrists in firm hands,

and hauled his hands away from his face. He peered searchingly into his eyes.

"See a ghost, Lieutenant?" he asked sharply.

"Ja! Ja!"

Lynch let go his wrists. "Tell us," he commanded.

Meer was beginning to recover. He stood straighter and felt the back of his head with his right hand. He must have felt blood, for he took his hand hastily away and looked at it.

"It iss impossible," he muttered. "No, it could not be!"

Some measure of intelligence was coming back into his face. He looked at the three of us in gathering amazement.

"I came ashore," he said unconvincingly, "just to take a little walk. This savage who attacked me . . . I do not know. I do not understand."

"That savage," said Lynch brusquely, "was a white man. He spoke German. I strongly advise you, Meer, to confide in us."

Stubbornly, Meer shook his head. Then he frowned. "Did—did someone shoot at me?"

"Yes."

"Vogel?"

Lynch answered swiftly. "No. Someone else." He cackled grimly. "You're not popular, Herr Meer. If you want to live to complete your mission I again strongly advise you to enlist our help."

"No! You mistake, I am safe!"

"Just now," Dibble put in mildly. "I must say you didn't look it."

"I suppose," Lynch said, "you mean because of what you know? Where the chests are? Don't count on it, Lieutenant. That's quite easy to find out."

"Yes? You think so? You mistake again." Meer produced what was intended for a superior smile. "I think I shall go now," he said. He turned his back and staggered off.

"I hope," I called after him, "you enjoy your little walk."

Since there seemed to be no point in tagging after him, we let him go.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

REGINALD Dibble produced a case and snapped it open. We accepted cigarettes.

"Odd place, this," he said.

"Very!" Lynch's tone did not encourage discussion. "I suppose you didn't see who took that shot at us?"

Dibble shook his head. "No. Just the flash as he fired."

"By the way," Lynch said, "mind if I look at that gun you're carrying?" He held out his hand.

Dibble hesitated, then reached into his hip pocket and handed over the revolver.

"Not at all."

"Thank you."

As swiftly as a snake's strike,

Lynch thrust the gun into the air and fired. And again, as fast as he could pull the trigger. Five times, until a click showed the chamber was empty. Though the revolver had a short barrel, it was of heavy caliber.

It made a hell of a rumpus. The echoing shots seemed to rumble and tumble in the silence of the tropic night to the farthest hills and back again. Startled birds flew cawing and with a rush of wings from the black scrub growth on the steep slope below.

"Thank you," Lynch repeated sweetly.

Taking the revolver gingerly by the hot barrel, he presented it butt first to its owner.

Dibble had leapt to his feet. "What the devil was the idea of that?"

Lynch chuckled. "Sorry if I startled you. I like noise. Noises in the night!"

Dibble stared down at him, then took the extended gun and slowly returned it to his pocket. At last, with an expressive shrug of his shoulders, he sat down again beside us.

"I suppose," said Dibble icily, "every man is entitled to his tastes. However odd."

"Quite!"

There was a trained pause. Dibble ended it. He seemed to have recovered his good temper.

"As you may have gathered," he said conversationally, "Meer in-

sisted that tonight he must come ashore alone. Whether simply to learn whether the dear old place was just as he had left it, or to conduct some sort of private Nazi festival, Viggo and I couldn't quite gather. Viggo suggested I trot along at a discreet distance to see what he was up to. But I don't see just where you two come in?"

"We just," said Lynch, "came in."

"Indeed?" Even in the moonlight, Dibble's smile was perceptible. And hard to read. "Ah, well," he added enigmatically, "a short life and a merry one. . . . Who on earth can the large intruder have been? Some local eccentric? I wasn't even sure of his color. You, as one might say, came to closer grips with him than I."

"Um-m," said Lynch.

Dibble was thoughtfully regarding my companion.

"Are you usually, Mr. Lynch, so unready with your tongue?"

Lynch stared back at him. The moonlight was elusive. It was not easy to read faces.

"Usually," he replied shortly. "You must agree, Mr. Dibble, your precise status is not clear to us."

"I suppose not. And yours, Mr. Lynch, is so transparent! . . . It's not really very complicated. Though my duties don't involve typing or sitting on his lap, my proper title, I presume, is that of Mr. Sand's private secretary. Good wages and 'all found.' "



With a graceful bound Dibble got to his feet, and stood looking out over the sea.

"You might describe me," he said half audibly, as if more to himself than to us, "as a gentleman of intermittent honor. . . . This enchanting place!"

He looked down on us quizzically. There was much that was attractive to me about this handsome, and this lonely, man.

"Since we are all of such uncertain 'status,' you wouldn't care to tell me, would you, whether you have any idea where on this unlikely earth we are?"

"I can see no harm in that," Lynch muttered. To my trained ears he sounded just the least bit apologetic. "I am reasonably sure I know. It came to me quite suddenly. A recollection. Quite at random. Do you remember World War I?"

"If you mean personally," I protested, "certainly not! I spent the last year of it in a bassinet."

"I believe my dear mother," murmured Dibble, who might easily have fought in it, "once mentioned it. Why?"

"Quite. Since you are both so ignorant, neither of you will recall an incident of the summer of 1915. I refer to the occupation of Haiti by the United States Marines."

"What's that to do with this?"

Lynch studiously pretended not to hear me. "Though I believe no

one now denies that the American Occupation ultimately did Haiti enormous good, the move at the time was widely criticized. The real reason for that action could not then be revealed. I didn't know it myself for many years. Until in examining some secret state papers at—" Lynch coughed.

"That is to say—er—in the course of a certain employment in which I was once engaged, I came upon a certain confidential memorandum. Since it was at that time of only academic interest to me, I'd forgotten it until tonight.

"The substance of the memorandum was this: The corrupt Haitian President had entered into private negotiations with agents of the Imperial German Government. For a sum which was never exactly learned, he had given permission to Germany to construct a secret fortress and submarine harbor on the commanding headland of the Mole St. Nicolas."

Lynch slapped the dry grass on which we sat.

"Here!"

"Construction was well under way when the American Government got wind of it. Remember, it was 1915. The United States was not yet in the war. Yet it was intolerable to it that a warring European power should establish an armed position on a site which commanded the chief approach to the Panama Canal. Though the memorandum, as I recall it, didn't

say so, obviously the work was interrupted with the arrival of the American forces. I also assume the German engineers directing the project hastily departed. Probably by submarine. The famous *Deutschland* had already accomplished transoceanic voyages."

Lynch abruptly stopped, his tale ended.

Dibble was looking curiously around him.

"At this moment then," he said dreamily, "we may be practically sitting on five million dollars? A stimulating thought! If only it were the Rajah's rubies tidily done up in a chamois bag, all one would need to spirit it away would be a good pair of track shoes. This way, you have to have a great hulking corps of stevedores and a yacht to lift the stuff."

Lynch got to his feet. "Quite. That the case, we might as well go back to the ship. Together."

I was more than a little uneasy about our reception when we should get back to the yacht. Despite my bulk, years, and three university degrees (worth, I had discovered, about \$1,000 each per annum) I felt like a naughty boy. Papa Viggo Sand, by no less plain a device than stationing a man with a bayonet and rifle at the head of the companionway, had forbidden us to go ashore. We had been disobedient. Whatever would we do?

We didn't have to wait long to learn. When we reached the foot of the companionway we only too willingly let Dibble go ahead. If he wanted the credit of having rounded us up and brought us back, he could have it.

The blackout of the yacht was no longer absolute. A few yards away across the foredeck I saw the glow of a cigarette. As we moved toward it, the red coal was slowly raised. It stopped and brightened like a tiny flare as someone drew on it. Out of the surrounding darkness leapt for an instant the moonlike face of Viggo Sand. The cigarette dimmed, moved, and the face as abruptly vanished.

"Good evening, gentlemen."

Neither print nor paper, nor my prose style, can convey the peculiar quality of those three words. The large, usually calm voice of Viggo Sand, by ever so little, quivered with sheer rage. He was warning us that if we wanted to enjoy a serene old age we had better talk fast. Damn fast.

Lynch talked fast.

"Good evening, sir," he said briskly and rather loudly. "Mr. Deane was just saying we must be sure to put in a word for Gonçalves here. He carried out his orders. Most correctly. He told us your instructions were that no one was to go ashore, that he wasn't to let us pass. He did not let us pass. We went by other means. We

knew, of course, that those orders did not apply to us. You heard the shots from the fortress just now? First, two? Then, after an interval, five in quick succession? By no means the least curious incident of a most interesting case. They were fired at us from ambush. Misses, happily, all of them. By someone from the ship . . .”

Lynch was a marvel. Here was Reginald Dibble, Sand's own confidential secretary, standing not three feet away attentively listening to that outrageous lie. And not interrupting. But what reason, I wondered, had Lynch for thinking that Dibble would not set Sand straight the moment they were alone?

Two possibilities occurred to me. The first was that Lynch might guess Dibble would find the truth—that he had tamely handed his gun over and let him bang away with it—embarrassing . . . I also suspected Lynch might be playing a hunch I shared: that Dibble might not be so entirely loyal to his master as we had first supposed.

Under Lynch's barrage of words, Sand began to move away along the deck.

“We wished to question you at once, sir. What information can you give us about the whereabouts of the people aboard here?” Lynch's tone became chiding, almost severe.

“Doth Mr. Deane and I feel,

sir, that perhaps you still don't fully appreciate the gravity of the situation in which we find ourselves. In which you find yourself. We must again warn you that if you are to have the slightest expectation of securing the chests you must give us the fullest cooperation. Far more cooperation than you have thus far. Surely you must realize your own life is in danger? Grave danger. Now this question of alibis. When we left you in the lounge after dinner a card game was beginning. How long did it continue?”

Sand's reply was a long time in coming. He was breathing deeply.

“So?” he intoned heavily. “I must admire your zeal, Mr. Lynch. But I do not like you.”

“Your personal feeling toward me, sir,” said Lynch with even more than his usual briskness, “is immaterial. You have employed Mr. Deane and myself to do a job. We propose to do it. Preferably, with your help. If need be, without it. Now, this bridge game. How long did you play?”

I could sense Dibble's tenseness. Never, I was convinced, had he seen anyone try to push the great man around like this. It might be fun. But it was grisly fun. Like watching a small boy with a hammer playing with an unexploded bomb. I felt like putting my fingers in my ears.

Viggo Sand had intended to do all the talking; ask all the ques-

tions. Instead, *he*—Viggo Sand, reputed to be worth half a billion dollars—was being rudely cross-examined. I am sure the impulse crossed his mind to take this irritating little fox terrier of a man into his two huge hands and throttle him.

Sand's respiration was clearly audible. You could have counted up to ten.

Then, out of the depths of that large frame came a chuckle. I would have invested little on the certainty that it was genuine. Perhaps Sand had simply decided he might as well relax since he had the gadfly of a detective where he wanted him and could later dispose of him at his leisure.

But for the moment it would serve.

"It may be I was mistaken. It may be that you amuse me. Is it this quiet Professor Deane—what do the Americans say?—who 'puts you up' to this? I will answer your questions. It was only for a little time. While we were playing the second hand Mr. Souhani complained he had a most violent pain. Here"—Sand touched his own forehead—"between his eyes. He went to his cabin. Soon also Herr Braun."

"I suppose, sir, you didn't check on them?"

"What you suppose is correct."

And Viggo Sand walked softly away from us down the deck and disappeared into the darkness.

When he was safely out of ear-shot Dibble let out his breath. It was as if he had been holding it for a long, long time.

"You also, Mr. Lynch," he said in a low voice, "have a taste for living dangerously. Now I'm sure of it."

"Yes," said Lynch. "I have."

Reg Dibble left us. He went in the direction Sand had taken.

Personally, I was ready to curl up with a good book. Or even with a bad book. But I knew Lynch of old. The man has the energy of a grasshopper. Dibble was scarcely out of sight before he was muttering away again.

"We've a great deal to do. First, let's check on that rope. See if our friend is back aboard."

That at any rate was the work of a moment. We found the place at the rail where we had climbed over. The line had been drawn up, and now hung neatly coiled again on its hook inside the life preserver.

Lynch grunted. "This means, I suppose, we should have taken off after him at once."

"And him," I said ungrammatically, "with a gun? On that dark trail? Don't be silly."

"You may be right."

"I often am. Now what?"

"I think I'll prowl a bit. See what our various shipmates are doing. It will be damn difficult with those black-out canvases in place. . . . D'you notice, by the

way, Sand asked no questions about what had happened to Meer? He must have seen him when he came back aboard. He didn't even speak of him?"

"You didn't give him much chance. Look. You won't need me for the next few minutes. I'll re-join you later. I have a little enterprise of my own I'd like to see to."

I went in search of Lily Wyndam. I had decided not to mention that I had briefed Lily on almost everything we knew. I was not sure Lynch would approve. Yet I was sure I had been right. Or, I hoped I had.

Knocking at the door of her cabin brought no response, and I went below to the lounge. She was still with the same large book in the same large chair where I had last seen her. Lily, I was beginning to realize, had a marked eccentricity. She had a brain. Her elegantly shod feet were tucked up under her. Her slender young face was all but lost behind those forbidding black-rimmed spectacles. Except for her, the splendid drawing room was deserted.

"Greetings, Deane old pot," she said when she saw me. She took off her majestic glasses, stuck both legs straight out and both arms over her head, stretched luxuriously, and yawned.

"When I think," she said in a somewhat cleft palate accent before the yawn was entirely fin-

ished, "of all the millions of girls who must envy this brilliant life I lead! All just too maddeningly gay. Do you think if I jumped overboard anybody would pay any attention to me?"

"I would. It would depend of course," I amended judiciously, "on where you did it."

"Naturally. I'll make a note of it. Only in shallow water and on the nicest sort of day. You could at least throw me a cork without taking too great a risk. Why the working clothes?" Lily eyed my gray pullover and mud-stained sneakers. "What have you been up to?"

With exaggerated furtiveness I made sure no one was within hearing. Then I told her. When I got to the point where the huge and unidentified character had fallen upon Siegfried Meer, choked him, and pounded his head upon the stones, Lily's only comment was:

"Grand!"

There was no doubt I had her attention. Her gray eyes sparkled. At worst they were never exactly drab.

"You really mean, then, all that money may be *real*?"

"I think it's extremely likely."

Lily nodded sagely. "What now?"

"I have an errand for you. Your boy friend Siegfried is pretty well bunged up. I thought out of your womanly tenderness you ought to go and find out how he's getting

on. If he was really whanged on the head as hard as he seemed to be he might even be addled enough to tell you what it's all about."

Lily considered. "Where is he?"

"I don't know. Probably in his cabin. If I'd been slapped around the way he was I'd certainly feel like lying down."

Lily purposefully stood up. "You'll hang around outside? I may as well tell you that if that storm trooper so much as lays a hand on me I'll tell some men I know in London to bomb Berlin again."

While I lurked just around the corner of the corridor, Lily knocked softly at Meer's door. In a moment it was opened and Lily disappeared within.

I thought Lily would be an accurate reporter. But, just the same, I would rather eavesdrop.

Suiting the action to the thought, I loped down the corridor, out the door which opened on the afterdeck, then, by counting, came back to the right window.

The canvas blackout cover, I found, was mounted on a wooden frame which was held in place by hand screws. Or "butterfly nuts," as the hardware trade calls them. By loosening the lower two I could ease it open a little, though at the cost of a painfully conspicuous streak of light down the white-painted steel wall.

This was a little better. Not much, but a little. I couldn't hear sentences, but I could catch an occasional word. Lily was working hard. Her voice dripped sympathy and womanly admiration for the bold Sea Hero. But I could detect that she had trouble keeping the conversation on a useful plane. Meer kept telling her how, until now, in his dedicated life, love had never really come to him. Ah, but *now* . . .

But it really wasn't much use. If Lily was getting anywhere, which I was beginning to doubt, I wasn't. Hard as I might press my ear to that thick screen of canvas, I was hearing not one word in ten.

Someone took me by the arm. Aboard the *Vittoria* my nerves had deteriorated badly. I squeaked like a startled mouse.

It was Lynch. In his prowling he had come on me. Not unnaturally, he wondered what I was up to. In the microscopic whisper which seemed lately to have become my habitual way of speech, I told him. He indicated his approval. I also explained that all that kept me at what had turned out to be my futile post was my promise to Lily to stand by—and presumably dash to the rescue if Siegfried should get rough.

A bell rang. The sound cut clearly through the low murmur of voices in the cabin. It was Meer's telephone. I flattened my ear still

harder against the canvas. I could hear the German answer it. Then he said something to Lily about being sorry. Lynch, who had been listening with me, and whose hearing was abnormally acute, plucked at my sleeve and began to run softly but swiftly down the deck. I followed him.

We reached the aft door of the port corridor and opened it a cautious crack just in time to see the door of Cabin G open. Lily Wyndam, looking amused, angry, and rather crestfallen all at once, emerged first. Meer followed her and closed the door after them.

He wore a dark blue, naval-looking bathrobe and felt slippers. The back of his neck and part of his head were neatly bandaged. Evidently he had called on Dr. Lund.

Meer seized one of Lily's hands in both of his.

"After when I have finished I to your cabin shall come?"

"You certainly to my cabin shall not come," said Lily acidly.

"No?" Meer beamed as if she had given him warm encouragement. "Then to you I shall telephone?"

"Yes, you do just that. Call me up sometime," said Lily.

With a final leer Siegfried Meer proceeded up the corridor. He limped a little but walked well enough. I noticed he kept his right hand in the pocket of his robe. Lily stood looking after him.

"Hist!" I said through the crack in the door behind her.

"Who histed?" asked Lily in a low voice. She did not even turn her head. A bright girl, this Wyndam. She was fast learning the tricks of the conspiratorial trade.

"I did. Come out on deck."

As Meer disappeared at the far end of the passageway Lily joined us on the deck outside.

"Who was it?" Lynch demanded. "Who phoned him?"

"Herr Manfred Braun," said Lily bitterly. "He wanted, I gathered, to talk to Meer at once. With Siegfried it was clearly not to reason why. Practically tore him from my arms. I was quite impressed."

"Would it be correct, do you think, to call Siegfried, Braun's *ja-man*?"

As well he might, Lynch grunted. He seemed excited.

"Quite. Thank you, Miss Wyndam. This is most important. Most. It's the key to their relationship for which we've been looking." He twisted his strong, thin hands nervously together.

"Unfortunately, we've just learned it is impossible to hear through those blackout canvases. I don't like it. But there's no alternative. Thank you again, Miss Wyndam. Come with me, Robert."

With that he jerked the door open and cantered down the corridor in the direction Meer had taken. With a hasty assurance to

the embittered Lily that I would see her around sometime, I charged after him.

To my surprise his destination turned out to be Sand's own cabin. Lynch knocked peremptorily. Paused. Then knocked again even more loudly.

Sand opened it himself.

Far from waiting to be asked, Lynch crowded in like a subway rider.

"We're sorry to disturb you, sir," he said quickly. "But a conversation is taking place in Braun's cabin which it is essential we overhear. With Meer. I believe it will touch most directly on your interests. If it is any way possible still to exclude you from those interests, be assured that is their intention."

Sand, who had been backed back into the center of his own parlor, managed at last to hold his ground.

"So? But I do not think that I understand."

Lynch clicked his tongue impatiently. "We wish, Mr. Sand," he said with great distinctness, "to listen to what is being said in Herr Braun's cabin by means of the concealed microphone you have installed there. Please! While you delay, possibly valuable information is being lost."

