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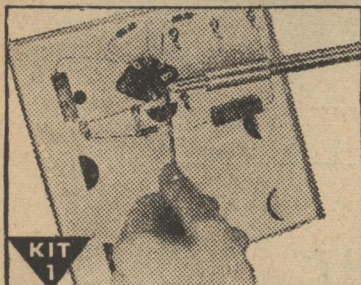
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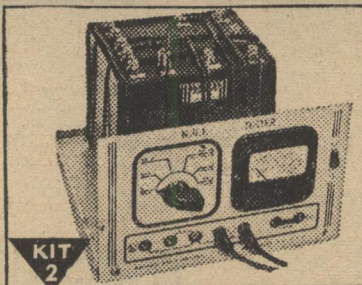


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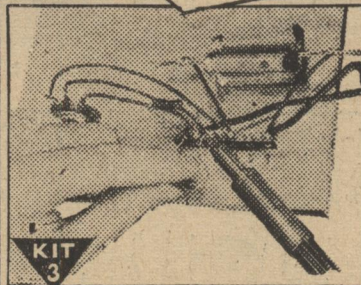
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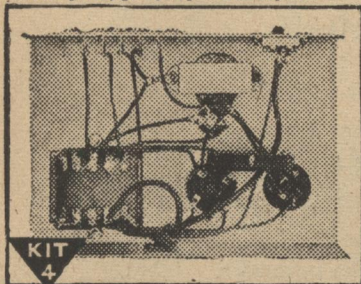
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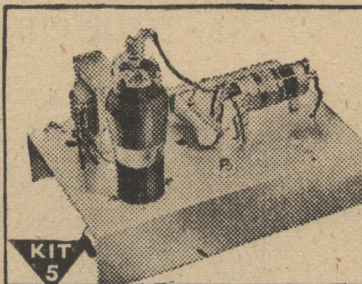
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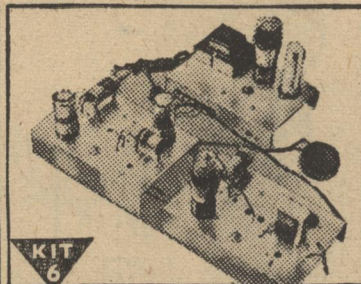
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DETECTIVE MYSTERY NOVEL MAGAZINE

Vol. XXVIII, No. 1

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

Spring, 1948

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THE SAINT SEES IT THROUGH

By LESLIE CHARTERIS

Simon Templar works under cover for the law, and stirs up quite as much trouble and peril as he did when he was on the other side of the fence! 11

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A NEW COMPLETE NOVELET

HANG MY KILLER HIGH

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Olney knew that he had to keep a step ahead of the police!

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An interesting get-together for our readers, writers and editor

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The LINE-UP



A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS
AND THE EDITOR MEET

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Just to give our readers some idea of the variety one can find in mysteries, take a look at "Cancelled in Red" by Hugh Pentecost, an Inspector Luke Bradley novel, which recently appeared as a *Popular Library* 25c reprint book and which deals with the fabulous rare stamp business.

Then there is "Fatal Descent" by John Rhode and Carter Dickson, also a *Popular Library* success, which treats of murder in a hermetically sealed elevator. "Three Bright Pebbles," a Colonel Primrose story by Leslie Ford, deals with the very prosaic subject of three pebbles found on an archery range. Yet, those pebbles spelled doom for a member of the wealthy Winthrop family.

R. Austin Freeman, distinguished English mystery novelist and creator of Dr. Thorndyke, is noted for the rare and unusual subject matter of his stories. Perhaps, one of the best examples is his "Mr. Polton Explains" which features an ingenious calendar clock.

"The Cat Screams" by Todd Downing is all about a strange cat living in a tourist house in Mexico. Tradition has it that every time the cat screams someone dies in the house. Hugh Rennert, hero of the yarn, finds that to be only too true soon after his arrival.

Mabel Seeley's famous story, "The Listening House" involves a lodging house. But it's not an ordinary lodging house. It's a house that seems to hold itself still, tensely awake, as if it were listening for something—perhaps, the stalking steps of a killer!

An Unusual Subject

But one of the most unusual subjects of a detective novel ever to come to our attention is that of a mysterious centuries-old mechanical automaton called The Golden Hag—an automaton which had been exhibited with great success at the court of Charles II of France in 1676 and which not only played

tunes on a zither, but conversed with spectators by dumb-show, thumbed its nose at people and made other similar indecorous gestures.

The Golden Hag, withering and gathering dust in the attic at Farnleigh Close, played a hideous and prominent part in the great contest between two men of the same name who laid claim to the rich Farnleigh baronetcy in Kent and in the grim sweep of violence, terror and death that followed their meeting.

It is all told in the most gripping and fascinating Dr. Gideon Fell novel ever written, which will highlight the next issue of **DETECTIVE MYSTERY NOVEL MAGAZINE**:

THE CROOKED HINGE

By

JOHN DICKSON CARR

There is no more capable writer of detective novels living today than John Dickson Carr, creator of that well-known, shovel-hatted investigator, Dr. Gideon Fell; and this book, originally published at \$2.00 by Harper & Brothers, is a glittering testimonial to Mr. Carr's ability to baffle, to terrify and to entertain his wide following of faithful readers. **DETECTIVE MYSTERY NOVEL MAGAZINE** is proud to be able to publish the story and we guarantee that its reading will be a thoroughly breath-taking and unforgettable experience.