Viggo Sand's smooth, large, pasty-blond countenance turned a vivid shade of pink. If Lynch kept up these tactics much longer I felt

Dr. Lund was going to have another patient. He swelled as if he would literally explode. Then, with a massive gesture, he shrugged his shoulders, turned his back on us, and strode across the room.

Apparently now willingly enough, the big man reached among the books and undid some sort of catch. Two sections swung out at right angles, revealing a conventional enough panel of dials, knobs, and finger switches: in appearance a kind of cross between a radio control panel and a telephone switchboard. Now that it was in full view there seemed to be nothing particularly mysterious about it. The bookcase trick had the effect rather of being a space-saver aboard a well contrived private yacht than a secret panel.

With a few touches of his big, yet oddly graceful fingers, Sand showed Lynch how it worked. A turn of one big knob activated the whole contrivance. A row of lesser knobs were marked "B, C, D" down through "K; Captain, Engine Room, Wireless Room . . ."

Sand touched a switch. "This is the loud-speaker. But I advise you use the earphones." He indicated a pair already plugged in and hanging on a hook. Lynch had already pulled up a straight chair and was beginning to fit them to his head.

"You will hear better."

Sand touched one switch and then another. "This is the address



system by which you may speak to the whole ship. I do not think that you will need this."

Viggo Sand straightened. "And now," he said with heavy sarcasm, "if there is no further service I can do you, have I your permission to go to bed?"

Lynch nodded. He had turned knob B and was already listening. "Quite. Thank you."

Like a great galleon with red silk sails Sand sailed majestically across the room, entered the bed-chamber which adjoined it, and shut the door behind him.

I didn't get it.

Lynch was leaning intently forward, pressing the earphones to his head with the palms of both hands. I found another chair and placed myself as close to him as I could get.

His expression, in rapid succession, was interested, puzzled, disappointed.

At last he pulled the earphones off, turned two knobs, knocked down a couple of switches and sat frowning at the wall, his forehead furrowed with concentrated thought. After a polite interval I poked him with a finger to remind him I was there.

"Well, how about it? What tidings?"

Lynch shook his head. "Interesting. But far from satisfactory. They were both keeping their voices down, and they were evidently some distance from the mi-

crophone. At least the relationship was clear. That had already been suggested clearly enough by Braun's summoning Meer, knocked about as he was, to his cabin instead of Braun's going to see him." Lynch looked over my shoulder toward the door of Sand's bedroom.

"But I am sure," he said more loudly, "we have abused Mr. Sand's hospitality long enough." Lynch made mouthing motions and wagged his eyebrows at me to indicate he would have more to say on the subject when we were outside.

Something had been preying on my mind, which couldn't wait.

"I can't make out Viggo," I whispered. "Didn't he strike you as remarkably incurious?"

Lynch closed one eye in an elaborate wink and shook his head. Bending down, he opened one of the doors of the built-in cabinet below. Even my inexperienced eyes at once recognized a tape recorder.

"While he was showing me the board," Lynch murmured softly, "he turned this on."

"Ho, ho! So he could listen later at his leisure?"

"But," Lynch whispered happily, "I turned it off!"

## CHAPTER NINE

LYNCH led me to his cabin. When he had closed the door he rum-

maged in the back of a dresser drawer and found one of those combination tool affairs which are made for mechanically inclined travelers. He crawled with it under his bed.

When he emerged he was looking pleased with himself. "I cut the wire. Now, thank Heaven, we can talk freely. Since Sand now knows we know of that convenient device of his, there's no further point in being furtive."

He made himself comfortable in one of the two velvet-covered French armchairs, leaned his head back until he was looking at the ceiling, and put his fingertips together.

Lynch shifted his position to fix his eyes on mine. "What I found most interesting," he said slowly, "came at the very last. Just as Meer was leaving. He was right away across the cabin from the microphone. By the door. He did not speak loudly. But I'd be willing to take my oath that what he said was this. You'll understand this much German, at least. 'Gute Nacht, mein Führer.'"

I softly whistled a single sustained note. "And that was when you said, 'Well, well, well.' I'd say you were justified. A new one, huh? The late Adolph's heir?"

"I think," said Lynch, "it is a reasonable assumption. We are now left with one large remaining question mark: Souhani. Any ideas, Robert?"

I shook my head. "None. Or almost none. I've seen him with Captain Carey. I've had the feeling they are beginning to get on. I have one other contribution. I once saw them talking by the rail. Sand hove into sight, and they very promptly broke it up. I had the feeling they thought Viggo might not approve."

"Possibly suggestive." Lynch produced one of his rare grins.

"But of what?"

I had been sound asleep several hours when I suddenly found myself wide awake. The yacht's powerful engines, deep in her hull, had been started. At the same time I heard footsteps and low voices and the creaking of a pulley. I glanced at my watch. It was four-thirty. I put on slippers and went out on deck. Lynch, in pajamas, was there ahead of me.

The blackout was still complete. Not a glimmer of light showed. But the fore and aft cables which had held the *Vittoria* to the brush-covered quay had been cast off and were being speedily wound up on silent electric windlasses. Three seamen were hauling up the companion stairway. In a few minutes they had it swung inboard against the rail and were lashing it in place. Far in the depths a bell clanged, and the ship began to move stern first out of the narrow slip. It was as efficient a bit of seamanship as one could see.

Bit by bit, the dark and furtive ship began to come alive. The white riding light at the top of the radio mast was switched on. Then the green and red starboard and port lights at either end of the bridge again stained a tiny portion of the night with their bright colors. Quick-handed seamen took down the battens of canvas with which the windows on the upper decks had been covered. Patches of soft glow showed where lights were lit. . . . It was like the lifting of a desperado's mask. The yacht *Vittoria* was bland and innocent again.

I was up again early. The day which was beginning seemed perfect. Some sailors, barefooted, with their white trousers rolled to their knees—and a hard-bitten looking crew they were—were hollystoning the ship's decks under a deluge of salt water from canvas hoses. The only other member of our not-so-select company who was up so early was Dr. Lund. I joined him at the rail, and we exchanged good mornings.

His opening remark was unexpected: "There is so much beauty in the world!"

There was such underlying bitterness in the commonplace words that I finished for him: "That it makes one impatient with all the ugliness?"

"Shall we say rather," Dr. Lund amended, "that most of us accept

the ugliness—man's ugliness—too easily."

I was not in the mood for philosophy or for politics, and changed the subject:

"This your first trip to the West Indies, Doctor?"

"The first time I have traveled outside Europe."

"You're making your voyage in curious company."

There was a measurable pause.

"Why do you say that?"

"Surely it's obvious. Would you call this a conventional yachting party? Meer, the disciplined fanatic who still doesn't know his cause was buried forever in the ruins of the Reich Chancellery. Braun, his leader—"

"His what?" Dr. Lund asked quietly. His washed-pale surgeon's hands resting on the rail were very still.

I was probing. Though with no clearly defined purpose. "So Mr. Lynch and I understand," I went on casually. "In this conflict of interests aboard here, he, curiously, seems to be the central figure. That upsets you?"

Dr. Lund smiled. "As any citizen of my small country would be if he learned the snake he thought dead still had life in it."

"You suffered greatly during the war?"

"Was there any European who did not? You have evidence of this Braun's identity?"

I shook my head. "Nothing, I'm

afraid, that could be described as evidence. But a strong suggestion."

Dr. Lund was silent.

"The chief remaining puzzle," I went on, "is Mr. Souhani. I wondered if you knew him?"

The Norwegian shook his head. "When, quite by chance, I succeeded to Dr. Persen's post I had no personal acquaintance with anyone aboard."

"Any ideas?"

"About Mr. Souhani? Only this. The men in whom you are interested are Central Europeans. If there is conflict or distrust between them, its source in these times is usually political. You must understand I have no information. I say this only as a possible direction for your inquiries."

I regarded the graying, repressed-looking little doctor with fresh appreciation. "You might have something. I hadn't thought of it. Thank you very much."

Dr. Lund bowed and wandered off.

He was almost immediately replaced by Lynch. For reasons which probably lay deep in his Britannic past, my friend had chosen this brilliant tropic morning to dress in a characterless gray suit, gray tie, and black shoes. He was looking out to sea.

I followed the direction of his gaze. A white motor launch had just come around the farthest point of the great headland of the Mole St. Nicolas, a couple of miles

away. Even at that distance "Official" was written all over it. The sparkling white paint and gleaming varnish, the awning amidships, and the bright flag fluttering from the stern could only mean that the *Vittoria* had come to the attention of some department of the Haitian government.

Lynch beamed. "We'd best tell Mr. Sand."

Sand was at breakfast in the parlor of his private suite. Or rather, when his steward opened the door to us, he was on the telephone. He put the receiver down as we came in. For once I thought I'd do the talking.

"There's what looks like a Haitian Customs launch heading for us. We thought you'd like to know about it."

Sand nodded. "Captain Carey just called me. Since there is no help for it, he is having the companion lowered."

He did not look at us. The big man was in white shirt and trousers. His fair skin was so smooth and pinkly shining he somehow looked as if he had been washed professionally. He also looked most thoroughly annoyed.

"Might we also suggest, sir, that you have some seamen at work preparing to lower the ship's launch? and perhaps the sailing cutter? Casually, you understand. As if we'd laid to for a few days' fishing."

Sand glowered at him. But he extended his hand for the phone, called Carey, and gave the order.

In the face of Sand's glumness and bad temper Lynch was as bright as a new penny.

"Suppose you let Mr. Deane and me handle this, sir. We both know the West Indies and how to handle these West Indians. Sure there'll be no difficulty."

I had a reprehensible desire to giggle. This man who had experienced so few defeats, and had been so rarely opposed in his domineering lifetime, seemed dismally to have accepted Lynch—this intolerable unimpressible, inextinguishable little cock-sparrow of a man—as a cross he had to bear.

"Very well." The hard blue eyes glared at us. "But I warn you, if you do not handle this and all else in accord with my interests you both will have reason to regret it."

Lynch grinned as if Sand had been just as pleasant as could be.

"Right-ho!" he said in purest Cockney. And we departed.

When we returned to the deck the companionway had been lowered. Captain Carey, accompanied by two trim sailors and dressed head to foot in an immaculate white duck uniform, stood by it waiting. If Lynch and I made any impression on his retinas he gave no sign of it.

The trim launch had just gone into a wide turn to swing in

alongside the landing stage. One of the *Vittoria's* sailors ran down the gangway to lend a hand. The other neatly threw a light rope ending in a Turk's-head knot into the outstretched hands of a Negro sailor in the launch's bow.

The officer who came up the steps was a middle-aged mulatto, slightly on the stoutish side. He was wearing an immaculate khaki uniform, somewhat faded by many launderings. Before his head was level with the deck I decided I liked him. His alert brown eyes were taking in the spit-and-polish splendor of the great yacht with amused interest. He looked good-tempered and intelligent.

Captain Carey introduced himself and welcomed him aboard in execrable French. The officer identified himself as Captain Heraux of the Haitian Gendarmerie. I saw him glance at the deck above us where the *Vittoria's* launch was being swung out on its davits. Then, since Carey was so pointedly ignoring our existence, he looked at us. It was all the encouragement Lynch needed.

"Captain Heraux? Enchanted to make your acquaintance," Lynch said, also in French. "My name is Bertram Lynch." He smiled. "I might be described, I suppose, as the ship's security officer. And this is Professor Deane of the Yale Graduate School, a guest of Mr. Viggo Sand, the owner. But forgive me. You speak English?"

The Haitian smiled. "I don't know about English," he said agreeably in that language. "But certainly American."

I was relieved to see that Lynch's fatuous remark to Sand about knowing "how to handle West Indians" meant only that Lynch had made the notable discovery that West Indians, like Esquimos or Americans, were "handled" best by straightforwardness and courtesy. . . . The visit went off well, I thought. While Captain Heraux's underlings bobbed comfortably on the launch, he was shown over the yacht from bridge to engine room. Though Carey made no attempt to hide his disgruntlement at our presence, he did the honors capably enough. Finally, after messages had been sent ahead, we conducted the Haitian officer to Sand's cabin.

Heraux was sufficiently impressed, but he was far from being awed. It was not until Sand had established him in one of the largest of the suite's neo-Wagnerian chairs and induced him to accept a glass of brandy that he got down to business. Then he spoke pleasantly but plainly.

"You understand, I am a police officer. That is to say, the clearance or examination of ships coming to Haiti is no part of my duty. As you must know"—he addressed us all and made the pronoun plural—"your action in dropping anchor in Haitian territorial wa-

ters without first obtaining clearance at a designated port of call is most irregular. No one has been ashore?"

"Of course!" said Viggo Sand with a large gesture. It struck me as a good answer.

After one searching glance Heraux accepted it as a negative. "But," he went on, "since I understand this is a private party and Captain Carey tells me you have a ship's doctor who can give you a clean bill of health, I'll offer no objection. In an outlying area like this I have wide discretion."

Captain Heraux's clever mouth twitched with amusement. "I can't bring myself to believe that Mr. Viggo Sand is engaged in smuggling Cuban cigarettes. Or even this admirable brandy. I am here for a different purpose."

"So?" inquired Sand.

"I have been at the little village near Juan Rabel Anchorage on the North Coast on police business. Late last night word was brought me that there had been a sound of shots. Then came the news of an unknown vessel. It may interest you that both messages were carried across a considerable intervening space of hills by means of drums. Can you explain?"

Lynch examined his knuckles with an air of embarrassment.

"I can, Captain. While firing at some dolphins on the trip down, I found my gun was balky. The pin was striking off center. Last

night I adjusted it. As I recall it, I first fired one shot. The adjustment was not yet exact. I did some further tinkering, then fired five more. In quick succession. Into the sea, of course."

Heraux listened to this explanation with what seemed to me considerable reserve. But at the moment he had to accept it. Without replying, he finished his drink and got up. We rose with him. Sand was actually looking pleased. It was the first time he had got his money's worth out of Lynch since he met him.

"Have we your permission to go ashore, Captain?" Lynch asked.

"For what purpose?" For the first time, Heraux's voice had a snap in it.

Lynch pretended not to notice it. "None in particular. After a sea voyage I'm sure some of Mr. Sand's guests would like to stretch their legs a bit. I know I would. Just to walk around a bit?"

Heraux relented. "I see no objection. There is a ruin on the headland some of you might find interesting. A relic of the follies of another time. Limit yourselves, if you please, to the daylight hours."

As Heraux left, a little jerk of Sand's head in my direction seemed to mean: "Come back here when you've finished."

At the head of the companion-way as Captain Heraux was completing his handshaking and what I now felt were his rather curt

farewells, Lynch pulled a long white envelope from an inside pocket.

"I wonder, Captain, Would you be good enough to do me a small service? These are some letters. Will you drop them in the post for me?"

Heraux took the extended envelope and turned it over. It was sealed but blank. His clever brown face showed no expression.

"With pleasure." He put the envelope into his pocket, patted it, and descended to his launch.

On the way to Sand's suite Lynch enlightened me in a swift whisper.

"A cable in code to London. There are some questions I want answered. A covering note urging discretion and advising they be forwarded through the British Legation. I trust we have one! Heraux struck me as a clever man!"

Sand opened at our first knock. He was alone. Even the ubiquitous English steward had been dismissed. With catlike grace the big man took a swift turn about the room. He turned upon us frowning. But this time the frown was impersonal.

"So. I do not like this. I do not like this at all. That officer was not a stupid man. I think we must make haste."

"We agree, sir," Lynch said quietly.

Sand nodded, picked up the phone, and spun the dial.

"Herr Meer? . . . No? Oh, Dr. Lund. It is you . . . So? . . . So? . . . I shall come."

The frown which furrowed Sand's ordinarily smooth brow was darker.

"Meer is ill. Come."

Dr. Lund had the door of Meer's cabin open when we reached it. Without speaking he made a motion with his head to-

"What is it?" Sand demanded. ward the bed.

"I believe," said Dr. Lund calmly, "it is nothing serious. There is no fever, so there has been no infection. Evidently Meer was injured last night more than he knew. There also seems to be an element of shock. As if this young man had gone through an emotional as well as a physical experience."

Lynch was poking away at Meer, counting his pulse and peering into his eyes for all the world as if he knew what he was doing.

Sand grunted with impatience. "Yes, yes! But how soon will he be all right? Can he understand? Talk?"

"I am afraid not. The intelligence"—Dr. Lund smiled—"such as it is, is dulled. Unless, of course, there are complications, serious complications, I should say that in forty-eight hours—"

Viggo Sand swore under his breath in five languages, few of which I knew. With a final glare of angry contempt which took in Lund and the German on the bed,

he waved his arm in a summoning gesture and commanded: "Come!"

We came.

Back in his own suite Sand made straight for the decanter of old brandy. As merely the hired help, our nerves were supposed to be in order. We were not included.

"So! But this is intolerable. I have come halfway across the world. That black man is too curious already. This fool—this blunderer—"

"If," I interrupted, "I could offer a suggestion?"

Sand glared at me as if he did not expect it to be valuable. "So?"

"Under the circumstances I think you are free of any further moral obligation. Why don't you open Meer's instructions? the sealed letter?"

Sand smote his brow a whack so resounding it must have been really painful.

"Tiens! Verdammung! Stupido! I have lost my mind! Please leave me! No, no, excuse me. I do not mean that. Go outside. In the corridor. While I get it. I will call you back."

Viggo Sand stood stock-still until we were outside and the door was shut behind us. Then we heard him moving about and, I thought, the soft opening and closing of a door. Several minutes passed. Then he called us.

"Come, come. Come in!"

It was rather like charades.



Sand had recovered his equable, if not good, nature. He struck the paper with his knuckles.

"Here. Of course. My mind was absent. These events have disconcerted me." He smiled. "Now you see I am not so innocent of the ways of doing business as you suspected."

Lynch had sat down the better to study Meer's map. I leaned over his shoulder.

"You have examined this before, sir?" Lynch asked.

Sand chuckled. "But certainly. Within an hour after Meer had put it in my hands. In Germany the day before we sailed. A second time after our conversation in this room the other day. Glue and sealing wax are not invincible. I am a man of business, Mr. Lynch."

"Um-m-m," said Lynch.

It was an admirable piece of work. Meer had been a naval officer. If he had executed this map himself he must have had special training as a cartographer. It showed the headland of the Mole St. Nicolas, the concrete walled slip where the *Vittoria* had lain the night before, the fortress on the height. Smaller, more detailed plans were at the bottom of the page. Contours were delicately shaded, and there were even fathom indications showing the sea depths around the promontory and the anchorage. There was a compass rose neatly drawn in a lower corner. I had studied it a full min-

ute before I saw there was something wrong with it.

There was something very wrong with it.

Lynch was annoyingly humming to himself.

The general shape of the Mole St. Nicolas is long and narrow. This promontory—plainly marked Mole St. Nicolas—was blunt. The slip in which the *Vittoria* had tied up, I was certain, cut into the cliffs almost due north and south. On this map it lay east and west. And it was somehow of a different shape. The plan of the fortress was square. Certainly the place we had visited—and there surely were not two of them—was a long rectangle.

"Mr. Sand," said Lynch matter-of-factly, "you have been swindled. This map is worthless."

Sand goggled. His pale northern skin achieved a sunset glow. The emotions of shock, surprise, anger — and suspicion — chased themselves across his big face.

"Look for yourself," Lynch said. He brushed a contemptuous hand across the plan on the desk.

"This is an imaginary landscape. A subtle but effective caricature. If you will examine the compass rose you will see it is eighty degrees out of true even with the general position of the island." He leaned over to peer at the plan more closely.