Which Is the Impostor?

"The Crooked Hinge" opens with two men, both answering to the name of Sir John Farnleigh, laying claim to the Farnleigh estate. One man has been living at the estate for some time with his wife, Molly Bishop, and has been accepted by everyone as the young baronet. The other man has, for years, been living under the name of Patrick Gore. But the death of young Dudley Farnleigh, the brother of John, brings him back to the ancestral home.

(Continued on page 8)



THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

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THE LINE-UP

(Continued from page 6)

Each man brands the other as an impostor. Each tells a different but equally convincing story. Molly Bishop insists that her husband is the real Sir John. Yet, before she married him, she had not seen him since he was a boy of seven. And Patrick Gore seems to know all the intimate details of their boy-and-girl life together.

The two claimants meet at the estate along with Nathaniel Burrows, Sir John's solicitor; a friend, Brian Page; Molly Bishop; Mr. Welkyn, Gore's solicitor; and Kennet Murray, Sir John's former tutor and the only person in a position to identify positively the real Sir John.

The story behind the family was a not uncommon one.

Old Sir Dudley had two sons, Dudley, Jr., and John. John had always been something of a young swine and had never gotten along with his father. The only one who could manage him was his tutor, Kennet Murray. Finally, a public scandal between John and a barmaid impelled Sir Dudley to ship John off to some relatives in America. Murray was to go to America with John, then take another boat to Bermuda, where another job awaited him.

They sailed on the ill-fated *Titanic* which rammed an iceberg and sank. In the confusion Murray and the boy were separated. Murray was finally picked up by a cargo boat bound for Bermuda. John, or a boy purporting to be John, was rescued by a ship bound for New York. This boy was met by his American relatives and lived there for twenty-five years, never writing, never seeing his brother. Back in England he was practically forgotten. Sir Dudley and his wife died, leaving the baronetcy to Dudley, Jr.

Young Dudley tried to get in touch with John but his letters to America were returned unopened. Then Dudley, who had never married, died suddenly of ptomaine poisoning and John became the heir to the estate. It was then that John hurried back to England, claimed the estate, saw Molly Bishop after all those years and married her.

The Arrival of Patrick Gore

And now Patrick Gore had appeared, challenging his right to the Farnleigh name and to the estate. Gore, knowing as much about

(Continued on page 140)



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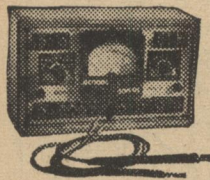
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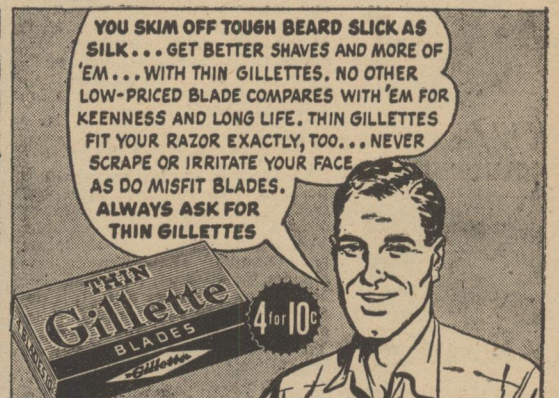
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SALLY BRETT AND HER BROTHER JOE, ARE JUST TURNING HOMEWARD AFTER A DAY-LONG RIDE IN STATE CANYON FOREST WHEN...



A COMPLETE NOVEL

The Saint Sees It Through

by Leslie Charteris



Simon Templar works under cover

CHAPTER I

for the forces of law, and stirs
up quite as much excitement and
peril as he did when operating
on the other side of the fence!

SIMON TEMPLAR lighted another cigarette, took a sip of his latest and most anemic-looking highball and reflected with considerable gloom that if the vanquishing of villains required any man like himself to endure certain unpleasantnesses and discomforts there must be a lot of more attractive and entertaining places to endure them in than in a joint with a name like Cookie's Cellar, situated in a rejuvenated basement in the East Fifties of New York City, U.S.A.

Such, for instance, as any reasonably busy boiler factory in any moderately insalubrious zone of reconversion.

For instance, in the boiler factory he would not have been offered Little Neck clams to whet his appetite. But then, after succumbing to the temptation, he would not have been faced with a soup plate full of water enlivened with a few fragments of weary ice among which floated, half submerged, four immature bivalves which had long ago decided that the struggle for existence was not worth it.

In the boiler factory, he would not have been able to order a rare filet mignon; but then, he would probably have had a real appreciation of the lunch in his plastic pail.

In the boiler factory there might have been a continual cacophony of loud and nerve-racking noises; but it was very doubtful whether they could have achieved such pinnacles of excruciating ingenuity as were being scaled by the five frenetic sons of rhythm who were blowing and thumping their boogie-woogie beat on the orchestra dais. There might have been smoke and stench in the air; but they would have been relatively crisp and fresh compared with the peculiarly flat sickly staleness of the vaporized distillate of cigars, perfume, and sweat that flowed through the happy lungs of Cookie's clientele.

There might have been plenty of undecorative and even vicious men to look at; but they would not have been undecorative and vicious in the sleek snide soft way of the chair-polishing champions who had discovered that only suckers work. There might have been a notable dearth of beautiful women who wore too little, drank too much, and chattered too shrilly; and it would have been a damn good thing.

But Simon Templar, who was known as the Saint in sundry interesting records, sat there with the patience of a much more conventional sanctity, seeming completely untouched by the idea that a no-girl no-champagne customer taking up a strategic table all by himself in that jam-packed bedlam might not be the management's conception of a heaven-sent ghost. . . .

"Will there be anything else, sir?" asked a melancholy waiter suggestively; and the Saint stretched his long elegantly tailored legs as best he could in the few square inches allotted to him.

"No," he said. "But leave me your ad-

dress, and if there is I'll write you a post-card."

The melancholy one flashed him a dark glance which suggested that his probable Sicilian ancestry was tempted to answer for him. But the same glance took in the supple width of the Saint's shoulders, and the rakish fighting lines of a face that was quite differently handsome from other good-looking faces that had sometimes strayed into Cookie's Cellar, and the hopeful mockery of translucent blue eyes which had a disconcerting air of being actively interested in trouble as a fine art; and for some reason he changed his mind. Whereby he revealed himself as the possessor of a sound instinct of self-preservation, if nothing else.

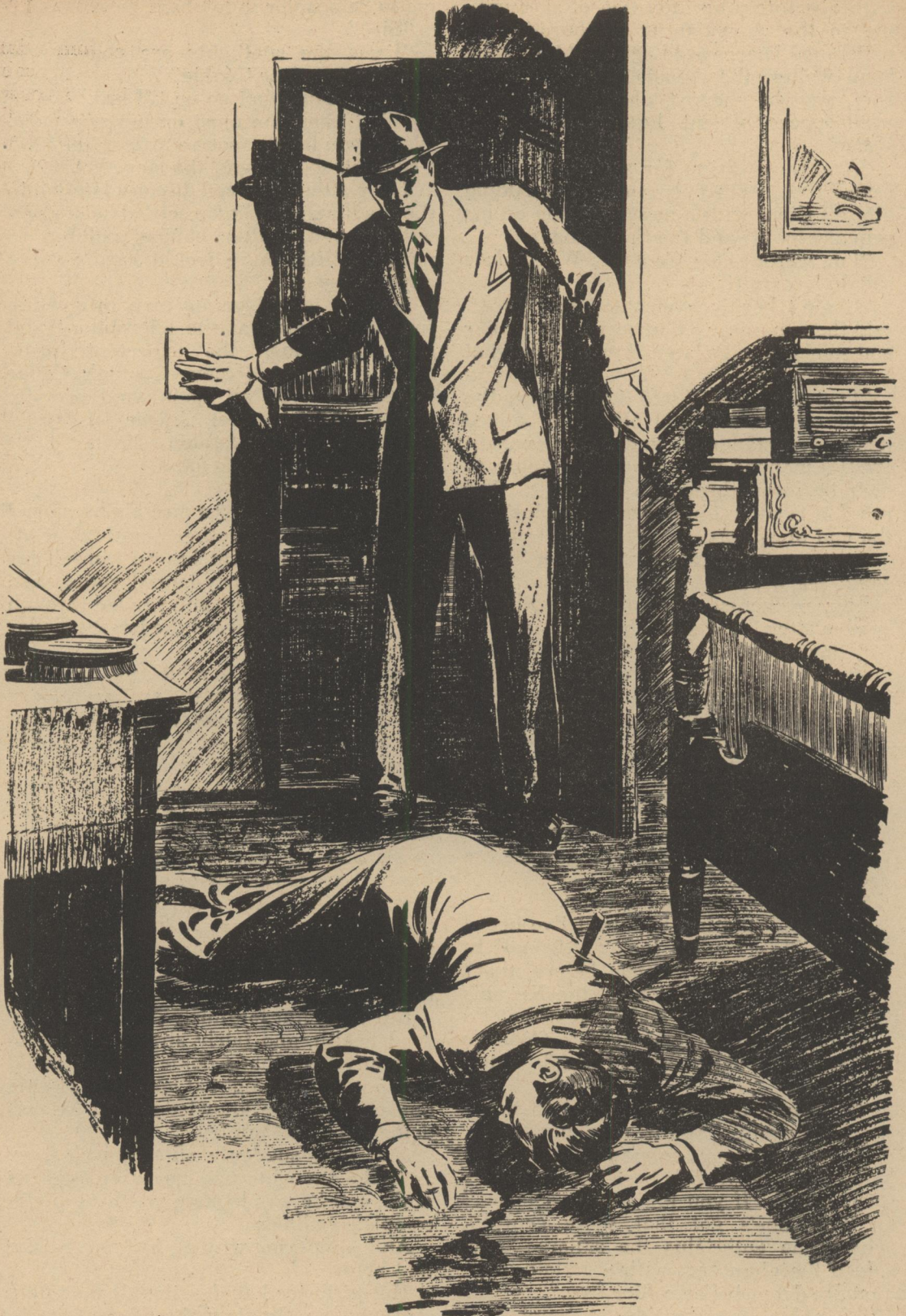
For those rather pleasantly piratical features had probably drifted in and out of more major forms of trouble than those of any other adventurer of this century. Newspaper reproductions of them had looked out from under headlines that would have been dismissed as a pulp writer's fantasy before the man whom they accoladed as the Robin Hood of modern crime arrived to make them real.