"I should like to have Captain Carey's opinion on these fathom

markings. I am of the opinion that if a navigator—and he would have to be a blind man—had attempted to bring the *Vittoria* into this slip by following these depth indications he would have driven her aground. Even from the little we saw of it, the floor plan of the fortress is also palpably false. It follows then, I think, that these large-scale sketches of the exact location of the chests are part of the same hoax." Lynch turned around and grinned impudently up.

"Mr. Sand, you have been had."

The multimillionaire was clearly a chastened man. He slumped. A groping hand found the little ebony baton on a near-by smoking table. Sand picked it up and began to fondle it. It seemed to comfort him.

"Something bothers me," I announced.

Sand looked at me with a scornful gloom. As if anything which bothered me could remotely compare with all that bothered him.

"So?"

"Yes. This doesn't fit. That plan there is sly. It would fool even a professional sailor if he didn't happen to know this particular terrain and if he didn't think of comparing it with a standard chart. It's subtle. The *soi-disant* Siegfried Meer isn't subtle. Dumb. Fanatic. Yes. But I'll eat the Nazi medals he no doubt carries around with him if he cooked this up."

"I received it," said Sand, "from Meer's own hands. Here in this room." He pointed to the floor. "In that envelope. Sealed."

"Meer was alone with you?"

"No. Herr Braun was with him. My business understanding was made jointly with them both." Sand cleared his throat. "Since you know so much as you do, I see no harm in your knowing the terms of that agreement. I am merely acting as agent. My promise was to assist in the recovery of the cases and to return with them to Bremen. I was then to retain a share of the specie in its original form as my commission: 30 per cent."

Lynch grunted. "Roughly a million, five hundred thousand dollars. A nice profit."

"For a great service, Mr. Lynch. We have found, a hazardous service. There was—there *is*—the gamble I may get nothing."

They were getting off the track.

"Can you remember the circumstances? I mean when Meer gave you the envelope? Where was he sitting? Where was Braun? Just exactly what happened?"

"A moment." Sand pressed the forefinger of his right hand to his left temple, the thumb to his right. "Yes. I think I recall perfectly. We had completed our understanding. It was simply a concluding meeting. I was sitting there." He pointed to his favorite high-backed chair across the room.

"Braun there. Meer was standing." He smiled. "I believe he made a speech at me. About how it was my privilege to assist in the regeneration—" Sand shrugged. "I was not interested. When he had finished he turned to Braun. Meer put out his hand like this. . . . Braun opened a briefcase which he had been holding on his lap. He took out the—envelope—and gave it to Meer—who gave it to me."

Viggo Sand's words had come more and more slowly. The last ones left him with his mouth open.

Lynch chuckled. "An amusing speculation. It may turn out that Meer was as easily taken in as you were yourself."

"Something else bothers me," I said. Lynch and Viggo Sand looked as if they were getting tired of me. Neither encouraged me by saying, "What?"

"Suppose," I said, "Simple Siegfried honestly intended to keep his part of the bargain. He just might have. And that he really did prepare a plan showing where the chests are—for which Braun substituted this one. That would mean that Braun has the original. He'd hardly have thrown it away."

"Sacré ventre bleu," muttered Sand, and held his head.

"What are we to do?"

"I suggest, sir," said Lynch briskly, "that Mr. Deane and I take the ship's launch, go ashore, and have a look for the chests ourselves."

Viggo Sand thought a moment and then inclined his head. "You will take Mr. Dibble with you."

"And," said I, "Miss Wyndam."

"Lily?" Sand was startled.

I looked impersonal and detached in the extreme. "Captain Heraux now knows of our presence here. Though this part of the island is sparsely populated, someone might see us poking around. If Miss Wyndam was with us it would give the impression we were simple tourists exploring an old ruin.

"I strongly advise," I strongly advised, "that we take lunch."

## CHAPTER TEN

It was rather like a picnic.

Reginald Dibble, looking, in rust-red linen trousers, a yellow shirt, and Paisley-pattern neckerchief, like a prewar afternoon on the Promenade des Anglais, sat lounging on the red leather seat behind the wheel. Lily Wyndam, her platinum hair done up in a knot on the top of her head and rather fetchingly absurd in immense sun glasses, a practically transparent blouse, and blue jeans which could have come only out of an American mail-order catalogue, was beside him. The boat was one of those attractive toys which are mostly polished mahogany top-decking, have two wide seats, one behind the other, and

are capable of tremendous speed.

We had to wait for Lynch. When he finally appeared he was carrying a worn little leather bag which clanked metallically when he set it down. He was looking, I thought, remarkably pleased with himself.

To preserve the appearance of idle yachtsmen with nothing to do in these West Indian waters but amuse themselves, Captain Carey and Paul Souhani, it was understood, were taking the ship's small sailing cutter to go fishing. For what? I wondered. Sand and Mrs. Wyndam seemed to have entered themselves for the trans-oceanic sitting championship. It occurred to me that I had not seen Manfred Braun since dinner the night before.

Lily Wyndam looked us over.

"What," she demanded loudly, "no shovels?"

Dibble kicked a self-starter, and the power boat jumped forward. The thing ran like a car. I wondered if it had brakes.

"In answer to your query," I shouted in Lily's ear, "we weren't sure even the *Vittoria* ran to shovels. Furthermore—"

Lily, who was directly in front of me, turned around at such close quarters that she nearly kissed me. "Goodby! Heading B?"

"Furthermore," I bellowed unnecessarily over what turned out to be the greatly diminished purr of the motor—it was humming now

—"this is supposed to be a picnic. Why would you take shovels on a picnic? To bury the paper napkins? We don't *have* paper napkins. They are *damask*, young Lily."

Lynch had a more practical turn of mind. "Did you bring your revolver, Dibble?"

Reg nodded. "Yes. And remind me not to give it to you."

Lily's mouth opened in a pleased O.

"Expectin' some shootin', pardners?" she drawled.

"We trust," said Lynch, "not. But there is the possibility we might be interrupted."

Dibble nosed the boat slowly along the slime-covered wall. At its far end we saw a cement stair which came down into the water. There was a rusty ringbolt. Dibble cut off power, alertly stepped out, and made us fast.

The moment motion ceased we became aware of the tropic heat. But it was pleasant, luxurious heat. It penetrated beneath the skin, thawed old physical and mental stiffnesses, and loosened nerves which had been tight too long. Lynch decided to take off his coat. With the unexplained little bag he'd brought with him, he had looked like an unsuccessful doctor. In shirtsleeves he now looked more like an unsuccessful veterinary.

Except for a slight bulge in the hip pocket of those lovely pants, Reg Dibble was unburdened.

The picnic hamper was heavy. I pointed out to Lily that it would be becomingly feminine of her to tote it up the hill. Food, was it not, was woman's province? According to Lily, not especially. She did, however, consent to lend a hand, and so the big basket swung between us.

We had been at sea some time—and people of the land like to feel the earth under their feet again. More than that, we all had a feeling of release. The *Vittoria*, luxurious, beautiful, comfortable as she was—one knew it best on quitting her—had become like an old dark house, oppressive, malignant, compact of secrets and of ugly deeds.

Here we felt as if we had put all that behind us.

So much for human instinct!

When we came out of the woods at the top of the promontory the sun hit us like the blast from a furnace. The light was so intense that even Lily, behind her sun glasses, squinted. As I have observed before, this part of the island was very dry. Away from the shelter of the cliffs and close proximity to the sea, though there were bushes, vines and coarse grass enough—and even cactus—there were no real trees, not a particle of shade. Everything was the same parched and yellowed green.

But if the unfinished, now half-

ruined fortress had been strange and romantic by stars and moonlight, it was hardly less so under the full glare of day. Lily gasped.

As we had hardly more than sensed, there were the massive outer walls on which work had stopped when they were almost as high as a man's chest, topped by their queer growth of rusted rods. There was the ramp of carefully laid stones leading down to the fortress' floor. The wide aperture, or gate, to which we had come once more, appeared to be the terminus of a road, now overgrown and all but invisible, which skirted the north wall and led inland.

And there, too, just as we had left them (I think subconsciously I should not have been surprised if the whole vast, lonely, foolish edifice had been made to vanish by the touch of some wizard's wand with the coming of the dawn), were the five iron doors let into the face of the stone wall of the long firing platform. We could now see that they were rusted and stained with a growth of some species of gray lichen. Against one of them, just as we had left it, was that incongruous pile of stones.

One thing which we had not noticed the night before was that just inside the wide gap in the wall was a four-foot ledge, covered with dirt and dry grass, which ran completely around the fort. It looked as if it might have

been intended as a sentry's walk. Since it led directly to the parapet where the gun platforms were mounted, which looked out over the sea, we followed it.

The view was stunning. Off to the left and far below, the *Vittoria* looked very handsome and surprisingly small. The yacht's cutter, presumably occupied by Captain Carey and Souhani, was some distance offshore, its triangular sail very white against the bright blue water. It struck me that this was practically the first time since the voyage began when one knew exactly where Paul Souhani was. If there was going to be any mayhem or malfeasance this, from Souhani's point of view, would be a good time for it. For once, he had an alibi. For that matter, so had Carey.

Below us, the cliff dropped dizzily down, straight to the water.

As we stood in a row taking in the scenery a soft voice made us all jump in unison:

"B'jour, blancs!"

We turned to confront a smiling young Haitian, not six feet from us. How he had come so close to us unheard, or where he came from, I'll never know. But the withered grass was soft, and his feet were bare. The source of that amiable salutation—"Howdy, whites!" would be a fair translation—was well over six feet tall, stringy, and almost a true black.

We grinned and muttered "Bon

jour" in return, and then conversation lagged.

He just stood there and smiled. He was a problem.

"You speak French, don't you, Bobby?" Lynch inquired in an undertone.

"Fairish," I muttered back. "But these Haitian country people, I understand, speak a very crude and debased dialect."

"That," said Lynch unkindly, "is why I thought that you might manage. Have a try."

I smirked. I waved the picnic hamper. I gestured toward the yacht. I pointed out such glaring truths as that it was a nice day, and that this certainly was an interesting place—wasn't it?—and that we were just having a stroll, and that in due time we expected to eat our lunch. They were not, I will admit, revelations of a character to produce great animation on any face, however perfect the comprehension of its wearer.

Although our Haitian just smiled and smiled he gave me the impression he understood me perfectly. Maybe he just wasn't chatty.

When I had exhausted my repertoire of small talk, he just said "Bon!" waved his machete in a friendly salute, and sloped off along the parapet. At the far end of it, as we gazed rather hopelessly after him, the tall Haitian found a sun-stricken stretch of grass which seemed to take his

fancy, lay down on it, placed the knife beside him, pulled his big straw hat down over his face, and to all appearances straightway fell asleep.

"All very well," observed Reg Dibble. "Local color and all that. But damned annoying. I don't see exactly how we can order the chap to get off his own island. But neither do I fancy digging up a million pounds under the watchful eye of a casual bystander, however innocent."

"The innocence of that bystander, if anyone so totally prone can be called that," said Lynch ruminatively, "is what occupied me. Think he understood you, Bobby?"

"Yes. I did."

Lynch nodded. "So did I. I am perhaps overly suspicious. Many of the Haitian countryfolk nowadays learn conventional French at school."

"But," I finished for him, "you detect the hand of our friend Captain Heraux of the local Gendarmerie?"

"If there's the least possibility of that"—Reginald Dibble shrugged his wide shoulders—"then I'm afraid our day's outing is *kaput*. We'd better eat our lunch, stroll around a bit, and then come back tonight. Viggo's distaste for publicity, I assure you, knows no bounds."

"Not at all! Not at all!" Lynch was emphatic. "First, I may be

mistaken. Then, remember our purpose. We do not intend to carry off the chests. The best we had intended, with great good luck, was to discover where they are. If we do find them, we don't, you know, precisely have to fire off rockets. Unless our friend there chooses to stand right over us, there's no reason why he should be any the wiser."

Reg looked doubtful. "What are we supposed to be doing here then?"

"I see no difficulty in that. This is a most singular place. What more natural than that passing yachtsmen would wish to explore it? Follow?"

"Um-m-m," said Dibble. "Hope you're right. Let's get at it, then."

The hamper having been left in the inadequate shade of a big clump of prickly pear, we clattered down the nearest of the stone stairways which led to the central courtyard. The tall young Haitian beneath the straw hat gave no sign of stirring. We purposely made our voices loud and care-free.

There could be no disagreement as to where we at least should make a start. Facing us were the five steel doorways of the powder magazines. The most conspicuous was the one in the middle, concealed behind its sloping mound of stones.

"That," said Dibble, eyeing it, "looks like the deuce of a lot of

work for a hot day."

"Quite," said Lynch. And then all three of us were abruptly silent.

The pause was so marked that Lily Wyndam eyed us curiously. Finally she asked: "What's up?"

"I don't know," I said slowly. "But I seem to be afflicted with amnesia."

Lynch nodded. "Then so am I. Dibble?"

Reg's handsome face wore the same look of mystification as Lynch's and my own.

"The light was tricky, of course," he said thoughtfully. "And there was a good bit going on. I'd not care to swear to it. But I certainly have the recollection"—he pointed—"those stones were not against that door, but against that. Against the—let's see—the fourth from the left, not the third from the left. Yes, dammit, I *am* sure!"

"Quite," said Lynch.

"I too," said I.

"Pixies?" inquired Lily, unhelpfully.

I nodded. "What's more, very stalwart pixies."

"Odd," said Lynch briskly. "But susceptible, I think, of explanation."

Before I had time sourly to interpose that most things were, but how about coming up with one, he went on as if nothing of much consequence had happened.

"If you gentlemen have no objection, my own interest inclines first toward this door here. The

fourth. The one against which the stones were piled last night, not the one against which they are piled today."

He approached it. We crowded behind him.

Dibble reached out and rapped the steel door with his knuckles. It gave out a very solid sound.

"A sturdy bit of hardware. Just how do we get in?"

Lynch's moment had come. I had been expecting something of the sort for the last half-hour. His commonplace and ordinarily expressionless face beamed like a rising sun.

First, he carefully set down the little bag he had been carrying. Then with the air of prestidigitator he reached into a trousers pocket, and with a final triumphant gesture held before our admiring eyes—a key.

It was quite a key. It was a good six inches long. The whaddy'-call-its—the bumps and cuts at its business end—were extremely complicated. It looked brand-new.

"I was sorry," said Lynch roguishly, "to keep you waiting. But after I had borrowed a few tools from the engine room"—he touched the bag on the ground with his toe—"it belatedly occurred to me that Meer might have something like this. A careful race. It is a safe assumption this was meticulously kept in the file pertaining to this fortress ever since 1915. It was in the small drawer



in Meer's bedside table." He chuckled.

"Now if one of you will see whether our Haitian shadow is watching?"

When Lily obediently backed up until she could survey the parapet above us, then encouragingly shook her head, Lynch set to work. Inserting his oil can in the keyhole he squirted upwards, downwards, and sideways. Not until then did he try the key. We held our breaths.

Lynch held it firmly in his fist and turned. It held for a fraction of a second, then gave smoothly. With a satisfying little sound the lock clicked back. Lynch pushed with his spread palm, and the heavy door began to open. The hinges squeaked, the bottom of the door dragged across the concrete floor. But it opened. We stared excitedly—into total darkness.

"A jolly good thing," Lynch muttered, "someone thought of this." He knelt again to his little bag and produced three flashlights. "The Chief Engineer is a Dane. He was most obliging."

I don't really know what we had hoped to find. Twenty chests full of solid gold neatly stacked and waiting to be trucked off were no doubt too much to expect. What the beams of the three torches did reveal was nothing.

The chamber we were in was almost a perfect cube; its walls, of

skillfully mortared stone. It was as empty as the inside of a bass drum. It smelt musty and unused. Here and there a few greenish stains showed that dampness had seeped in, but on the whole the magazine was surprisingly dry. I had to remind myself that, after all, this was not a medieval castle but a sound piece of twentieth century construction. Through the years, though, wind had driven a certain amount of sand and dust under the door and had distributed it in a fine film over the floor. It gritted audibly when we walked on it.

Lynch gave a discouraged shrug and straightened up. He and Dibble and I then proceeded to make a detailed examination of all six surfaces of that blind cube of a room. We were not rewarded.

Lily Wyndam, with no flashlight of her own, had grown bored and wandered back into the sunlight outside. Her back was to the open door. I heard her call in a low voice, without turning.

"Yoo-hoo. Don't look now, but we are not alone."

I stuck my head out and did look now. Our wrestling companion of the night before had reappeared. He was perhaps twenty yards away behind the unfinished wall on the side of the fortress opposite to that by which we had entered. Even in broad daylight and half concealed in a tangle of weeds and scrub growth, he was no mean spectacle. If the wall on

that side was of the same height as the one behind which Lynch and I had crouched, the impression we had had of his stature had been no illusion.

He must be six feet six—built to scale. The face peering from the snarled jungle of blond hair and matted beard and the muscular arms thrust from the short sleeves of the dirty smock were a fiery, uncomfortable red—as if the giant was one of those unfortunates who never cease to burn under a tropic sun. Even at that distance a white scar was visible, a wide, ugly mark which began near the center of the forehead and disappeared into the mat of unkempt hair.

It was the face of a madman—a madman puzzled and bewildered at the sight of so many persons making free of his particular preserve. He was terrifying, and it was brave in Lily not at least to have squeaked. Yet there was something pitiful about him.

I called to Lynch and Dibble. "Siegfried's little friend has turned up again. Come out casually. Reg, suppose you take that gun out. Don't point it at him. Just show it. Let him see it. Lily, try something. Wave to him. A friendly wave. And smile."

A deep, musical laugh from above made us spin around. The tall Haitian was on the parapet immediately over our heads taking it all in.

The big man saw him, and his smile froze. The Haitian flapped his long hands toward him in a shooting gesture. Like a puppet in a Punch and Judy show the man vanished behind the wall.

"Who is he?" I called in French.

"*Lui? Ca, c'est gros-oiseau!*"

"*Vogel!*" exclaimed Lynch. "'Bird' in both languages." He lowered his voice. "Have another go at him, Bobby. Perhaps we'd best knock off till the ruddy place is less congested."

"I," pronounced Lily Wyndam plainly, "am hungry."

We spread our repast and ourselves on the dry grass of the parapet near one of the gun platforms. The Haitian, whose name turned out to be Diogène, joined us. While we swigged and munched in the full blast of that bright relaxing sun I questioned him.

He was perfectly willing to talk, in his halting French, of the bearded man he had called Gros Oiseau.

Seven or eight years ago—yes, it may have been toward the end of the Big War—some country people of the district had found him lying in the woods not far from here. At first they had thought him dead. Diogène touched his right temple. The white man had been badly wounded—here. He had lost a great deal of blood. The peasants took him home, and in time he got well. With a smile and a headshake Diogène touched

his temple again. But he was not right in the head. He was a "fool," but a harmless one.

His name? When he had tried to tell them what it was he had flapped his arms. They had laughed, and ever since then he had been called Big Bird. He was immensely strong. He could carry loads of *lignum vitae* and other heavy native produce more easily than the little Haitian donkeys. In return for that and other small services the people of the district gave him occasional shelter and what food he needed: he had no fixed place of abode. He was no trouble. Yes, he spent much time here at the old fortress. (Diogène grinned, showing his perfect teeth.) He was its self-appointed guardian. But we must not mind him.

Then, being a natural gentleman and having drunk wine and taken bread with us, Diogène rose, saluted us, and went away . . . If he was one of Captain Heraux's men he could now report that we were as harmless as Gros Oiseau.

Lynch got up and brushed the crumbs from his trousers. Our faces reflected the fact that we felt decidedly let down. If the chests were not waiting behind Door No. 4—the one to which Meer had so unmistakably directed our attention the night before—then they might be anywhere. Or nowhere. In the crass noonday sun-

light the whole thing had begun to seem unreal.