Other versions of them could have been found in the police files of five continents, accompanied by stories and suspicions of stories that were no less startling if much more dull in literary style; the only thing lacking, from the jaundiced viewpoint of Authority, was a record of any captures and convictions.

THERE were certain individual paladins of the Law, notably such as Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal, of Scotland Yard, and Inspector John Henry Fernack, of New York's Centre Street, whose pet personal nightmares were haunted by that impudent smile. And there were certain evil men who had thought that their schemes were too clever to be touched by justice who had seen those mocking blue eyes with the laughter chilling out of them, the last thing before they died.

And now so many of those things were only memories, and the Saint had new enemies and other battles to think of, and he sat in Cookie's Cellar with as much right and reason as any law-abiding citizen. Perhaps even with more; for he was lucky enough never to have heard of the place before a man named Hamilton in Washington had mentioned it on the phone some days before.

Which was why Simon was there now



A corpse sprawled on the bedroom rug and blood seeped from the back to the green carpet
(CHAP. VI)

with absolutely no intention of succumbing to the campaign of discouragement which had been waged against him by the head waiter, the melancholy waiter, the chef, and the chemist who measured out eyedroppers of cut liquor behind the scenes.

"Are you waiting for somebody, sir?" asked the melancholy waiter, obtruding himself again with a new variation on his primary motif; and the Saint nodded.

"I'm waiting for Cookie. When does she do her stuff?"

"It ain't hardly ever the same twice," said the man sadly. "Sometimes it's earlier and sometimes it's later, if you know what I mean."

"I catch the drift," said the Saint kindly.

The orchestra finally blew and banged itself to a standstill, and its component entities mopped their brows and began to dwindle away through a rear exit. The relief of relative quiet was something like the end of a barrage.

At the entrance across the room Simon could see a party of salesmen and their lighter moments expostulating with the head waiter, who was shrugging all the way down to his outspread hands with the unmistakable gesture of all head waiters who are trying to explain to an obtuse audience that when there is simply no room for any more tables there is simply no room for any more tables.

The melancholy waiter did not miss it either. "Would you like your check, sir?" he inquired.

He put it down on the table to ease the decision.

Simon shook his head blandly.

"Not," he said firmly, "until I've heard Cookie. How could I look my friends in the eye if I went home before that? Could I stand up in front of the Kiwanis Club in Terre Haute and confess that I'd been to New York, and been to Cookie's Cellar, and never heard her sing? Could I face——"

"She may be late," the waiter interrupted bleakly. "She is, most nights."

"I know," Simon acknowledged. "You told me. Lately, she's been later than she was earlier. If you know what I mean."

"Well, she's got that there canteen, where she entertains the sailors—and," added the glum one, with a certain additionally defensive awe, "for free."

"A noble deed," said the Saint, and noticed the total on the check in front of him with an involuntary twinge. "Remind

me to be a sailor in my next incarnation."

"Sir?"

"I see the spotlights are coming on. Is this going to be Cookie?"

"Naw. She don't go on till last."

"Well, then she must on her way now. Would you like to move a little to the left? I can still see some of the stage."

The waiter dissolved disconsolately into the shadows, and Simon settled back again with a sigh. After having suffered so much, a little more would hardly make any difference.

A curly-haired young man in a white tuxedo appeared at the microphone and boomed through the expectant hush: "Ladies and gentlemen—Cookie's Cellar—welcomes you all again—and proudly presents—that sweet singer of sweet songs: . . . Miss—Avalon—Dexter! Let's all give her a nice big hand."

WE ALL gave her a nice big hand, and Simon took another mouthful of his diluted ice-water and braced himself for the worst as the curly-haired young man sat down at the piano and rippled through the introductory bars of the latest popular pain.

In the course of a reluctant but fairly extensive education in the various saloons and bistros of the metropolis, the Saint had learned to expect very little uplift, either vocal or visible, from sweet singers of sweet songs. Especially when they were merely thrown in as a secondary attraction to bridge a gap between the dance music and the star act, in pursuance of the best proven policy of night club management, which discovered long ago that the one foolproof way to flatter the intellectual level of the average habitué is to give him neither the need nor the opportunity to make any audible conversation.

But the Saint felt fairly young, in fairly good health, and fairly strong enough to take anything that Cookie's Cellar could dish out, for one night at least, buttressing himself with the knowledge that he was doing it for his Country. . . .

And then suddenly all that was gone, as if the thoughts had never crossed his mind, and he was looking and listening in complete stillness.

And wondering why he had never done that before.

The girl stood under the single tinted spotlight in a simple white dress of elaborate perfection, cut and draped with artful artlessness to caress every line of a

figure that could have worn anything or nothing with equal grace.

She sang:

*"For it's a long long time
From May to December,
And the days grow short
When you reach November . . ."*

She had reddish-golden-brown hair that hung long over her shoulders and was cut straight across above large brown eyes that had the slightly oriental and yet not-oriental cast that stems from some of the peoples of eastern Europe. Her mouth was level and clean-cut, with a rich lower lip that warmed all her face with a promise of inward reality that could be deeper and more enduring than any ordinary prettiness.

Her voice had the harmonic richness of a cello, sustained with perfect mastery, sculptured with flawless diction, clean and pure as a bell.

She sang:

*"And these few precious days
I'd spend with you;
These golden days
I'd spend with you."*

The song died into silence; and there was a perceptible space of breath before the silence boiled into a crash of applause that the accompanist, this time, did not have to lead. And then the tawny hair was waving as the girl bowed and tossed her head and laughed; and then the piano was strumming again; and then the girl was singing again, something light and rhythmic, but still with that shining accuracy that made each note like a bubble of crystal.

And then more applause, and the Saint was applauding with it, and then she was singing something else that was slow and indigo and could never have been important until she put her heart and understanding into it and blended them with consummate artistry; and then again; and then once more, with the rattle and thunder of demand like waves breaking between the bars of melody, and the tawny mane tossing and her generous lips smiling; and then suddenly no more, and she was gone, and the spell was broken, and the noise was empty and so gave up; and the Saint took a long swallow of scarcely flavored ice-water and wondered what had happened to him.

And that was nothing to do with why he was sitting in a high-class clip joint like Cookie's Cellar, drinking solutions of Peter Dawson that had been emasculated to the point where they should have been marketed under the new brand name of Phyllis Dawson.

He looked at the dead charred end of a cigarette that he had forgotten a long time ago, and put it down and lighted another.

He had come there to see what happened, and he had certainly seen what happened.

The young piano-player was at the mike again, beaming his very professional beam.

He was saying: "And now—ladies and gentlemen—we bring you—the lady you've all been waiting for—in person—the one and only . . ."

"Lookie, lookie, lookie," said the Saint to himself, very obviously, but with the very definite idea of helping himself back to reality—"here comes Cookie."

CHAPTER II



AS A raucous yowl of acclamation drowned out the climax of the announcement, Simon took another look at the table near the dais from which Cookie arose, if not exactly like Venus from the foam, at least like an inspired hippopotamus from a succulent wallow.

It was a table which he had observed during a previous casual survey of the room, without recognizing Cookie herself as the third person who had joined it—a fact which the melancholy waiter, doubtless with malice aforethought, had carefully refrained from pointing out to him. But the two other people at it he had been able to place on the flimsier pages of a scrap-book memory.

The more feminine of the two, who wore the trousers, could be identified as a creature whose entrance to life had been handicapped by the name of Ferdinand Pairfield. To compensate for this, Mr. Pairfield had acquired a rather beautifully modeled face crowned with a mop of strikingly golden hair which waved with the regularity of corrugated metal, a pair of exquisitely plucked eyebrows arching over long-lashed soulful eyes, a sensuously chiseled mouth that always looked

pink and shining as if it had been freshly skinned, and a variety of personal idiosyncrasies of the type which cause robustly ordinary men to wrinkle their nostrils. Simon Templar had no such commonplace reactions to personal whimsy: he had enough internal equanimity to concede any human being the right to indulge in any caprice that looked like fun to him, provided the caprice was confined to the home and did not discombobulate the general populace: but he did have a rather abstract personal objection to Ferdinand Fairfield.

He disliked Mr. Fairfield because Mr. Fairfield had elected to be an artist, and moreover to be a very dextrous and proficient artist whose draughtsmanship would have won the approval of Dürer or Da Vinci. There was only one thing wrong with the Art of Ferdinand Fairfield. At some point in his development he had come under the influence of Dadaism, Surrealism, and Ultimate Googooism; with the result that he had never since then been able to paint a woman except with breasts that came out like bureau drawers, apexed with nipples that took the form of rattlesnakes, put-and-take tops, bottle-openers, shoe-horns, faucets, bologna sausage, or very small Packard limousines.

The other half of the duo was a gaunt stringy-haired woman with hungry eyes and orange lipstick, whom he identified as Kay Natello, one of the more luminous of the most luminescent modern poets. The best he could remember about her was a quote from a recent volume of hers, which might as well be re-printed here in lieu of more expensive descriptions:

FLOWERS

I love the beauty of flowers,
germinated in decay and excrement,
with soft slimy worms
crawling
caressingly
among the tender
roots.

So even I carry within me
decay and excrement:
and worms
crawl
caressingly
among the tender roots of my
love.

Between them they made a rather fine

couple; and Simon realized how Cookie could have been the idol of both of them, if there were any foundation to the casual whispers he had been able to hear about her since he discovered that she was destined to enter his life whether he wanted it or not.

He looked for Cookie again, remembering that he was not there for fun.

She was sitting at the piano now, thumping the keys almost inaudibly while she waited for the informed applause to die away, with a broad and prodigiously hospitable smile on her large face.

She must have weighed more than two hundred and fifty pounds. The expansive grossness of her features was slightly minimized by a pompadoured convict coiffure which reduced the breadth of her face for as long as it lasted, but below that she was built like a corseted barrel. Her Brobdingnagian bosom bloused up from a skin of appalling sequins that shimmered down in recognizable ridges over the steatopygous scaffolding that encased her hips.