"We'll see," said Lynch without enthusiasm, "if Siegfried's key will fit the other doors."

With some force and some judicious filing, it did. In turn, Doors 1, 2, and 5 creaked open—upon the same mustiness, the same film of drifted sand up on the floor. The same emptiness.

Reginald Dibble sighed audibly, unknotted the handkerchief about his throat, and mimicked the gesture of spitting on his hands.

"Come, Deane my lad! Back to the rock pile. You and I are the biggest. Though frankly, I'd be willing to consider a fair offer right now for my share of what's behind this one, too."

Together, without haste, we then tackled the sloping pile of stones which blockaded the third steel door.

Lynch with his hands in his pockets strolled about looking thoughtful. Lily, neglected, took a flashlight and began to conduct her own investigations of the empty chambers.

She was gone some time in Magazine No. 1, then wandered out again. Shifting those damned rocks was rugged work. I peeled my shirt off. Lily paused long enough to vent a whistle of pure mockery at my manly form, then disappeared in the next chamber.

A few minutes later I heard her call in a low voice. "Hey! Bobby.

Mr. Lynch. Come here a minute. I've found something."

I dropped the stone I was lifting so suddenly I nearly crippled Dibble for life. The three of us reached the door simultaneously with the jostling impact of practiced subway riders boarding a Bronx express. It took a minute to straighten ourselves out and let Lynch go ahead.

Lily was squatting—if so inelegant a verb can be applied to anyone so pretty—in the near, left-hand corner of the stone room behind the door.

She was pointing her flashlight at something on the floor. We bent over her. I gave her A-Plus for thoroughness. "That" was a thin piece of metal about half an inch wide and some eight inches long, with a saw edge. She had not touched it. It lay against the wall almost covered by the gritty dust. It looked as if it had not been disturbed for many years.

Lynch picked it up between thumb and forefinger with the greatest delicacy. He was not careful enough. The strip of metal would have broken if he had not quickly got the palm of his other hand under it. He brought it out into the light.

"A broken hacksaw blade," he said reflectively. "We are in your debt, Miss Wyndam. . . . Very badly rusted. . . . Been there a long time. But clearly not since this place was built. In all those

years it would have entirely disintegrated. The use of a hacksaw is to cut metal. Small bits of it. We have seen nothing in any of these chambers which would justify such a use. . . . The sawing of a bolt, or catch—" He stopped and stared thoughtfully off into space. We were respectfully silent.

Then the Great Brain, instead of working, seemed to go completely to pieces.

Lynch flung the hacksaw blade, our first and only clue, abruptly away. He didn't even look where it went. While we stared open-mouthed he dashed to the pile of stones on which Reg and I had been working, picked out the biggest of them, came staggering back with it to where we stood and, crouching, began to bang it on the stone courtyard floor. It sounded like stone hitting stone. Nothing more. He picked it up and careened with it into the chamber we had just quitted. Again he banged it on the floor.

If it had still been fashionable to shout "Eureka" (a custom I have always questioned) we would have shouted it. The sound he now made with his pounding was entirely different. It was a hollow and resounding *boom*.

Lynch dropped his stone, rose, dusted his hands, and said: "Ha!"

He really did.

"Below us. Odd! The furniture of the mind contains these random fragments of information.

But it takes some cue, some tangible fragment of fact like the hacksaw blade Miss Wyndam so fortuitously found to turn them up."

"I am *bouleversé*, of course, with admiration," said Reg Dibble dryly. "But aren't you going a bit fast? Granting the probability, where are they and how does one get to them?"

Lynch nodded as if the point was well taken, took the flashlight from Lily's hand and returned to the corner where she had found the rusted blade.

"I do wish," I heard him mutter anticlimactically, "I had a whiskbroom!"

Since it so happened none of us had one, Lynch made do with a pocket handkerchief. Wadding it up into a kind of swab, he began to brush the fine sand inward from the edge of the chamber wall. The three of us behind him watched as attentively as if he were unveiling the ruins of Troy.

At about the twentieth swipe he hit pay dirt. Had he not been proceeding with exceeding caution, and had not the beams of three flashlights been directed on the same spot, he would have missed it. It was a tiny circle of metal less than half an inch in diameter, level with the concrete floor.

Lynch inelegantly spat upon his handkerchief and wiped at the metal. It showed the marks of filing. Without comment, Lynch went on dusting. A broom would

have done the job better. The silica dust, fine as confectioners' sugar, was heavy and tended to stay put. But in a moment, with a muttered exclamation of satisfaction, Lynch dropped his handkerchief and ran a fingernail along the floor from a point about five inches from that tiny dab of metal. He had found a crack.

To my surprise he then stood up. "I think," he said quietly, "this speaks for itself. This appears to be a trapdoor. The construction is not uncommon. I believe we will find the door swung on steel rods just off-center. When we get one of them up, I have no doubt we will find a lower chamber and a stairway leading down to it. As we have seen, the big ring-bolt by which it was lifted has first been cut off with a hacksaw, then filed smooth. Originally there was of course no intention of concealment. A trap of this kind has the virtue, first, of being spark-proof. Then, any concussion or explosion from above cannot blast it open, but rather closes it more tightly. Follow?"

"For heaven's sake, then," urged Dibble, "let's get it open!"

"If you have no objection," replied Lynch mildly, "I suggest we examine the fourth chamber: the one to which Meer first directed our attention. If we find nothing there we can then try the rest of them."

We had no objection.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

THIS TIME Lynch took the little satchel of tools he had borrowed from the *Vittoria's* engine room. We held the flashlights while he worked. In less than a minute he had again found the little circle of metal.

With his handkerchief he now quickly uncovered the identical twin of the crack he had located in the second chamber. It had become a very grimy handkerchief indeed. Then, with the awl, he scoured along it. It went quickly. In a moment, scrambling round on his knees, he had in effect drawn on the floor a sharply defined rectangle about three and a half feet wide by six feet long. Even as he marked it, the fine sand dribbled back.

"It may be difficult," said Lynch matter-of-factly, "to get a proper purchase with no lifting bolt. But if you two will bear down on the far end there I will see what I can do."

"And if you can't," said Reg Dibble distinctly, "I will do it with my teeth!"

Rattling around in the worn satchel, Lynch produced a foot-long steel rod. It looked like a star drill of three-eighths-inch diameter. But never mind. It worked. Lynch pushed it into the bolt hole, then forced it toward him till it held. Dibble and I thrust down hard on the far end of the rectangle

with one foot each. There was a second of stubborn hesitation; then the heavy concrete trap swung smoothly up and back. We crowded around and directed the beams of the flashlights down into the blackness.

Lily Wyndam screamed.

With the same instinctive movement we three men snapped our flashlights off.

"Miss Wyndam," said Lynch quietly, "I suggest you go outside. This has been a most unpleasant shock."

Lily had one hand pressed hard across her lips. She swallowed hard, then took it shakily away.

"Nonsense. During the blitz I got used to anything. Don't worry about me. I promise I'll not faint or anything. Go ahead."

We took her at her word. I don't know where she found room for them, but the girl had guts.

One at a time, the flashlights hesitantly went on again. Out of the corner of my eye I saw that Lily, this time, for all her protestations, was carefully not looking.

She was wise. Stone steps led down into the lower chamber. On them, a man was lying. His head was only a few feet below us. He was dead.

He was hideously dead. A bullet of heavy caliber had struck him squarely in the face. Under that terrible blast it had all but disintegrated. In the mess of blood and torn flesh the flashlight beams

caught the glitter of particles of glass. The sprawled figure was wearing a shabby trench coat a couple of sizes too small for it.

"Braun!" someone whispered.

Lynch went down first, carefully picking his way past that sprawled body. I followed him. After a long moment's hesitation, Reg Dibble came down after us.

We were in a second chamber of the exact form and dimensions of the one above. While Dibble and I held the torches steady, Lynch turned Braun over. The heavy bullet had gone right through his head and splattered on the stone. Except for that familiar raincoat and the fragments of the pince-nez in his face, recognition would have been difficult if not impossible.

Lynch gingerly put a hand first in one coat pocket of the dead man, then the other. From the second he drew out a large sheet of stiff paper which had been carelessly folded.

"Your guess, Robert," said Lynch, "was correct. By his lights, Meer tried to deal honestly with Sand. Not, I suspect, because of any native love of fair dealing but because it was certainly no part of his purpose that through some chance accident to himself the chests should be lost forever. I am afraid our Sea Hero will be disappointed when he learns that his admired Herr Braun deceived him."

"Unless," I offered, "he knows it already."

Lynch looked at me in the uncertain light. "Quite. It is a possibility. By the way—" He swept the beam of his electric torch slowly across the room.

There they were.

Dibble audibly sucked in his breath. I senselessly hummed a little tune.

In the far corner of the chamber was a neat pile of oblong metal boxes, five across and four high. They had a dull and silvery gleam. My guess was that they were made of Duralumin. Each was banded in both directions with thin strips of steel held by a twist of wire and a lead seal. Neither the pile nor the separate chests were as large as I had somehow expected them to be. I tried one of them. It was as heavy, as the saying is, as lead. But this was gold.

"If I had a hat on," said Dibble reverently, "I would take it off. There—it is an awesome thought—right there is five million dollars."

There was a reflective pause. Then I said:

"The immediate business before this committee is, What do we do next?"

Lily Wyndam's voice came from above. "You'd better come up. We have visitors."

She was waiting inside the upper chamber door. "Mate de Jongh and some sailors from the yacht

have just showed up over there by the break in the wall. I'm afraid they saw me."

Lynch nodded. "No matter. I expected someone would be along."

We waited for them, blinking like owls at the sun outside. The afternoon was getting on.

De Jongh and four white-uniformed sailors came across the great weed-grown courtyard of the fort.

He touched the peak of his cap in a polite salute. "Mr. Sand has sent me ashore with a message. Mr. Braun seems to have disappeared. Mr. Sand sent me ashore to tell you that we can't find him."

"We have," said Lynch. "Got a strong stomach, Mister?"

De Jongh looked startled. "Yes, sir?"

"Come along then."

Lynch took charge like any competent policeman. Since we had no camera with which to make a photographic record, he insisted that all of us, including the four alarmed and large-eyed sailors de Jongh had brought, memorize the position and the exact appearance of Braun's body. I was then sent to the upper parapet to make certain we were not observed.

On my reporting favorably, the two huskier seamen, a Pole and a Spaniard, looking very sick, grappled awkwardly with Braun and at last succeeded in lugging what was left of him into the open. Af-

ter one swift glance, Lily turned away and looked no longer.

With a lack of nerves for which I'd not have given him credit, Dibble found a big silk handkerchief he had used as a neckerchief and tied it around Braun's shattered head. It helped a little.

At a low-voiced command from de Jongh, the Pole and Spaniard took Braun's body by the heels and below the armpits and started off with it, de Jongh going ahead to reconnoiter.

"Lynch, old boy." It was Dibble. "A suggestion. We've got two more pairs of arms here." He indicated the other sailors. "Suppose we take at least one of the cases back with us. A penny gained, so to speak, is a penny earned."

Lynch gave me the impression the idea did not appeal to him, but he could think of nothing to say against it. He nodded.

The trip down the steep trail was a nightmare. But at last it was done. The heavy lifeboat in which de Jongh and his crew had come ashore was moored at the same slimy steps where we had left the speedboat. They deposited Braun's body in it under the cross seats where, if anyone was watching from the shore, it would not be seen. Dibble directed the stowing of the heavy chest, also out of sight, under the rear seat of the speedboat.

So as to keep pace with the rowed lifeboat, Dibble throttled



down until the powerful engine was just barely turning over. We let de Jongh with Braun's body reach the *Vittoria* first; then Reg tied up the faster craft under the companionway.

We had not been forgotten. The rail above was lined. The discovery of Braun's disappearance, our own prolonged stay ashore, then the long absence of de Jongh had aroused a maximum of curiosity.

"I think," said Reg Dibble in a low voice, "for the present we'd best leave that little box of ours where it is. I'm sure Viggo wouldn't care to have it advertised."

Braun's now fast stiffening body, with its hideous, blood-stained bundle of a head wrapped in Dibble's handkerchief, received the tribute of shocked and staring silence as it was carried to the deck. Lynch directed that it be taken to Braun's cabin.

For some time he had been peeling from him like the successive skins of an onion, his earlier pretense of being no more than a commonplace private investigator. He now shed the last trace of that role. He was as completely in command as if he owned the yacht and all aboard her.

He planted himself in the middle of the foredeck with his feet slightly apart and made a speech.

"As you see, a murder has been committed. I must insist that, until I have countermanded these

instructions, no person aboard this ship shall at any time permit himself to be alone in the company of anyone. You follow? *Anyone*. Captain Carey, you will arrange your schedules of duty so that never less than three men are together at all times. Those of Mr. Sand's guests who wish to go to their cabins—and this applies to Mr. Sand himself—must lock their doors and not open them to anyone—I repeat again, *anyone*—until they have called Mr. Deane or myself by telephone. Mr. Meer is ill. While all of you remain here where you are, I shall now go myself to his room and lock him in. I have made myself quite clear?"

When no one answered, he strode briskly away. No one moved, and no one spoke until he came back.

"Now, Dr. Lund, if you will come with us to Herr Braun's cabin. The rest of you will remember my instructions. They are for your own safety. I promise you they will be modified as soon as circumstances permit. I trust, very soon."

Lynch had said "us," and I obeyed. Unwillingly. I was still feeling distinctly queasy. Another sight of Braun would not make me feel better.

They had put him on the bed. When Lynch had closed and locked the cabin door after us, Dr. Lund said: "If you will tell me what it is that you require of me, I

shall of course be glad to assist. I am afraid I do not quite understand."

"Quite. I shall make myself clear, then. First, we shall require for our own records some sort of death certificate. Make the customary examination. Though I do not know in what way you can assist us in that, I am also greatly interested in the question of identification. We shall require fingerprints. But I'll attend to that myself."

Dr. Lund nodded.

"A question, Doctor," Lynch said. "After having received the injuries which you dressed last night, would Meer have been capable of further marked exertion? Say, going ashore, climbing the hill, and returning to the ship again? Follow?"

Lund thought for a moment. "I should think so. Yes. I follow you, of course. I should in fact say if Herr Meer had made that additional physical exertion, perhaps coupled with emotional excitement, that it would precisely explain the condition of shock and extreme exhaustion which you saw this morning."

"And he is now better?"

"He will soon, I should say, have recovered completely."

"Another question. The stab wound Braun received during the voyage over. How serious was it?"

Lund considered for a moment. "I have no doubt it was uncom-

fortable. But at no time was it serious. It was a surgically clean cut. I felt, since you ask, that Braun made far too much of it. I believe he was a physical coward."

Lynch nodded. "What I am getting at is this. Last night would it have been difficult or painful for him—say, to have climbed down a rope from the ship's side and made his way up the hill unaided?"

"Not in the least."

"Thank you, Doctor. Mr. Deane and I will now accompany you to your cabin. You will lock yourself in. If you will telephone when you are ready, your dinner will be brought to you there. I shall ask Mr. Sand to give instructions to that effect. Later this evening I expect that we shall call you. I am confident this case will be closed before the night is over."

Dr. Lund inclined his close-cropped head to us in a slight bow. We walked like jailers behind him to his room. We heard the key turn in the lock. We returned to the cabin in which Braun lay.

We then turned to what a lawyer would have called Braun's "effects." They were not remarkable. Under the bed and on top of the wardrobe were stowed three suitcases. One was leather, so old that it left a reddish stain on the carpet when we moved it. The other two were of a cheap black cardboard composition. Since Braun had un-

packed and distributed his entirely undistinguished possessions in the closet and bureau drawers, all three were empty. But one—the smaller of the cardboard jobs—had a false bottom.

Lynch spotted it at once. A cross-eyed customs inspector with a month's experience could have done as much. The inside depth of the suitcase was an inch and a half less than the outside measurement. That was that. Lynch had it up in no time with his fingernails.

Underneath was a briefcase. One of those thin, floppy, worn briefcases which every second German took to carrying after World War II as an adjunct to black-market operations. But the moment one picked it up, its ordinariness ended.

Inside that simple but effective disguise had been constructed a thin steel box, about twelve by sixteen inches and not much more than an inch thick. The steel was polished, and obviously of the hardest temper. No mere can opener was going to do for this. It was locked with a tiny but most effective-looking cylindrical brass lock.

It took us a solid hour to find the key.

We took the cabin apart. We stopped just short of demolition. We fingered every hem of every garment Braun possessed. We unceremoniously put the body on the floor and went over the bed with

a thoroughness which would have graduated us *summa cum laude* from a school for exterminators. We crawled on our hands and knees. We shinnied up the walls. We dissected the lamp fixtures.

When at last he found the key, the usually reserved and easily shockable Lynch swore like a London fish peddler caught fishless on Good Friday. It was on a rawhide leather cord around the dead man's neck.

The steel box in the briefcase opened readily. Inside, was a single document, typed in luxuriant and wordy German. Each page bore inked initials. At the bottom of the last sheet was an array of signatures. The largest, written with a scrawling flourish, made me whistle low and long.

Lynch had forgotten his bad temper and his weariness. He was smiling like a cat. A cat before, not after, dining.

"A will," he said. "A most important will. I will be frank with you, Bobby. This is even more than I had hoped to find."

He folded it very carefully and put it into an inside pocket: the pocket which already bulged a little with Braun's other precious document.

I stood guard while Lynch went to his cabin and returned with some white cards and portable fingerprinting outfit.

His last business with Manfred Braun was soon completed.

When Lynch had locked the door behind us and pocketed the key and we were on deck, the swift twilight of the low latitudes had passed and night had come.

"We'll have to bluff a bit, Bobby," Lynch said in a low voice. "But we should be able to carry this thing through tonight. I'm of a mind at the moment, though, to put second things first. Get the chests aboard here with no more delay. All our eggs, so to speak, will then be in the same basket." He chuckled.

"You don't have to persuade me. The thought of all that lonely, lovely money up there by itself makes me nervous. By all means, let's go and get it."

Viggo Sand had followed instructions to the letter. When we knocked at his door we had to identify ourselves explicitly before he opened it.

The big man flung himself loosely back in his chair and simply stared at us. No two ravens could ever have become so intimately associated in his mind with sheer bad news as we were.

"Mr. Dibble," Lynch said, "will no doubt have told you that we found the chests."

Sand ponderously nodded. Not even that cheered him.

"There is nothing, I am sure," said Lynch briskly, "which cannot be satisfactorily arranged. We know the exact location of the remaining chests. They are readily

accessible, and darkness has now fallen. I advise you to have Carey take the yacht at once to the quay where we lay last night and get them. If you have some dependable men who could rig a hoist at the edge of the west gun parapet, I believe that would serve best. At that point the cliff drops sheer to the water. Manhandling them down the trail is not impossible, but it would take more time. At this moment that is not a commodity in which we are very rich."

Though Sand's face did not lend itself to the expression of emotions, it had reflected as many changes in the forty seconds during which Lynch had been talking as that of an actor having a screen test. First he had been annoyed. Next he had thought Lynch was joking. When he realized he was not, it was like watching a sunrise. The blue eyes brightened and grew hard again. The limp body was energized. At Lynch's last words he leapt from his chair a happy—and a forceful—man again. In seconds he had pounced on the hand phone and was barking orders in all directions.

When he had finished and had put the receiver down he said with his back still towards us, in a tone of ice:

"I am assuming, Mr. Lynch and Mr. Deane, that this is not another trick. If it is, I give you my word once more. You will regret it. So!"

We could already hear running footsteps and subdued activity on deck. At Viggo Sand's brusque command we followed him to the bridge. It was clear that this time he would direct operations himself.

One by one the yacht's riding lights were switched off. In minutes the twin screws were gently turning over, and the *Vittoria* was under way. Neither the speed boat we had used nor the lifeboat in which de Jongh had gone ashore had been replaced in the davits. Longer lines had been strung to both, and they were towed astern in the event they might be needed.

The whole operation had been conducted with a minimum of fuss and in extraordinary quiet. The silence was so absolute I fancied I could hear the muted voices of insects in the dark woods on shore. It was interrupted by a far-off splash. No doubt made by a fish jumping.

Viggo Sand was beside us at the bridge rail. At the near prospect of completing his uneasy errand and recovering the gold he prized so much, all the slump had gone out of him. For all his girth he had again become a towering and impressive figure.

The splash came again. And, after the lapse of no more than thirty seconds, again. It was rather curious.

Captain Carey was a few paces behind us in the open door of the

wheelhouse, where he could watch the lay of the land ahead and give low-voiced orders to the steersman. At a fourth identical splash, perhaps a trifle louder than the ones which had gone before, Carey came to the bridge rail and leaned forward to peer into the night. The set of his shoulders indicated he was puzzled.

There was another splash.

"What's that?" Sand asked Carey.

"No idea, sir. Sounds like some joker's throwing stones. Big ones."

Lynch, just beside me, had been slouching on his elbows. I felt rather than saw him gradually stiffen, then stand upright. There was still another splash.

Without turning, Lynch suddenly shot out his left hand and peremptorily snapped his fingers.

We heard another splash.

"Captain! If you please. Have you some night glasses?"

Carey disappeared in the chart-room and obediently came back with some heavy binoculars which he put into Lynch's still outstretched hand. Bracing his elbows on the rail, Lynch began quickly to focus them on a point straight ahead of us and upward.

The splashes, at what seemed to be mathematically fixed intervals, were now quite loud.

Lynch's shoulders began to shake so that the binoculars jiggled. I stared at him. He was laughing.

The laughter burst from him in a loud cackle. He handed the glasses to Sand.

"Vogel! Poor Gros Oiseau. Faithful to the last. There, Mr. Sand, goes glimmering your ruddy gold!"

Sand savagely snatched the binoculars, focused them, then slammed them into the nearest hands, which happened to be mine, and darted inside.

Now I knew where to look, I could see with unaided eyes what had caused Lynch's raucous merriment. At the very edge of the cliff was the indeterminate shape of a man. I could see him bend down, rear up to an exaggerated height, then move with a violent, jerking movement. And there was another splash.

All was now plain, of course. The self-appointed guardian of the fortress and of the Nazi retirement fund, that poor innocent whom the officers of the *U-976* had shot and apparently left behind for dead, had evidently watched us from close concealment during the afternoon. He had seen us discover the treasure trove which was the fixation of his broken mind. He had seen us cart away one box of it and a dead man's body. Now, with the sheltering night to give him courage, he was hiding it in a still safer place—at the bottom of the sea—to prevent strangers laying profane hands on any of the rest.

I wondered if Gros Oiseau might also have interrupted the lonely investigations of Manfred Braun.

I was shouldered aside by Viggo Sand so violently I almost fell. He was carrying a heavy rifle he had snatched from a rack in the chart room. He braced his massive legs and took careful aim.

Lynch saw what he was doing, leapt, and struck the barrel up. The shot reverberated deafeningly and harmlessly among the hills. There was another splash.

"You fool!" Lynch spat. "If you had hit him it would have been murder. I'd have seen to it you'd have hanged for it!"

Sand was shaking with rage and frustration. For a second I thought he was going to pick Lynch up and break him in half. But Viggo Sand was an essentially sensible man. With a great effort he controlled himself.

"Carey," he growled, "What is the depth of the water at that point?"

The Captain seemed to be more tense with disappointment than Sand himself. He was gripping the rail as if he might fall without the support it gave him. He had to wet his lips and swallow before he answered.

"I was only now checking on the chart, sir. The cliff at the far end there goes right down. The depth is marked at fifty fathoms."

"Three hundred feet," Lynch

said reflectively. "Rather below the possible working level for both helmet and aqualung divers. They will have to be recovered, if at all, by grappling."

"Grappling?" Sand echoed.

There was another splash. He winced.

"I have no grappling equipment! That is an engineering project. It might take days. Weeks! I have no time." He waved his arms.

"It would be impossible to avoid detection!"

Splash.

He groaned. "Are we just going to stand here and let that maniac throw that gold away?"

Splash.

Lynch spoke with the air of a patient man who had now lost all patience.

"Of course we are! What else do you suggest? Might I also inquire, sir, for what reason you are keeping the yacht on its present course? There's no further purpose to be served by going in. If this Vogel hasn't already come to the end of his nineteen chests, he will have done long before anyone can reach him. Evidently he carried them all to the parapet before he threw the first one down."

"You are right," Sand muttered.

He gestured toward Carey. The Captain went into the wheelhouse. There was the remote clang of the engine-room telegraph, and the *Vittoria* began slowly to back water.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

THE performance of the small hours of the morning was repeated. The *Vittoria* returned to the same place of anchorage; the no doubt bewildered but still obedient crew took down the blackout canvases they had fixed in place less than half an hour before; her riding lights went on. Silence and a delusive peace enveloped her.

We walked with Sand to his suite, where he locked and bolted himself in. I then accompanied Lynch on an inspection of the ship.

For all alike Lynch had the same message: to stay where they were; under no circumstances to open their doors to anyone; and at precisely eleven o'clock to make their way to the lounge on the deck below. He promised that at that hour both corridors and the stairway would be closely guarded by members of the crew.

In a whisper I had myself demurred at that unseemly hour.

Lynch smirked. "You know my methods," Bobby," he quoted. "In questioning a group like this, surprise is of the first importance. Unfortunately so much time has elapsed we can no longer hope for that. Second best is to create suspense. Let 'em stew a bit. Tonight the second best will have to do. I think it will do nicely."

He had put off Meer's cabin until last. When we reached it he

took the key out of his pocket, unlocked the door, and unceremoniously marched in.

Siegfried Meer was sitting on the edge of his rumpled bed in his dark blue robe, and holding his tousled head in his hands. He looked up dully when we came in, but said nothing.

Lynch sat down, lit a cigarette, and made himself airily at home. He spoke in the unnecessarily loud voice old-fashioned people used to reserve for their inferiors.

"Well, young man, and how do you feel now?"

"Better. Only now it is my head which aches." Meer touched the designated part cautiously. "And my stomach which feels a little sick."

"Overdid a bit last night, huh?"

Meer started to shake his head, then thought better of it. "I did not think so." He made a feeble attempt to flex his biceps. "I am very strong. But all this day I feel quite horrible."

"Pity," said Lynch unpityingly. "But you understand what I am saying to you? Memory's quite in order?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Good. Tell us about Vogel. All about him, mind."

Meer stared in sullen silence. "Nein!"

"Ah," said Lynch, "but you will! I give you my word you will. And quickly. Shall I tell you why? At the moment you are under sus-

picion for murder. That murder was committed on Haitian soil. If you don't cooperate with me fully I shall turn you over to the Haitian authorities. You might find the local jails unpleasant."

"Murder? I do not know what it is you mean."

Lynch, with a queer, grim smile on his thin lips, looked at him long and hard.

"Sure? Don't be ingenuous with me, Lieutenant. Braun was shot through the face last night. In the lower chamber of Portal Four. It interrupted him in a private effort to secure the treasure for himself. Your friend Vogel, by the way, has thrown your precious chests into the sea."

But for a suspicion that I was being deluded, I might have felt sorry for the man. In theory, of course, this was the first the sick man, locked in his cabin, had heard of what had happened. If that were true, he must have felt like one who had just had five tons of buckwheat coal dumped on him.

There was a long silence while Meer stared at the floor. At last he looked up.

"What is it that you want of me?"

Lynch was brisk—and loud. "First, your name and rank. Braun's, I believe I know."

"Oberleutnant Horst Haller. Unterseeboot 976. Commander Hellmuth."



"Very good. Now Vogel. The date, by the way?"

"April 29, 1945." The words came slowly and with hesitation, but they did not stop. "We surfaced"—he vaguely pointed—"there. Inside the slip, it was. Most beautiful navigation. It was ten o'clock at night, and very dark. Six men with Commander Hellmuth and myself were chosen. This Vogel—Karl Vogel, his name is—with the rating of quartermaster was chosen their leader because he was very strong. And a mechanic to make the—"

"Yes, yes. Carry on."

"At three hours we are finished. We start down the path which you have seen is there. I see that Vogel is not with us. I go back. I see he has a paper in his hand and with a pencil on it is drawing. Such a thing is *Verboten*. I shot him with my revolver. In the head. It is my duty. I pull his body into the bushes. He is very heavy. Commander Hellmuth is very severe that I have fired a shot. I do not know until last night I had not killed him. It was a mistake."

I had heard German prisoners during the war when, under interrogation, they had at last decided to speak up. Their recitals had been exactly like Meer's—expressionless, exact, devoid of any hint of emotion.

There was a silence. Lynch stood up.

"Excellent. I shall require more

of you later. Much more. You will come to the lounge at eleven o'clock. Tonight. Be punctual. Follow?"

At 10:55 P.M. Lynch's melodramatic order was carried out. The maindeck corridors and stairway were thronged with white-garbed sailors. They looked puzzled and frightened. Then, one by one, the cabin doors opened, and Viggo Sand and his disastrous selection of shipmates paraded to the brightly lighted lounge.

Nothing Lynch did was ever impromptu, however swift his decision might seem to be. Therefore I was puzzled by the place he chose to sit—the cushioned, enveloping corner of a big divan, near an end table on which stood a French hand phone. His slight frame all but disappeared in the divan, so that the uneasy company ranged around the room could see hardly more of him than his small, black-shod feet and his head. But they would have no difficulty at all in hearing his sharp, commanding voice—that voice which for someone, I was quite sure, would be the voice of doom before the night was over.

By a trick of coming to a full stop, letting the silence become absolute, then snapping out a name in a brisk bark, he made his victims jump. It is in no sense an advantage to begin a conversation with a nervous start.

"Mr. Sand!"

"Yes?" Sand had brought his baton to a rhythmical jerk.

"In New York Mr. Deane and I made an understanding with you. The basis of that understanding was that on this voyage we would do our utmost to protect your interests. You must know that the fulfillment of that agreement still remains our first consideration."

"So-o-o-o?"

The single word was so heavy with sarcasm it was a wonder it didn't go through the floor.

"As of this moment, however," Lynch continued, "Your interest is quite clear. It is to bring this affair with all its ramifications into the open. Thus leave your reputation without stain. I believe we can go further. If you will follow my guidance I think you can gain credit in quarters which in the future you might find useful. In London. In Washington. Perhaps at Bonn. The recovery of the gold, except by the most public and official means, you now recognize has become impossible."

Again, grudgingly, Viggo Sand inclined his head.

"But I am sure," Lynch went on with studied irony, "to a gentleman in your situation that is of little consequence. Whatever losses you may have suffered on this venture will be deductible from income tax. May I use the telephone?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said," Lynch enunciated clearly, "may I use the telephone? The communications of the *Vittoria* are famous. I should like to speak with Port au Prince. Possibly London. It is one reason why I have kept you waiting. I assure you it is relevant."

Lynch took the French phone at his elbow off its cradle and extended it.

"If you will be good enough to instruct the radio operator."

Sand rose, gurgled into it for a moment in what I took to be one of the Scandinavian languages, and handed it back to Lynch.

"Get me the British Legation in Port au Prince, please. I should like to speak to the code clerk. Tell them it is Bertram Lynch here."

Lynch put the phone some inches from his ear and leaned comfortably back and stared at the ceiling as if he were completely alone and had all the time on earth.

At the words "British Legation" Viggo Sand had suddenly stiffened and blown out his breath in an almost inaudible *pouf*. Then he crossed one big well tailored leg over the other and relaxed more completely than I had ever seen him. With the baton between a thumb and forefinger he began to tap a little tune with it on the edge of a patent leather pump.

The connection came through surprisingly fast. Lynch sat forward.

"Are you there? Bertram Lynch here. . . . Captain Heraux of the Haitain Gendarmerie sent you some messages for forwarding to London. Replies in yet? . . . Got 'em decoded? . . . Good. Read them to me, please. . . . What? . . . Nonsense! No question of security's involved. . . . Dammit, man, of course I'm who I say I am! Who should know better? . . . Right. . . . As well to be cautious. An occupational disease . . ."

All eyes were on him. His end of the conversation now came to us broken by long silences. Occasionally, he nodded.

"Sir Charles? . . . Lynch here. Sorry to turn you out. But since it falls in your area I fancied you'd like to know. Two metric tons of gold in coins and ingots are at the bottom of the sea off the Mole St. Nicolas. Close inshore and location definitely known. The property formerly of the German National Socialist Government—What? . . . Oh, yes, I'm quite well, thank you. . . . Of course it's not the heat! . . . It's rather a long story—I know, but unfortunately I am very busy. . . . I'll send a full report tonight to London through the Legation. . . . Have a look at it. Thought it would be less embarrassing to you if you had advance information. Not at all. Oh, quite. . . . I hope so."

And Lynch put the receiver down.

By that time-saving device he had, of course, told all who overheard him a great deal. The quality of uneasiness which pervaded the lounge had, I thought, materially changed. It was now tinged with awe. And apprehension.

Lynch maddeningly took his time. He lit a cigarette. He blew out the match and carefully deposited it in an ash tray by the phone. He inhaled and let the smoke trickle slowly out of his mouth and nose. At last, when I, for one, was ready to cuff him, he consented to speak.

"This voyage," he said, "as you all must realize, began with a false premise. With the foolish belief that a large sum in gold which a government already *in extremis* managed to spirit out of Germany under the noses of the victors could be privately recovered. Then returned to the uses of the now illegal National Socialist party. With the deduction of a handsome profit for our host. That fond belief has now been dissipated.

Something struck me. In theory, by no means everyone in that room knew what had taken place ashore. By that rule, then, much of what Lynch was saying should be the purest gobbledygook—and at least some faces should have shown it.

Not one did. Every face had been set in so cautious and self-preservative a mold that Lynch could have announced the Dural-

umin chests had turned out to be full of doughnuts and no one would have shown either approval or regret.

Whichever might be Lynch's special nut would be hard to crack.

"Our concern here, then," Lynch recommenced abruptly, "is only with the crimes which have been committed. With the discovery of their perpetrator. Let me briefly recapitulate.

"In the early evening of June 16th during stormy weather, an experienced seaman of this vessel, one Friedrich Brunke, disappeared. That single fact is all we know. The inference is he was thrown overboard.

Lynch drew busily on his cigarette to make sure it did not go out again. Every pair of eyes in the room watched him as attentively as if he were performing some rare ceremony.

"Later during that same night Manfred Braun in Cabin B was awakened to find someone ransacking his cabin. He grappled with the intruder and was stabbed"—Lynch touched the spot on his own body—"in the left shoulder. I have good reason to believe that the stabber's purpose in entering Braun's cabin was not achieved. I say that because a quite cursory search which Mr. Deane and I made of the same room this evening brought to light a most important and revealing

document." He pressed his hand to the right side of his jacket.

"Which I have here.

"But these are details. Perhaps later the one responsible for those two crimes will be so good as to enlighten me."

I was beginning to feel distinctly queer. I am sure the rest were, too. One of us was a multiple killer. Perhaps the person sitting just beside me. Or across the room.

Lynch's cigarette was spent. He studied it regretfully, then twisted the butt out in the ash tray.

"The next incident was the assault on the watchman Wilhelm Heitzig in Mr. Sand's office. An assault which Dr. Lund believed might be fatal, a tragedy which he was able to avert. I shall pass over that quickly. There were—ah—certain fortuitous circumstances with which I will not trouble you."

(And a good thing, too!)

"Which brings us to last night. Mr. Sand, you have brought the chart with you as I asked?"

Sand produced from the inner confines of his sumptuous mess jacket a many times folded sheet of stiff white paper which I correctly assumed to be the false plan of the Mole St. Nicolas and the fortress.

"Herr Meer!"

The Sea-Hero jerked his head up and stiffened his shoulders.

"I may as well call you that. Have you ever seen this?" He held it out.

Meer had to rise and come over and get it. He took the chart and began to study it. In a moment his brow furrowed. Lynch was studying him intently.

At last Meer looked up. "I do not understand? This is a map of the Mole. The fort. And it is not. It is a—a"—he groped for a word—"a cartoon!"

Lynch reached out and took it. "Quite. Yet it is the one in the sealed envelope which was left in Mr. Sand's keeping. Under the terms of your agreement. The substitution, we know, was effected by Braun. Your Manfred Braun, as he chose to call himself. Lieutenant Haller, had from the beginning but one purpose. To betray you."

Meer, standing stiffly at attention, flushed darkly through his sunburn.

"It is a lie!"

"And it will be of interest," Lynch went on as if he had not spoken, "to learn at precisely what point you discovered it. Please sit down."

"I would now remind you of the physical situation of the yacht as it was when the final crime occurred. Under Herr Meer's guidance Captain Carey had moored the *Vittoria* in the slip below the fortress. The front companion-way had been let down. Herr Meer had expressed a desire to Mr. Sand to go ashore alone to reconnoiter. Mr. Sand sent Mr.

Dibble to follow him. As a check on Meer's actions. A guard was then set so that no one else might leave the ship.

"It is no reflection on the sailor Gonçalves that that guard was ineffective. As Mr. Deane and myself soon proved. The *Vittoria* was moored immediately alongside the old concrete quay. The early part of the night, before the moon rose, was very dark. At intervals along her rail the yacht carries round life preservers to each of which is attached a considerable length of thin but stout Manila rope. One had only to drop over the side a doubled length of that rope to provide a handhold, and it was an easy matter—well within the powers of anyone in this room—to reach the quay.

"Mr. Deane and I did just that. We found that a third person had preceded us. Someone who later fired a shot which struck within inches of Meer's head.

"Meer, just previously to that, had been violently—and I should say quite justifiably—assaulted by a marooned and half-mad seaman of the *U-976* who recognized him as the officer who had attempted to kill him on the night when the chests were hidden." Lynch's bright, birdlike gray eyes swept all our faces.

"Follow?"

Some at least of those in the room must have found it difficult. But no one spoke.

Lynch nodded approvingly and went on.

"Mr. Dibble, Meer, Deane, myself, and the unknown then returned to the yacht.

"Something then occurred in the fort which I think it is not hard to reconstruct. Vogel had seen the man who had tried to kill him and three strangers with their attention fixed on the door behind which the chests lay. By a labored process of his poor intelligence, with the slyness which so often characterizes the mentally defective, I believe Vogel decided it would throw those who were now seemingly intent on seizing his treasure off the scent if he moved his stones to the door of another chamber, adjoining, and empty. Since Vogel is a creature of immense strength, the task probably took him no more than half an hour. That pitiable and useless gesture of this one faithful man facilitated what followed."

Lynch was speaking swiftly, with the precision of a man dictating a report. But even with the advantage at least one of us did not possess, that of knowing my innocence, I was growing uncomfortable. The lounge seemed to be getting warmer.

"I would again remind you of the physical situation," Lynch went on. "Within an hour after our return to the yacht, the waning moon had again sunk below the mountains. There was, there-

fore, a space of at least three hours of total darkness before, shortly before dawn, Captain Carey took the *Vittoria* out into open water.

"During those three hours anyone—I repeat, *anyone*—aboard this vessel could have easily made his way ashore. We know that Manfred Braun did so.