As much as any other feature you noticed the hands that whacked uninhibitedly over the keyboard; large, splay-fingered, muscular, even with the incongruous vermilion lacquer on the nails they never looked like a woman's hands. They were the hands of a stevedore, a wrestler, or—for that matter—a strangler. They had a crude sexless power that narrowed down through the otherwise ludicrous excesses of her figure to give a sudden sharp and frightening meaning to the brash big-hearted bonhomie of her smile.

IT WAS a strange and consciously exaggerated sensation that went through the Saint as he analysed her. He knew that some of it came from the electric contrast with the impression that Avalon Dexter had left on him. But he could make use of that unforeseen standard without letting it destroy his judgment, just as he could enlarge upon intuition only to see the details more clearly.

He knew that there were not enough ingredients in the highballs he had drunk there to warp his intelligence, and he had never in his life been given to hysterical imaginings. And yet with complete dispassionate sanity, and no matter where it might go from there, he knew that for perhaps the first time in a life that had been crossed by many evil men he had seen a truly and eternally evil woman.

Just for a moment that feeling went

over him like a dark wave; and then he was quite cool and detached again, watching her make a perfunctory adjustment to the microphone mounted in front of her.

"Hullo, everybody," she said in a deep commanding voice. "Sorry, I'm late, but I've been taking care of some of our boys who don't get too much glory these days. I'm speaking of the plain ordinary heroes who man our merchant ships. They don't wear any brass buttons or gold braid, but war or no war they stay right on the job. The Merchant Navy!"

There was a clatter of approbation to show that the assembled revellers appreciated the Merchant Navy. It left no room for doubt that the hearts of Cookie's customers would always be in the right place, provided the place was far enough from the deck of an oil tanker to give them a nice perspective.

Cookie heaved herself up from the piano bench and pointed a dramatic finger across the room.

"And I want you to meet two of the finest men that ever sailed the seven seas," she roared. "Patrick Hogan and Axel Indermar. Take a bow, boys!"

The spotlight plastered two squirming youths at a side table, who scrambled awkwardly and unwillingly to their feet. Amid more spirited clapping, the spotlight switched back to Cookie as she sat down again and thumped out a few bars of *Anchors Aweigh* with a wide grin which charmingly deprecated her own share in bringing the convoy home.

"And now," she said, with a cascade of arpeggios, "as a tribute to our guests of honor, let's start with *Testy Old William, the Nautical Man*."

Overlapping a loyal diminuendo of anticipatory sniggers and applause from the initiated, she broadened her big jolly smile and launched into her first number.

Simon Templar only had to hear the first three lines to know that her act was exactly what he would have expected—a repertoire of the type of ballad which is known as "sophisticated" to people who like to think of themselves as sophisticated. Certainly it dealt with sundry variations on the facts of life which would have puzzled a clear-thinking farm hand.

It was first-class material of its kind, clever and penetrating to the thinnest edge of utter vulgarity; and she squeezed every innuendo out of it as well as several others which had no more basis than a



One shot would have been enough but Carpenter, a conscientious man, gave Prather a second to make sure (CHAP. XIII)

well-timed leer and the personal psychoses of the audience. There was no doubt that she was popular: the room was obviously peppered with a clique of regular admirers who seemed to know all her songs by heart, and who burst into ecstatic laughter whenever she approached a particularly classic line.

Consequently, some of her finest gems were blanketed with informed hilarity—a fact which must have saved many an innocent intruder much embarrassment. But she was good: she had good material, she could sell it, she could get away with almost anything behind that big friendly bawdy boys-in-the-lavatory-together smile, and beyond any question she had more than enough of that special kind of showmanly bludgeoning personality that can pound an audience into submission and force them to admit that they have been wonderfully entertained whether they enjoyed it or not.

And the Saint hated her.

HE HATED her from a great distance; not because of that first terrible but immaterial intuition, which was already slipping away into the dimmer back-grounds of his mind, nor in the very least because he was a prude, which he was not.

He hated her because dominantly, sneakingly, overwhelmingly, phony-wittily, brazenly, expertly, loudly, unscrupulously, popularly, callously and evilly, with each more ribald and risqué number that she dug out of her perfertile gut, she was destroying and dissecting into more tattered shreds a few moments of sweetness and sincerity that a tawny-maned nobody named Avalon Dexter had been able to impose even on the tired and tawdry café aristocracy who packed the joint.

"I brought you a double, sir," said the melancholy waiter, looming before him again in all the pride of a new tactic. "Will that be all right?"

"That," said the Saint, "must have been what I was waiting for all evening."

He controlled the pouring of water into the glass, and tasted the trace of liquid in the bottom. It had a positive flavor of Scotch whisky which was nostalgically fascinating. He conserved it respectfully on his palate while Cookie blared into another encore, and looked around to see whether by any chance there might be a loose tawny mane anywhere within sight.

And, almost miraculously, there was.

She must have slipped out through another door, but the edge of the spotlight beam clipped her head for an instant as she bent to sit down. And that was the instant when the Saint was looking.