"In the interval, Meer was peremptorily summoned to Braun's cabin. There he was given a dressing down for having made so little progress and for letting himself be observed while making it. As a mindless adherent of his party, Meer accepted it. But he did not like it. However, Meer concluded the interview by addressing Braun as 'mein Führer.'"

Meer was glaring at Lynch with a cold, compressed hatred—a hatred diluted, in spite of himself, with amazement.

At the last two words, as quickly as my glance could travel, I tried to survey the expressions they produced. Sand's forehead was furrowed in a thoughtful frown. But, in so far as I could tell, only Lily Wyndam and Reg Dibble showed genuine astonishment.

Lynch's attitude—or pose—was one of being so completely sure of himself that he had little interest in the reaction he produced. He rattled swiftly on.

"Meer had two items of tangible evidence showing that he did indeed know where the chests were

hidden and how to reach them: a key and a ring lift bolt which had been threaded to fit a particular socket. Braun demanded that he hand those over as an earnest of his continued good intentions. Meer did so, but with bad grace.

"Though his mind works slowly, his suspicions were aroused. Braun, remember, already had in his possession the chart and written instructions which would lead him without difficulty to the well contrived but readily accessible place where the gold was cached. It was Braun's intention to make sure of it. When the whereabouts of the chests was verified, Meer would no longer be needed. Braun, I have no shadow of doubt, intended to kill him. This expedition would then ostensibly end in failure. In good time Braun would return to Haiti, or manage to remain here, and make the gold his own.

"Braun underestimated Herr Meer. Oberleutnant Haller, to use his correct name and title, secretly kept watch on Braun's movements. His suspicions were soon justified. Taking the key, the plan and the lift bolt, Braun climbed over the rail and let himself down to the quay. The tide was out, and there was no difficulty whatever in reaching it. To be quite just, Meer's motive was not pure greed. He had nourished the dream that that great sum was to be used for the reconstitution of the Nazi

party. He sincerely believed it was his duty not to allow it to be diverted for any private end. He followed Braun. He waited until the traitor in whom he had believed had lifted the concealed trap and descended to the lower chamber. At some sound above him Braun looked up. Meer shot him in the face."

Meer leapt to his feet, his fists clenched and flailing helplessly at his sides.

"I tell you it iss all lies! I have not done this!" Meer was shouting at the top of his lungs.

Lynch stared at him as if he were an unattractive exhibit on the slide of a microscope.

"Quite. *Sit down!*"

Because all his life he had been accustomed to obeying, Meer sat down.

"We will now consider," Lynch suavely went on, "the case of Dr. Lund."

Startled, the Norwegian doctor jerked his head around from contemplation of his employer.

"Yes?"

"You were seen on deck this morning by Miss Wyndam between three and four o'clock. That is correct?"

"I did not see Miss Wyndam, but yes, that is correct. I am a bad sleeper. The night was warm, and I became restless in my cabin."

"You are a poor man." Lynch was no longer asking questions. He was making statements.

"A physician, unless he has special reasons for it, does not ordinarily accept a post as a ship's doctor unless he is in need. As a Norwegian whose country was invaded, you have good reason to hate any survivors of the Nazi party. You are at an age when it is difficult to start afresh. To recover that vast deposit of gold for yourself would not only make you rich. There would be a kind of rough justice in it. It would repay, at least by proxy, some of the hurt your country had suffered during the war. Also as a physician, the fact of death, even of violent death, has little meaning for you. You had the means and the opportunity to follow Braun ashore. To make away with him."

Dr. Lund was smiling a distant smile. I may say I have never seen one more distant.

"Your logic, Mr. Lynch, is persuasive. It is true. I could have."

"Quite. Thank you for that admission. Mr. Dibble?"

Reg's handsome mouth twisted uneasily.

"My turn?" He took out an elaborately figured silk handkerchief and gently patted his forehead. He was justified. The lounge was getting warmer, not only figuratively but literally. My body tickled with perspiration.

"You, Mr. Dibble, in one particular, closely resemble Mr. Sand. You love money. You will do almost anything to get it."

"Almost."

"In the crucial hours this morning you had a unique advantage. You alone knew with fairly close approximation where the chests were hidden. You had twice followed the difficult trail to the fortress. So a third and a fourth journey over it presented, in your case alone, no hazards. You knew all of the circumstances connected with this venture. You possess a revolver of heavy caliber which I can attest was in excellent working order. Your respect for the somewhat absurd carnival of human life is severely limited. For your victim you had none at all."

Dibble beat him to it: "Quite!"

Lynch was momentarily disconcerted. "Er—yes."

Lily Wyndam was sitting next to me. I heard her say under her breath: "Hey, what about me?"

"Mr. Souhani!" Lynch snapped.

The everlasting smiling dark plain man in the dark plain suit did not vary his expression.

"Yes?"

"Precisely what has been your role in this affair?"

Souhani separated his folded hands in a slight and deprecating gesture.

"I am—I was—an old friend of Herr Braun's," he said levelly. "Or maybe I should have said, an associate. We have worked closely together at home. It was our purpose to work together in the future. I came with him to give



whatever assistance I could render."

"You are not a German?"

Souhani hesitated a fraction of a second, then saw he couldn't get away with it.

"No," he conceded.

"But," Lynch persisted, "you are of the same political persuasion?"

Souhani gravely nodded a single nod. "Say that in our broad aims we were in entire accord."

Lynch scarcely let him finish. He was after him like the traditional terrier after a rat.

"You agree then," he said rapidly, "with the generally prevailing opinion that the late Josef Stalin was a butcher and a tyrant?"

It was primitive, but it worked.

Souhani's well disciplined face lost its habitual control. His eyes flickered. His lips parted to speak, but no words came.

"Thank you!" said Lynch. "Manfred Braun, as we will call him, has been living in the Eastern Zone. We know that, for we have his papers. That explains why the Western occupying powers have never found him. You, Mr. Souhani, are a Soviet official. Though not, I believe, a Russian. It was, of course, only with the assistance of the Eastern Zone authorities and with the understanding that you would accompany him, that your 'associate' was given permission to cross the frontier and come on this venture. It was

never your plan that the gold hoard should be used for its originally intended purpose. I suspect the understanding was, in fact, that Meer's 'Führer,' in exchange for so handsome a payment, would be given appropriate powers and honors under the Communist regime."

"What?" Meer was shouting again.

"Be quiet," Lynch ordered. "As a servant of the Cominform, however, Mr. Souhani—I perceive you do not deny it—you of course had no intention of carrying out that promise. After your two glibble Germans had led you to the chests you had no further use for them. They were in your way. You put the more troublesome of the two out of your way last night."

"You would have to prove that, Mr. Lynch," Souhani said steadily. At the moment his strong, composed figure, in which every muscle was now rigid, made him look a very dangerous man indeed.

"I believe, though, Mr. Souhani, that from the first you were confronted with a difficulty. This voyage originated in Bremen, in the British Zone of the German Federal Republic. It was Mr. Sand's intention to return to the same port. Obviously that would not suit your purposes. Neither the Occupation authorities nor the Bonn government are so lax that

it would be possible to transport two tons of gold safely behind the Iron Curtain. It was incumbent on you to make some other arrangement. Of course, it did not take much more than a simple bribe to convince Captain Carey to bypass Bremen on the return trip—in favor of some East German port.

“Captain Carey!”

The renegade Irishman, his big hands clamped on his knees, had been listening with such uneasy concentration that the sudden pronouncement of his name made him audibly grunt.

Lynch held out his hand. “I asked you to bring some handcuffs with you. I shall need them in a moment. May I have them?”

As grimly and unwillingly—but as promptly—as he always obeyed Lynch, Carey fished in a hip pocket, brought out a pair of very businesslike linked steel bracelets and strode across the lounge.

Lynch got up and began to pace nervously around the room, the handcuffs dangling from his left hand. It was a full minute before he began to speak again. Even his usually chill countenance had begun lightly to bead with perspiration.

There was no doubt about it. The lounge was sweltering-hot. It couldn't be just nerves. Suddenly, I knew. The air conditioning had been shut off. I said nothing.

“In the reconstructions I have

attempted thus far,” Lynch began briskly, “I have gone upon the assumption that the crimes which have been committed have had gain as their sole motive. When so large a sum as five million dollars is involved, that seems a natural assumption. I do not believe it is the correct one. Let us see if there is some other pattern.

“Aboard the *Vittoria* a host of nationalities is represented. Yet every victim—the seaman, the night watchman, Braun—has been a German. Perhaps this is a coincidence. It may not be. If it is not, then our attention should be directed at someone who has some personal reason to hate the people of that race. A hatred which has become paranoid in its intensity.

“It can be argued, I think, that the motive of these crimes may have been the very reverse of greed. From the commission of the first, Mr. Sand was very seriously disturbed. He is a man of immense wealth. It was entirely in the realm of possibility—and the murderer, if he is as acute as I believe him to be, must have known it—it was entirely possible, I say, that Mr. Sand might even then have become so badly frightened that he would have dropped the whole affair.

Lynch, in his nervous pacing about the room, was hesitating slightly before each occupied chair, scrutinizing its occupant in a detached, yet penetrating way: Sou-

hani—Carey—Sand—Dibble . . .

“From that may we argue that the motive of these crimes was not gain, but, on the contrary, that its base was wholly emotional? An attempt—it has proven a successful attempt—to defeat a vicious political purpose which would have been served dangerously well had those chests of gold reached their destination.”

Lynch, in his jerky perambulation, had now stopped in front of Dr. Lund.

The air conditioning was certainly deader than a doornail. We all were now frankly sweating. Lund seemed rather cooler than the rest of us.

“Dr. Lund,” said Lynch conversationally, “for the sake of our discussion, will you allow me to fit you to that role?”

“Of course.”

“Thank you. Let us see then. In answer to my cable I learned from London tonight that you were once at the head of your profession. The chief, I am informed, of Oslo’s largest hospital? That, I take it, is a salaried position?”

“Of course, Mr. Lynch.”

Lynch nodded. “A comfortable enough income, no doubt. But producing nothing like the rewards a surgeon of your skill could have earned in private practice. The chief motivation of your life, then, is not one of gain.”

Dr. Lund smilingly shook his head. “I do not think so. I trust

not. But why do you say my ‘skill’?”

“At the time of Heitzig’s injury I asked you, Doctor, if you would trepan, and you said that you would do so if you found it necessary. That operation, which involves the excision of a circular portion of the skull itself, is one of great difficulty. No ordinary surgeon would dream of attempting it. Especially aboard ship without skilled assistance. Yet you did quite casually consider it. Later, I believe you actually accomplished it. You are a doctor. I do not think we have to argue that you do not enjoy the thought of needless suffering.”

“Again I thank you.” Dr. Lund’s smile was growing stiffer. The oppressive heat was making his forehead shine.

“You are making this shoe fit uncomfortably tight. I only comfort myself that you have made it fit all of us.”

“Forgive me,” Lynch said. “In recent years you have dropped out of sight. During the war you suffered exceedingly? You have good reason to hate Nazi Germans?”

Lund was fast losing his polite smile. He was frankly sweating. “Your questions, Mr. Lynch, rather overwhelm me. May I say that no doubt many others suffered just as much as I did. As to hating the Nazis, who does not? If you will be so good, Mr. Lynch, will you now play this distressing

game with some other member of our company?"

Dr. Lund straightened out one leg to grope in a trousers pocket for a handkerchief. Not finding it, he reached around to the hip pocket of his habitual dark suit and drew one out.

Lynch was watching Lund's commonplace movements with the sharpness of an eagle.

Suddenly, with the snakelike speed of which only Lynch is capable, his hand shot out and seized Lund's half-closed fist. He spoke so softly I could scarcely hear him.

"I am afraid, Doctor, no one else would do. May I have your handkerchief?"

Lund lost his temper. "I grow tired of this. You may not!"

He tried to pull his captured hand away. He might as well have tried to extricate it from an iron vise. Lynch pulled it slowly toward him. Lund's sleeve slid up.

Lily Wyndam cried out and pointed.

"Bobby! Mr. Lynch! Look! Look!"

For a moment I did not see it. Then, I did. Inside Lund's forearm were dimly tattooed five blue numbers: the brand mark of the victims of the Nazi concentration camps.

Lynch again moved so rapidly his movements seemed to blur. There was a double click, and Dr. Lund was securely manacled.

Lynch forced open the fingers which held the handkerchief.

"Thank you, Doctor," he said with heavy irony. "This is fortuitous, of course. But it was something I needed badly."

Half turning so that the rest of the room could see, he held in the palm of one hand the handkerchief he had taken from Lund. It was filthy, wadded, stained and heavy with fine, pale sand.

With his other hand Lynch reached into a pocket of his coat and produced its twin, his own handkerchief which he had used to wipe clear the cracks which had revealed the concrete trap in the fourth chamber.

"All that distinguishes these two, Doctor," said Lynch calmly, "is that I used mine to wipe the crack in the trapdoor clear. You used yours to cover it." He weighed the wadded rag in his left hand.

"This is the kind of tangible evidence that juries like. Follow?"

Lund had relaxed. He was leaning back in his chair with his manacled, white surgeon's hands in his lap, palms up.

"One question, Mr. Lynch," he said quietly. "Who was Manfred Braun?"

Lynch eyed him reflectively. "It would make a great difference to you, Doctor?"

"Yes."

"I believe he was Martin Bormann." A current ran through the room, like an electric shock.

"You have proof?"

"I have here in my pocket," said Lynch gravely, "what I am reasonably certain is one of the three valid copies of Adolf Hitler's will. We found it in Braun's cabin. The will written in the bunker beneath the Berlin Reich Chancellery in the last days of April, 1945. The will which 'appoints my most faithful Party comrade, Martin Bormann,' executor and elects him Party Chancellor. The same Martin Bormann who was known as the 'brown eminence,' the sedulous private secretary who toward the end gathered all power in Germany into his almost unknown hands. The Bormann who was a witness to Hitler's wedding to Eva Braun—whose name, I think, he borrowed. The same Bormann who alone among the top Nazis has always avoided discovery or capture. I concede that absolute proof may not be easy. Photographs of Bormann are rare. And we cannot photograph him now."

Dr. Lund was smiling an odd, delighted smile. "Thank you! Thank you! You may now do with me what you wish."

He stood up.

I rose, too. Without a word to any of the others, Lynch and I walked with him, one on one side and one on the other, across the lounge, up the stairs, and to his cabin.

In his room Lund threw him-

self wearily into the velvet-covered armchair.

"Is there anything else you want of me?" he asked.

"In these affairs one has a certain curiosity."

"Ask your questions, then. I have done my work."

"The sailor Brunke?"

Lund tiredly nodded. "You were right. He saw me in Braun's cabin from the deck outside. Through the window. He came around to the door to demand what I was doing. I engaged him in talk and walked out onto the deck with him again." Lund's mouth twisted, and his eyes gleamed oddly.

"There is a useful instrument in every surgeon's kit. A short-handled hammer with one rounded and one flat end. You came close to identifying it, Mr. Lynch, when you examined Heitzig. It is used in bone work. I struck Brunke with it. As he fell I caught him by the knees and lifted him. We were close to the railing. It was a regrettable necessity."

Lynch nodded. "We know the rest, I think. You injected a heavy dose of morphia in Meer last night with the assurance it would make him sleep. You repeated it this morning. You followed Braun. May I inquire why you returned the key to Meer's cabin?"

The pale slight man in the chair inclined the upper part of his body in a kind of bow.

"Because, sir, I believed you were an honest man. I had no objection to the gold chests being discovered if they did not fall into improper hands." Dr. Lund actually laughed, a queer, dry and rattling laugh. "I am afraid it did not occur to me that I might be discovered, too. How was I?"

Lynch smiled. "It appears, Dr. Lund, that we also must confide in you. When you came on the watchman Heitzig in Sand's office he was, I assume, still unconscious. Deane here—I may say, most efficiently—had struck him with what citizens of the London underworld call a 'cosh.' The blow, though not serious, had left a perceptible swelling. I myself found it without difficulty when I examined him that morning. But you, a physician, did not report it. You did not mention it. By that singular omission, you invited my suspicion.

"Follow? The shot you fired at Meer at the fortress I then regarded as conclusive that no one else would be willing to risk by Meer's death the very likely chance the knowledge of the whereabouts of the chests might die with him. That shot convinced me gain was not the motive. Only Deane, Sand, and I guessed Braun had Meer's chart."

Lund was examining his surgeon's—and killer's—hands lovingly back and forth in the confines of the handcuffs.

"A last word, gentlemen," he said quietly, "in my defense. Though I do not particularly care. During the Nazi occupation of my country my wife died of hunger and neglect. My son was killed in the resistance. I myself, as you have discovered, spent three years in Buchenwald. . . . If you wonder how I first learned of this—of this adventure, it is because I have not forgotten. In Europe there are many like me. We do not believe, you see, that the Teutonic dragon has been killed. We fear it no less in its new dress of Communism. We who remember keep in touch. We spy on them—ceaselessly. . . . I may say, in justice, our numbers include many Germans. A story, a suspicious though a garbled story, reached me. . . . It chanced I was an acquaintance of my predecessor on this yacht. I removed him. With arsenic. A carefully measured dose, I assure you. I was thus able to secure this post."

"Quite," said Lynch.

Dr. Lund saw that Lynch was finished. He stood up.

"I am going to lock you in," Lynch said quietly. "I will get in touch with Captain Heraux of the Haitian Gendarmerie by telephone. I imagine he will be here shortly." He gestured toward the handcuffs.

"Those do not inconvenience you too much? You have drugs

here in your stateroom? Sleeping pills, perhaps?"

Lund manipulated his long white fingers. He was smiling.

"I am sure I shall be quite comfortable."

We left him. Lynch carefully locked the door and pocketed the key.

From the lack of any sounds below we concluded the others had scattered to their cabins. We went out on the afterdeck.

"Was it accident or design," I asked, "that the air conditioning conked out?"

Lynch chuckled. "Design. I left instructions with the Engineer. But I'd no idea, of course, the result would be so happy. I meant merely to stir 'em up. Make 'em more uncomfortable."

A dim figure at the stern rail turned out to be Lily.

"Nice going, lads," she greeted us almost respectfully. "I rather liked the little man. He seemed so meek."

"The strong," observed Lynch sententiously, "must learn how dangerous the meek can be."

"The terrible meek," Lily quoted.

A white-garbed sailor crossed the deck to us and saluted.

"I've been looking for you, sir," he said to Lynch. "Mr. Dibble asked me to give you this." He held out an envelope.

"Thank you." Lynch disinter-

estedly put it in his pocket and the sailor went away.

"A complex affair, this," Lynch began. Then he stopped.

"What's that?"

What he heard was the sharp starting explosion of a powerful motor, which in an instant lapsed into a low humming. It was not far off. In a second I knew what it was. Someone had started up the sleek speed boat in which Reg Dibble had taken us ashore what seemed an eternity ago.

In another minute the boat streaked past below us, heading west, its wake leaving a trail of phosphorescence in the midnight sea. We turned like three marionettes on pivots to watch it go.

"Now what," muttered Lynch, "is that?" Suddenly he slapped his pocket. "Dibble!"

Lily and I crowded over him when he went into the lighted passageway.

The note the sailor had brought him was scrawled in a handsome hand. It was brief:

Dear Old Boy,

I was so hurt when you said I cared for money, I have decided to run away. My love to Viggo.

R. D.

We looked at one another. It was naughty of us, but I am afraid all of us were smiling.

"The chest we lugged down yesterday!" said Lily.

"One hundred and thirty-five thousand, four hundred and seventy-five dollars," I murmured more exactly. I had done my homework.