The detail that registered on him most clearly was the table where she sat. It was another ringside table only two spaces away from him, and it happened to be one table which had never been out of the corner of his eye since he had accepted his own place. For it was the table of the one man whom he had really come there to see.

It gave him a queer feeling, somehow, after all that, to see her sitting down at the table of Dr. Ernst Zellermann.

Not that he had anything solid at all to hold against Dr. Zellermann—yet. The worst he could have substantially said about Dr. Zellermann was that he was a phony psychiatrist. And even then he would have been taking gross chances on the adjective. Dr. Zellermann was a lawful M. D. and a self-announced psychiatrist, but the Saint had no real grounds to insult the quality of his psychiatry.

If he had been cornered on it, at that moment, he could only have said that he called Dr. Zellermann a phony merely on account of his Park Avenue address, his publicity, and a rough idea of his list of patients, who were almost exclusively recruited from a social stratum which is notorious for lavishing its diamond-studded devotion on all manner of mountebanks, yogis, charlatans, and magna-quacks.

He could have given equally unreasonable reasons why he thought Dr. Zellermann looked like a quack. But he would have had to admit that there were no proven anthropological laws to prevent a psychiatrist from being tall and spare and erect, with a full head of prematurely white and silky hair that contrasted with his smooth taut-skinned face.

There was no intellectual impossibility about his wide thin-lipped mouth, his long thin aristocratic nose, or the piercing gray eyes so fascinatingly deep-set between high cheekbones and heavy black brows. It was no reflection on his professional qualifications if he happened to look exactly like any Hollywood casting director's or hypochondriac society matron's conception of a great psychiatrist. But to the Saint's unfortunate skepticism it was just too good to be true, and he had thought so ever since he had observed the

doctor sitting in austere solitude like himself.

Now he had other reasons for disliking Dr. Zeller mann, and they were not at all conjectural.

For it rapidly became obvious that Dr. Ernst Zeller mann's personal behavior pattern was not confined to the high planes of ascetic detachment which one would have expected of such a perfectly groomed mahatma. On the contrary, he was quite brazenly a man who liked to see thigh to thigh with his companions. He was the inveterate layer of hands on knees, the persistent mauler of arms, shoulders, or any other flesh that could be conveniently touched. He liked to put heads together and mutter into ears. He leaned and clawed, in fact, in spite of his crisply patriarchal appearance, exactly like any tired businessman who hoped that his wife would believe that he really had been kept late at the office.

SIMON TEMPLAR sat and watched every scintilla of the performance, completely ignoring Cookie's progressively less subtle encores, with a concentrated and increasing resentment which made him fidget in his chair.

He tried, idealistically, to remind himself that he was only there to look around, and certainly not to make himself conspicuous. The argument seemed a little watery and uninspired. He tried, realistically, to remember that he could easily have made similar gestures himself, given the opportunity; and why was it romantic if he did it and revolting if somebody else did? This was manifestly a cerebral cul-de-sac.

He almost persuaded himself that his ideas about Avalon Dexter were merely pyramided on the impact of her professional personality, and what gave him any right to imagine that the advances of Dr. Zeller mann might be unwelcome?—especially if there might be a diamond ring or a nice piece of fur at the inevitable conclusion of them. And this very clearly made no sense at all.

He watched the girl deftly shrug off one paw after another, without ever being able to feel that she was merely showing a mechanical adroitness designed to build up ultimate desire. He saw her shake her head vigorously in response to whatever suggestions the vulturine wizard was mouthing into her ear, without being able to wonder if her negative was merely a

technical postponement.

He estimated, as coldbloodedly as it was possible for him to do it, in that twilight where no one else might have been able to see anything, the growing strain that crept into her face, and the mixture of shame and anger that clouded her eyes as she fought off Zeller mann as unobtrusively as any woman could have done. . . .

And he still asked nothing more of the night than a passable excuse to demonstrate his distaste for Dr. Ernst Zeller mann and all his works.

And this just happened to be the heaven-saved night which would provide it.

As Cookie reached the climax of her last and most lurid ditty, and with a sense of supremely fine predestination, the Saint saw Avalon Dexter's hand swing hard and flatly at the learned doctor's smoothly shaven cheek. The actual sound of the slap was drowned in the ecstatic shrieks of the cognoscenti who were anticipating the tag couplet which their indeterminate ancestors had howled over in the First World War; but to Simon Templar, with his eyes on nothing else, the movement alone would have been enough. Even if he had not seen the girl start to rise, and the great psychologist reach out and grab her wrist.

He saw Zeller mann yank her back on to her chair with a vicious wrench, and carefully put out his cigarette.

"*Nunc dimittis*," said the Saint, with a feeling of ineffable beatitude creeping through his arteries like balm; "O Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace. . . ."

He stood up quietly, and threaded his way through the intervening tables with the grace of a stalking panther, up to the side of Dr. Ernst Zeller mann. It made no difference to him that while he was on his way Cookie had finished her last number, and all the lights had gone on again while she was taking her final bows. He had no particular views at all about an audience or a lack of it. There was no room in his soul for anything but the transcendent bliss of what he was going to do.

Almost dreamily, he gathered the lapels of the doctor's dinner jacket in his left hand and raised the startled man to his feet.