We had gone out on deck again and stood looking off in the direction in which the speed boat had vanished.

"Quite," said Lynch. "He will make for Cuba. It's a calm night. The *Vittoria* couldn't possibly overtake him."

"I shall now," he said, "leave you two alone. Good night!"

We looked mutely after him. Lily took my arm in both of hers and snuggled close to me.

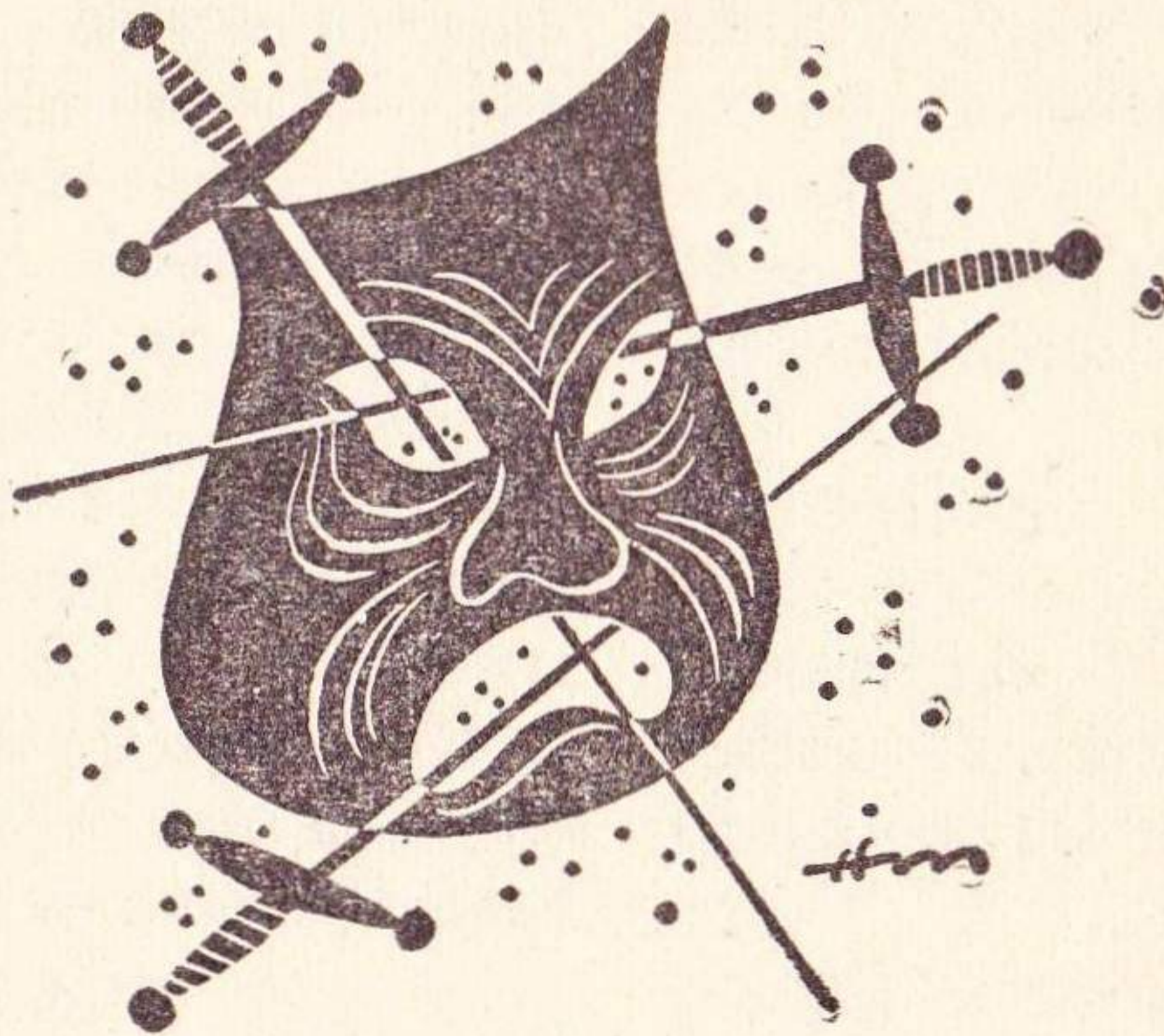
"You're quite sure, Bobby, you haven't any money? Nor any way of getting any?"

My imagination, I found, was dwelling on those nineteen chests at the bottom of the sea.

"I could practice diving?"

"Do!" said Lily.

THE END



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*To all appearances Alma Carmody's death was a commonplace tragedy. She had simply fallen to the floor dead while brewing a pot of tea. Yet an unforeseen horror, a traceless violence enveloped her whole being during the last agonizing moments of her life . . .*

## CAT AND MOUSE

by KERMIT ROLLAND

THE DEATH OF MRS. ALMA CARMODY occurred on Friday, the twenty-second of October, at approximately eight o'clock in the evening in the kitchen of a small flat on Stover Street. She had just prepared her husband's supper and at the moment of death was brewing a pot of catnip tea. When she fell to the floor the pot was smashed and the tea was spilt over the linoleum. Her body was found by her husband Albert when he came home from work.

On the surface Mrs. Carmody's death was a commonplace tragedy, made interesting only by the fact that Albert Carmody usually came home for supper at six o'clock, not eight. But this fact alone was scarcely significant enough to prompt a police inquiry.

The circumstances pertinent to Mrs. Carmody's passing had been assembled on the previous evening. The initial circumstance was a quarrel between husband

and wife. The quarrel concerned a cat.

Mr. Carmody was a small man, thin, rather shabby, and considerably younger than his wife, who was forty-four at the time of her death. For several years he had been employed by the Department of City Parks as an assistant keeper in the public zoo. He worked in the lion house.

His duties were light because the city was not rich in lions. There were only two: King Congo, a savage beast who could snap the rib-bone of a horse with a single crunch of his great jaws, and Old Ernest, equally terrifying in appearance but quite harmless because he was toothless. There had been talk around the zoo that Old Ernest would shortly be destroyed because the public expected a lion to have teeth.

Mr. Carmody's work was finished at five-thirty each day when Bostitch, the head keeper, came

around to see that the cages had been properly secured for the night. At these times he repeated a favourite joke as he tugged at the padlocks.

"Have to lock up right," he said. "Can't afford to have King Congo get loose and eat up one of the public. Attendance is slim enough as it is." Mr. Carmody laughed dutifully.

The night before his wife's death, Mr. Carmody said good night to the two lions and then set off as usual across the park for home. The Carmody flat on Stover Street lay just on the other side of the park; it had been taken because of its convenience for Mr. Carmody's work. The walk through the deserted, twilight park took half an hour. At six o'clock Alma Carmody unlocked the hall door in response to her husband's knock. After exchanging a perfunctory greeting, husband and wife sat down to supper in the kitchen.

For fifteen years Thursday night had been meat-loaf night. Mrs. Carmody was excessively fond of this dish and ate a great plateful. Mr. Carmody did not care for it. Once he had asked his wife to serve something else on Thursdays, but she had flown into such a rage that he had never dared mention it again.

With the rather tallowy supper was served a herb tea made from catnip leaves. This was another of Mr. Carmody's grievances. He

had suggested to his wife several times that the use of catnip should be confined to animals. Showing a familiarity with the subject, he explained to her that catnip, in its dried form, was often administered to house cats as a tonic and that catnip, in the form of an essence, was often used by big game hunters to lure tigers, lions, panthers and other jungle cats within the range of rifles or nets. But catnip was not, he insisted with some heat, a proper supper-time beverage for a man who had spent a hard day in a zoo.

Mrs. Carmody's comment was brief. "You'll drink it and like it!" she said. She added, "You know it's done my heart a real lot of good."

Now it was true that Mrs. Carmody suffered from a mild heart condition. It was her own fault, according to her husband. A doctor she visited a number of years ago told her to go on a diet if she wanted to get well. This she had indignantly refused to do. Instead, she persistently aggravated her condition by two-handed gluttony three times a day and drank a large pot of catnip tea at each meal to ease her conscience. The catnip had been recommended to her by a former neighbor as a remedy for her complaint.

Mr. Carmody had once remarked with a certain wistfulness that he would enjoy a cup of coffee with his supper. This had

brought about a sharp exchange of words, in the course of which Mrs. Carmody made the curious declaration, "I'll die before I'll have the stuff in the house!"

After their supper, which was to be the last that Alma would enjoy on earth, they went into the parlor to occupy themselves separately until it should be time to go to bed. The flat contained three rooms: the kitchen; the small parlor with its brown, buckled wallpaper; and the bedroom, with a sagging double bed on which Mrs. Carmody slept alone because of her bulk, and a folding cot at the foot of her bed for her husband.

Mrs. Carmody sat in her rocking chair next to the small, sooty fireplace in the parlor and laid out a game of patience on top of a soiled, oilcloth hassock, balancing a cup of catnip tea in her lap.

On this evening, as on every other evening, Mr. Carmody went to a large table which stood in one corner of the room. On top of this table was spread the material for the hobby which had occupied his evenings for fifteen years. It was a miniature African landscape. In cunning and loving detail, with a bucket of sand, a sheet of painted cardboard, and some bits of twigs and straws picked up in the park, on a credible scale (here the footprint of a mouse would pass for that of a jackal), he had succeeded in capturing for himself the look of Africa in his living room.

As he gazed upon his handiwork, his nimble imagination quickly translated sand, twig, straw and cardboard into hollow and grove, hummock and rise. He saw the broad, gently-rolling sweep of the tawny veldt; the acacia trees clustered thirstily about a waterhole, and the green foothills rising to Kilimanjaro on the horizon. This was the small, private world into which Mr. Carmody escaped every evening between supper and bed. Here he unleashed an impatient spirit and watched it roam the land on strange safaris.

Tonight he pictured a lion by the waterhole, lured there by the imaginary catnip which he, Carmody the Hunter, had scattered on the game trail; a huge lion, fiercer than King Congo in the zoo, looking up at him with hungry yellow eyes.

"We've got mice!" Mrs. Carmody's voice from the rocker cut into her husband's reverie like a sharp tooth. "We've got mice," she repeated, peeking under a little pile of cards to locate a black queen. "I saw one today eating at your landscape."

Now Mrs. Carmody had been considering the mice for more than a week, although they had no more place in the dingy reality of Stover Street than the lion in the landscape. She had invented the mice.

When Alma met Mr. Carmody

she had been a plump, pouting creature who entertained a fuzzy-headed notion that taking up life with a lion keeper would be a romantic, intrepid escapade. Marriage had revealed her lion keeper to be neither romantic nor intrepid, by her lights, but only solicitous, diligent, and quietly good-natured, and this was something she had never forgiven him.

As an outlet for her frustration she had long ago invented a little game to play with her husband. The game consisted of laying small plots against his good nature until he was driven to make a protest, and then, quickly seizing the advantage, browbeating him until he was reduced to submissiveness, as an animal tamer baits a beast by flicking a whip in its eyes and then, at the moment of the lunge, quickly thrusts the four legs of a kitchen chair in its face.

Lately, since the completion of his model landscape, Mr. Carmody had refused to respond to the whip. As a consequence, Mrs. Carmody had found her evenings growing very dull indeed. That was why she had been forced to invent the destructive mice, knowing that her husband lived in fear that some harm might come to his precious landscape.

Mr. Carmody greeted his wife's announcement about the mice in his landscape with controlled excitement. "I'll get some traps," he said. "First thing tomorrow. Cur-

lee's has them." Curlee's was the local store where Mrs. Carmody bought the catnip.

Mrs. Carmody was very disappointed by her husband's reaction to the mice. She cast about for some way to continue the game. She said suddenly, "I think we should get a cat."

"Heavens, no!" Mr. Carmody exclaimed. "I mean," he amended in a more moderate tone, "we've discussed having a pet in the house. I like pets, but you know yourself what a cat would do to my landscape. Scratching it up—digging in the sand. I'd rather put up with the mice. Besides, we've already discussed it."

"I've changed my mind," said Mrs. Carmody flatly. "I want a cat. Anyway, your landscape don't mean nothing to me." She resented her husband's hobby because he seemed to find in it the romantic adventure she felt she had been cheated of by her marriage to him.

"But you don't even like cats," Mr. Carmody declared. "You don't like any animals. You said they frighten you. You don't even want me to talk about my work in the zoo." He had tried to tell her about Bostitch's plan to have Old Ernest removed because of his dental condition.

Mrs. Carmody was delighted with the progress of her game. She would, she decided, permit her husband one more protest before forcing him to knuckle under.

"I've changed my mind," she persisted. "I want a cat. If you don't bring me one—by tomorrow night—you'll never have a moment's peace as long as you live."

Mr. Carmody groaned like a man under a lash. Then, slowly, he gathered his scattered resolve. "I won't do it!" he shouted at his wife. "I'm damned if I'll bring you a cat!"

"Don't you shout at me!" Mrs. Carmody shrieked at him. "Do you want to upset my heart?" She could not understand it. She couldn't remember her husband ever before daring to defy her in this manner. Her little game, she realized, had grown out of all proportion to her intention: what had arisen instead was a contest for the control of the whole household. Mrs. Carmody was growing alarmed.

Mr. Carmody was still excited. "You've shoved me around long enough!" he shouted again. "No cat!" he made the cry sound like a rally at a barricade.

Mrs. Carmody got up abruptly from her chair. The cup of tea slid from her lap and crashed on the hearth. The tea spluttered into the fireplace and made the coals hiss. She trembled with a genuine rage. "You'll be sorry!" she screamed at her husband. Then she stamped into the bedroom and slammed the door.

An hour later Mr. Carmody also went to bed, first making a

careful inspection of his landscape for mouse tracks. For a long time he lay on his folding cot and stared at the ceiling. He strained his ears for the sounds of mice but he could hear nothing except his wife's heavy breathing on the double bed next to him.

The idea of mice at work in the landscape distressed him so much that he turned his mind to his job at the zoo for relief. He thought about the lions, the fierce King Congo and the gentle Ernest, pacing their dark cages all night long while the people of the city, careless that lions walked in their midst, slumbered in their beds. Pad-pad, thought Mr. Carmody. Pad-pad.

It was impossible, he told himself, but the soft fall of the cushioned paws sounded so plainly to him that the big cats might have been treading the floor of the very bedroom. In a little while he fell asleep.

Alma Carmody rested quietly on her sagging mattress waiting for her husband to fall asleep. She was enraged with him for his firm stand against her. While she waited she planned how she might punish him for his obstinacy. The mice, she decided finally; she would use the mice again.

At the first sound of a snore from the cot at the foot of her bed she got up and, with a stealth surprising in one so large, she

crept on broad, bare feet into the shadowy living room. The room was dark save for the small coal fire in the grate. Marked by dim highlights, she moved purposefully to the African landscape.

For an instant her hands hovered over the table. Then methodically she began to pluck the veldt. A few moments later she made her way to the fireplace and carelessly scattered a double handful of twigs and straws on the grate. A yellow blaze rose from the grate as she crept back to bed.

Mr. Carmody was the first to awaken the next morning. The day was Friday, the twenty-second of October.

As was his custom, he stood for a moment in the bedroom doorway immediately upon rising and looked across the living room at his landscape. What he saw this morning sent him hurrying to the table. What he found there was a scene of destruction.

The hand of blight had struck the verdant land during the hours of darkness. The veldt was all but barren of grass. The little grove of acacia trees no longer fringed the waterhole. The smooth hummocks were gouged and furrowed as though a morose boar had rutted through them. The cardboard mountains were rent and ripped.

"The mice!" exclaimed Mr. Carmody in a hoarse whisper.

In the bedroom Mrs. Carmody yawned herself awake. She called

lazily to her husband. "I'm staying in bed a while—my heart ain't too good today. Bring me some tea before you make your breakfast."

The voice snapped Mr. Carmody out of his dazed appraisal of his blasted land.

Mechanically he began to dress himself in his dark green, zoo department uniform. Next he went into the kitchen and lighted the gas under the kettle for his wife's tea. Then he went to the fireplace in the living room and stirred up the ashes in the grate preparatory to building up a fire.

It was while he was occupied with the poker that he discovered, scattered about the grate, a number of half-burned fragments of twigs and straws.

The meaning of the charred bits was clear to him at once. There were no mice, he thought. Alma destroyed the landscape!

Mr. Carmody's first impulse was to rush into the bedroom and throttle her where she lay. But he rejected this course for he knew his wife's strength was superior to his own. He must, he decided, hold himself in control until he could find a more conclusive way of dealing with her. Grim-faced and thoughtful, he returned to his chores.

First he carefully swept up the bits of twigs and straw and buried them beneath the ashes in the coal bucket. It would be to his ad-

vantage, he thought, if his wife did not learn too soon that he had discovered evidence of her deed. Then he went into the kitchen and brewed a pot of tea, his mind busy with the idea of revenge. He put the pot of tea and a cup and saucer on a tray and carried the tray into the bedroom. Mrs. Carmody was sitting propped up with pillows. Her face was puffy with sleep.

"I heard them again last night," she said cheerily as her husband entered the room. "The mice."

Mr. Carmody placed the tray on a chair beside the bed. "I saw signs of them this morning," he said quietly.

"The tea smells good," said Alma as she reached over to fill her cup. "There's nothing like a good, hot cup of catnip tea in the morning."

The tea, thought Mr. Carmody. The catnip tea! An idea for revenge began to shape itself in his mind. The tea, of course!

"You were right about the cat," he said suddenly. "We should have a cat. I'll bring you one tonight."

"I knew you'd come round to my way of thinking," said Mrs. Carmody in a smug voice.

Mr. Carmody put on his peaked zoo department cap. "I'll be late getting home tonight," he said. "Not till after dark. Say about eight."

"I'll have some supper for

you." Mrs. Carmody reached over to refill her cup. "We're having cold meat loaf. You didn't eat hardly none of it last night."

"And tea?" Mr. Carmody asked gently.

"Of course."

Mr. Carmody paused in the doorway on his way out and turned to look back at his wife. "That'll be nice," he said with a thin smile.

Ordinarily Mr. Carmody enjoyed the half-hour walk to work through the park. During these walks his imagination found space to stretch itself. On some days each lilac bush concealed for him a lurking shape, four-footed and tawny, and every sycamore and elm was populous with the fur-bearing creatures of his fancy. Boldly he led an imaginary safari through a tropical wilderness of fang and claw, giving courage by his example to the timid gun bearers who straggled behind.

But this morning, Mr. Carmody saw only seedy shrubbery and bare-limbed trees, on the branches of which hopped a number of dingy city sparrows. He admitted sadly that there wasn't a lion in sight. His wife, he realized, had destroyed more than his model landscape while he slept; she had also destroyed all illusion for him.

The foolish landscape, thought Mr. Carmody; foolish cardboard

Kilimanjaro. This morning he knew all mountains were made of hard, imperishable stone.

During the Friday afternoon, Head Keeper Bostitch came stumbling into Mr. Carmody's lion house.

"Well," said Bostitch, "the curator finally came through. Knew he'd see it my way. 'Think of the public,' I told him. He did, Carmody, and right off he gave me the authorization. Here it is," He exhibited a slip of white paper.

Mr. Carmody had known that it must come some day. "It's inevitable," he had said to his wife. But now that the time had arrived he felt in no way prepared to accept the decision with the equanimity Bostitch was displaying.

He read the slip of paper. It was an order from the curator directing Head Keeper Bostitch and his staff, Mr. Carmody, to destroy, in a humane manner, one African lion, male, named Old Ernest.

"Sa-a-ay," exclaimed Bostitch, "don't take it so hard. You're white as a sheet. It's only an old lion with no teeth. Think of the public, Carmody." He tucked the slip of paper into his pocket.

"Take care of things," he directed. "I won't be around till morning. Be sure to lock up well tonight. Think of the public." And he hurried importantly out of the lion house.

Mr. Carmody put down the broom on which he had been leaning and walked sadly to the cages. He was very fond of lions and he hated to have Old Ernest taken away from him.

Old Ernest, whose ferocious appearance belied his toothless condition, padded to the front of the cage at Mr. Carmody's left. At Mr. Carmody's right, King Congo raised his head from his paws and sniffed the carefully filtered air of the lion house.

Mr. Carmody looked thoughtfully from one great lion to the other as though he were trying to make up his mind about something.

"It's a shame," he said aloud, "that you two never get out-of-doors. It's a shame to have to walk all day and all night on the hard, concrete floor, when on the other side of your bars the earth is still soft with summer. You would like the park. We could walk together—at least one of you."

Mrs. Carmody lay in bed until ten o'clock when hunger finally drove her into the kitchen. Her heart seemed more quiet to her now and she made herself a large breakfast of eggs and toast with a slice of cold meat loaf on the side. On her way into the kitchen she stopped to look at the remains of her husband's landscape. It was very odd, she thought, that he hadn't been more upset.



During the afternoon she took a bottle of furniture polish and a flannel cloth from the shelf under the kitchen sink and rubbed and buffed the rocking chair which stood by the fireplace in the living room. The polishing done, she went to her husband's table and picked out the few straws remaining in the landscape. Then she shoved the table far back into the corner.

By seven o'clock it had started to grow dark in the shabby rooms and she turned on the light in the kitchen as she set about preparing supper. Mr. Carmody had said he would be late getting home—he probably had to go to one of the pet shops in town to pick up a cat, she told herself. She worked without haste among her pots and pans, pausing now and again to nibble at the food she was preparing.

Mrs. Carmody looked at the clock on the wall. Eight o'clock. Surely, she thought, her husband would be along at any moment now. It had grown very dark outside and an evening chill had begun to work its way into the dingy rooms. She set the table in the kitchen and put the remains of the meat loaf into the oven to heat. Then, from its special place on the shelf, she took down her porcelain teapot.

Into the teapot she dropped five pinches of dried catnip leaves. Over the leaves she poured

boiling water from the kettle on the stove. The pungent, faintly medicinal aroma of steeping catnip filled the kitchen.

At that moment, Mrs. Carmody heard a knock on the hall door which led off the living room. That would be her husband, she knew. He always made a special little knock before coming in so as not to frighten her. The knock was repeated.

"Albert?" she called out. She remained in the kitchen out of sight of the hall door, still holding the teapot in her hand.

From the outside hallway came a muffled, "It's me."

"Did you bring me a cat?" she shouted. There followed a moment of silence, broken only by an odd, scrambling sound in the outside passage. "What you doing out there, Albert? I asked did you bring me a cat?"

Mrs. Carmody heard the hall door slowly open and from the dark living room she heard her husband say, "I brought you a cat."

"Kitty, kitty, kitty—" Mrs. Carmody began.

The sentence went unfinished. A long, tawny shape with savage yellow eyes bounded into the kitchen with a deep roar.

Mr. Carmody remained standing in the hall until he heard the roar, the simultaneous shriek of terror, the crash of a teapot, and the thump of a heavy body strik-

ing the kitchen floor. Then he began to untangle a new-looking leather collar and steel chain which he held in his hands.

"Kitty," he called softly. "Here, kitty." Then, more sternly, "Ernest! Come here, Ernest!"

Old Ernest padded reluctantly out of the kitchen and into the hall. His tongue lolled from his toothless mouth and his muzzle was damp with the catnip tea he couldn't resist.

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Carmody as he fastened the collar around the old lion's neck, "but we have to go back now. We'll have a little run in the park on the way."

A week later, Albert Carmody walked with a springy step into Curlee's store. He made his way purposefully to the stationery department in the rear.

"A sheet of cardboard," he smiled at the attractive young woman who waited on him, "and a box of paints."

He paid for his purchases and tucked his package carefully under his arm. On his way out of the store he stopped at the lunch bar where he perched himself on one of the high stools.

"A cup of coffee," he said to the girl behind the counter. "A large cup."



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*The very unorthodoxy of the \$150,000 jewel theft was enough to unnerve the most ardent exponent of logic. The police experts scratched their heads in utter confusion. It was at this point that Norwood entered the case. . .*

## THE CASE OF THE UNHURRIED THIEF

BY PAUL F. SERPAS

"YES, MR. MARRINGER, NORWOOD here is just the man to solve your little mysteries," Harry Derwon was saying as he turned toward the younger man. "Norwood is getting pretty well known for his ability to think these things out. He has built somewhat of a reputation for being an amateur sleuth."

"Is that right? I certainly would appreciate someone throwing some light on the matter," John Marringer answered with a smile.

"Just what is your problem, Mr. Marringer? I should be pleased to do whatever I can to help you, if indeed it is not beyond my meager talents to do so," Norwood replied somewhat jokingly.

"It is no joking matter, Mr. Norwood. For some months now there has been a strange business going on here in this house," the elder

man began, looking about the huge old mansion. "Valuable pieces of my wife's jewelry are missing, and the police have been unable to turn up a single clue as to their disappearance."

Norwood sat silent, his eyes intent upon the face of his host.

"First there were the diamonds from her bracelet, then . . ." Marringer had not yet finished the sentence when Norwood interrupted.

"You say the diamonds from her bracelet? Surely the bracelet also was taken?"

"No, and that is only one of the many things that have taken place. It is indeed mystifying why the bracelet too was not stolen, as it is made of solid gold."

"Please continue Mr. Marringer, but start at the very beginning. When did these thefts begin to occur?"

"Well, it began one night about four months ago. My wife discovered that several of her smaller stones were missing from the jewel box. They were not worth much, and she thought that perhaps she had misplaced them. There was no cause for alarm as they were not considered very valuable. Since they were in the form of some pin or another, we thought it likely that they had been lost."

Norwood shifted about in his chair, crossed his long legs into a comfortable arc and began fishing deep into his jacket pocket for his pipe.

"Try some of this," Marringer said, pushing a humidor of tobacco toward the younger man.

"I thought this would interest you Norwood," Harry taunted, with a sly grin on his cheerful face. "Wait till you hear the rest of it. I'll bet even you won't be able to figure this one out."

"It sounds intriguing already," Norwood returned, "Please go on Mr. Marringer, and try to remember everything."

"Well, about two weeks after we realized the first stones were missing, we found the bracelet. It was only the shell and was discovered in the middle of the floor in the bedroom, left in plain sight. The maid found it."

"It was left in plain sight in the middle of the floor?" Norwood asked.

"That's right. The thief appar-

ently didn't want it and saw no reason to conceal it. Why he didn't take the setting too, I'll never know."

"Were the stones themselves of any value?"

"Mr. Norwood! Those stones were among the most valuable in my family. They were worth about ten thousand dollars each, and there were fifteen of them."

"Were they insured?"

"Yes, they were insured. And I don't mind telling you that the insurance people gave me a few questioning glances when they came to investigate."

"Tell me more about the maid," Norwood said.

"There is nothing much to tell of her," Marringer answered. "The police have checked and rechecked her and completely cleared her of all suspicion. They searched her room, she lives in the house, as well as all of her personal belongings and came up with nothing. She herself insisted upon being searched. As you no doubt may have noticed, she walks with a limp, being partially crippled, and finds it difficult to get about on long distances. She seldom leaves the house, perhaps only once or twice a month. Since she has been followed by the police, at least for the past three and a half months whenever she does leave the house, it would be hard for her to do anything with the jewels if she had taken them."

"What about her mail? Is that checked too?" Norwood asked.

"Yes. What little there is of it. She insists that my wife seal all of her letters. She never has mailed a package to my knowledge."

"Well I have to admit that she does seem honest."

"Yes Mr. Norwood, that she is. Don't forget that she was the one who found the gold bracelet and returned it."

"Yet only the maid had the opportunity to enter your bedroom during the day?" Norwood asked.

"Yes, that's true," Marringer answered.

Norwood thought for a moment, but before he could ask another question, Mr. Marringer continued:

"It couldn't be she at any rate, Mr. Norwood. The thefts continue to occur, even now, at the rate of three or four stones a month. The house has been searched time and time again, along with the maid and all of her belongings, spot checks, you might say, and still nothing can be found. No, someone is getting into the house and stealing the jewels."

"I think not, Mr. Marringer. For two good reasons," Norwood said sharply.

"Look here my good man, do you mean to suggest that I am stealing from myself?"

"No, not exactly. But someone inside the house is taking the jewels, that's certain." Norwood was

adamant. "For one thing, the police have undoubtedly been watching the house for some time now, not to mention the insurance detectives. For another, there would be no reason for an outsider to take one or two pieces at a time when he could easily take the entire box and be done with it. Only someone who fears being caught with the stolen merchandise would take so small a portion. May I see the bedroom?"

"Of course," Marringer nodded his head in affirmation and motioned toward the stairs. The three men rose from their chairs and moved single file up the winding flight, pausing on the upper landing. Marringer reached into his pocket, coming up with a ring of keys. He selected one and placed it into the lock in the door.

In a moment he was inside the room and had flicked on the light. The room was a large one, but the most outstanding thing about it was that one entire wall was lined with huge potted plants. Some of them reached from the floor to the ceiling and all stages in between.

"My wife," Marringer explained, "has always believed that plants purify the air which we breathe, and she feels that an abundant supply of vegetation in the bedroom will clear our lungs as we sleep."

"That's quite true," Norwood agreed, "an excellent idea. You must compliment your wife for

me, Mr. Marringer. Her theory is correct."

"She keeps the jewels here in the dresser. In the second drawer." Norwood walked over to the dresser and opened the drawer. From it he took a beautifully decorated box which he opened. Inside was a large assortment of jewels, highly polished and each carefully placed in a section of the box.

"Isn't it a little unusual for these valuables to be without the benefit of lock and key?" Norwood asked.

"My wife and I do not feel that we should have to lock things up in our own bedroom, Mr. Norwood, but if this business keeps up, I think we will have to change our thinking."

Norwood then proceeded to very carefully examine the room, paying special attention to the two windows that opened onto a terraced balcony. Leaning near the floor, he asked, "What are these high voltage outlets used for, Mr. Marringer?"

"As you see, those are situated directly across the room from the plants. The maid plugs in the big sun lamps here. The heat makes the plants grow faster. She suggested the lamps herself along with some special fertilizer, for she says that the only time the plants purify the air to any degree is when they are growing rapidly."

"The maid suggested this to your wife?"

"Yes," Marringer said.

"I see." Norwood was looking closely at the leaves of one particular plant. He leaned closer to it and ran his hand down over the stalk, which was a good eight inches in diameter. "Tropical growths. No doubt your wife selected them for their fast growing qualities?"

"The maid selected them for her."

Norwood took a pencil from his pocket and began jabbing it into the soil, turning up the mud as he did so.

"Ha! Mr. Norwood, you don't really believe that the police and the insurance investigators have overlooked so simple a hiding place do you? Why I even thought of the pots myself."

"Not quite," Norwood answered, absorbed in a close examination of another of the stalks.

"These plants are indeed interesting. But tell me, what do you do with them when they reach the ceiling? Do you cut them?"

"Oh no. That would never do. Once these plants are cut, my wife says, they don't serve their purpose. We send them back to the florist and he replaces them with smaller ones."

"He comes in and gets them?" Norwood asked.

"He used to, before this business started. Now the poor fellow has to wait until the police or the insurance men inspect them before he can take them out of the

house. That's how it is with everything, even the garbage."

"I would like to speak to the maid, if you don't mind," Norwood said.

"Of course I don't mind," Marringer answered and rang the buzzer. In a moment the maid was standing in the doorway.

"Yes sir," she said, her well-kept hair shining black in the light from the hall.

"I would like to ask you one question, young lady. Will you give me an honest answer?"

"Yes sir, if I can."

"What is the name of the man who has been helping you steal the Marringer's jewels?"

Norwood's accusation cut the air and shattered it into a deep silence. The maid stood stock still for a moment, then glanced quickly from one to the other of the three men who confronted her. Harry had a look of surprise on his face. Marringer stood looking at the girl, his eyebrows raised, and Norwood stared coldly into her blue eyes.

She started to speak, then turned and dashed out into the hall, running like the devil himself was after her, in spite of her one bad leg. Harry made a movement to run behind her, but Norwood stopped him.

"Let her go. The police will have no difficulty in catching up with her, I am sure," Norwood said, quite pleased with himself.

"You don't mean that she is actually the one who stole the jewels?" Marringer was dumbfounded.

"But Norwood old boy, where are the stones—you have no evidence whatever. She'll sue you!" Harry bellowed.

"I hardly think so. I knew it was she, because she was the only suspect in the entire case, if you exclude the Marringers, which I did. She was clever all right, clever enough to fool the smartest men on the force as well as the insurance detectives. In the first place, as I said earlier, it had to be someone who could not get the entire contents of the jewel box out of the house. That fact, together with my examination of the doors and windows, proved that someone in the household was the thief as nothing has been forced to allow entry of an outsider. But the way she succeeded in getting the gems out of the house is the really clever part."

Norwood walked over to the plants and dug his finger down into the dark soil.

"No, it's not what you're thinking. The gems were not hidden in the pots or the soil. That, as Mr. Marringer pointed out, is too obvious. Our friends were much too smart for that. But the fact that the bracelet was left behind and only the stones were taken gave me a clue. Also, the first items you will remember, were small and not very likely to cause a stir if they were missed, as they were. These

first stones were used only to experiment with the ingenious method these two devised for getting the gems out of the house." Norwood walked closer to the largest plant and knelt down beside it.

"If you will come here gentlemen, I will show you the newest way of transporting stolen goods known to man," Norwood was running his hand lightly along the stalk of the plant.

"Don't tell me the stones were fastened onto the plants themselves?" Marringer was still somewhat skeptical.

"No sir. Not *on* the plants, but *inside* them!"

"What!" Harry shouted.

"If you step closer, Harry, you can see a slight scar on the bark of this plant. This is, I believe, where we shall find one of the missing stones." Norwood produced a pocket knife and stabbed it into the shrub. As he did so, a slight scraping sound was heard, and by twisting the blade of the knife, he caused a small bright red stone to pop from beneath the surface. "A ruby," exclaimed Marringer.

"The shrubs," Norwood went on, "growing rapidly as they were made to do, at the suggestion of the maid, healed themselves in a short time and left barely a trace of where the stones were placed into their stalks. I think if we examine these seedlings, we will find some more of the gems. But, of

course, some of them already have been taken out of the house, and I doubt if any of us will ever see them again."

"But Norwood, how did you know where to look for them?" Harry asked impatiently.

"The bracelet gave me the first clue, as I said. It was too big to be put into the plants without killing them, and so it was left behind. They realized that they could not get it out of the house, so they left it on the floor of the bedroom and the maid pretended to discover it. This was supposed to throw suspicion from her, which it did, remembering that she had willingly returned a solid gold bracelet.

"But when I examined the soil in the pots, I found some little pieces of bark in the mud, along with some dried droppings of sap, indicating that the trunks had been cut into. When I learned how much attention the maid gave the plants and her concern for their quick growth, I knew just where to look. As for her accomplice, it had to be the florist—because if he were not a partner to the crimes, the maid would never have let him go off with the jewels."

"They surely weren't in a hurry to get the jewels," Harry said, "I guess it was the time element that trapped them in the long run. Which only goes to disprove the saying that 'Haste Makes Waste'."



With a smile of satisfaction on his lips, Norwood nodded and walked silently from the room.

"How about an after dinner drink?" Marringer asked happily.

"You know, I don't care if I do," Harry said, putting his arm around the older man's shoulder as together they followed Norwood down the stairs.



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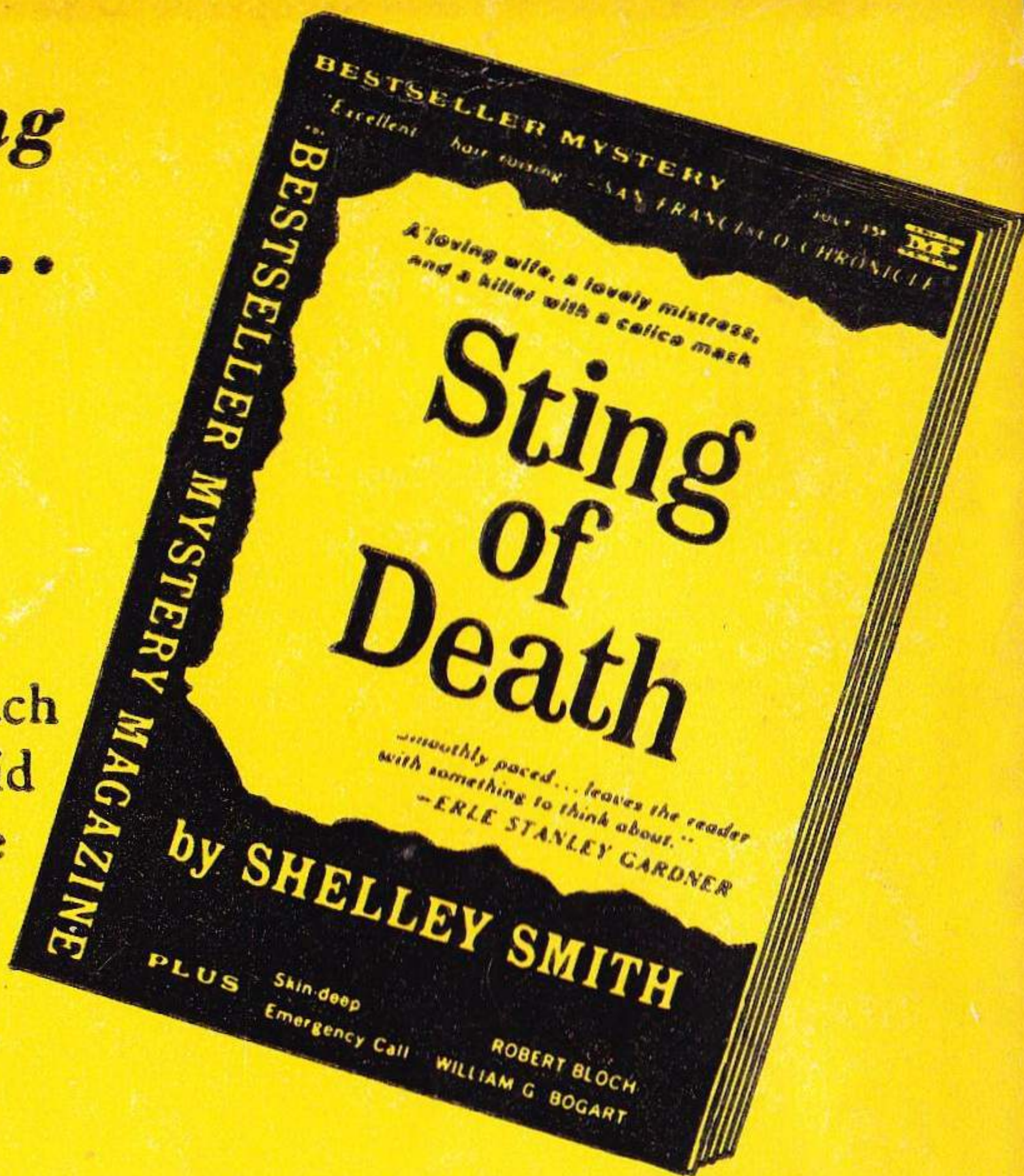
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