"You really shouldn't do things like that," he said in a tone of kindly remonstrance.

Dr. Zeller mann stared into sapphire

blue eyes that seemed to be laughing in a rather strange way, and some premonitive terror may have inspired the wild swing that he tried to launch in reply.

This, however, is mere abstract speculation. The recordable fact is that Simon's forearm deflected its fury quite effortlessly into empty air. But with due gratitude for the encouragement, the Saint proceeded to hit Dr. Zellermann rather carefully in the eye. Then, after steadying the healer of complexes once more by his coat lapels, he let them go in order to smash an equally careful left midway between Dr. Zellermann's nose and chin.

The psychiatrist went backwards and sat down suddenly in the middle of a grand clatter of glass and china; and Simon Templar gazed at him with deep scientific concern.

"Well, well, well," he murmured. "What perfectly awful reflexes!"

CHAPTER III



FOR one fabulous moment there was a stillness and silence such as Cookie's Cellar could seldom have experienced during business hours; and then the background noises broke out again in a new key and tempo, orchestrated with a multiplying rattle of chairs as the patrons in the farther recesses stood up for a better view, and threaded with an ominous bass theme of the larger waiters converging purposefully upon the centre of excitement.

The Saint seemed so unconcerned that he might almost have been unaware of having caused any disturbance at all.

He said to Avalon Dexter: "I'm terribly sorry—I hope you didn't get anything spilt on you."

There was an unexpected inconsistency of expression in the way she looked at him. There were the remains of pardonable astonishment in it, and a definite shadowing of fear; but beyond that there was an infinitesimal curve in the parted lips which held an incongruous hint of delight.

She said in a rather foolish and meaningless way: "Thank you—"

Then the vanguard of the sedative squad was at the Saint's side, in the person of a captain whose face looked as if

it had known rougher employment than smirking welcomes and farewells to transient suckers.

He was a fairly weighty man, and his tuxedo was tight across his shoulders. He grasped the Saint's arm and said without any professional servility: "What's this all about?"

"Just a little apache dance routine," Simon said pleasantly. "Unscheduled addition to the floor show. I've been practising it quite a while. Would you like me to show you, or would you rather let go my arm?"

The bouncer captain, with the Saint's biceps palpably under his fingers and the Saint's very cool eyes on him, seemed to experience a shred of indecision.

Avalon Dexter's clear voice said: "Take it easy, Joe."

Simon gently eased his arm away in the act of searching for a cigarette, and gazed interestedly at Dr. Zellermann, who was trying to unwrap himself from a tablecloth with which he had become entangled in the course of his descent.

"Unfortunately," he explained, "my partner hasn't practised so much, and his timing is all off. It's too bad he had to fall down and hurt his face, but accidents will happen."

Dr. Zellermann got to his feet, assisted by one of the larger waiters, who thoughtfully kept hold of him under the guise of continuing his support.

With his patriarchal locks dishevelled, one eye closed, and a smear of blood smudged down from one corner of his mouth, Dr. Zellermann was not in the least beautiful or benign. In fact, for a man who claimed to adjust the mental disorders of others, he showed a lamentable lack of psychic balance.

He spoke to and about the Saint, in very precise English mingled with a few *recherché* foreign epithets and expletives; and Simon was saddened to learn from the discourse that the doctor was clearly the victim of several psychoses, inclined towards paranoia, subject to perverse delusions, and afflicted with obsessive coprophilia. Simon realised that the symptoms might have been aggravated by some recent shock, and he was considering the case with clinical impartiality when Cookie herself surged through the ring of bystanders.

Simon had never thought she was beautiful, but now he saw for himself how ugly she could look. The big practised



Without the slightest warning Hogan's right fist rammed upwards at the Saint's jaw (CHAP. XVI)

smile was gone, and her mouth was as hard and functional as a trap. Her eyes were bright, watchfully venomous, and coldly capable. For that moment, in spite of the complete oppositeness of all the associations, Simon felt that she had the identical bearing of a hard-boiled matron preparing to quell trouble in a tough reform school.

"What's this all about?" she demanded, using what began to sound like the house formula.

"This insolent swine," Zellermann said, gathering his words with a vicious precision that made them come out as if he were spitting bullets, "attacked me for no reason at all—"

"Or only one little reason," said the Saint easily. "Because I saw you grab Miss Dexter's arm, and I thought you were getting much too rough."

"Because she slapped me!"

"For a very good reason, chum. I saw it."

Cookie's wet marble eyes flicked from face to face with the alertness of a crouched cat surrounded by sparrows. Now she turned on the girl.

"I see," she rasped. "What have you been drinking, Avalon?"

SIMON admired the blushless pot-and-kettle majesty of that, for at close quarters Cookie was enveloped in a rich aroma of whisky which probably contributed some of the beady glaze to her malevolent stare.

"Really, Cookie," he said earnestly, "anyone who wanted to get tight on the drinks you serve here would have to have been working on it since breakfast."

"Nobody asked you to come here,"

Cookie threw at him, and went on to Avalon: "I'd like to know what the hell makes you think you've got a right to insult my customers——"

It was not a pretty scene, even though the Saint's aversion to that kind of lime-light was greatly tempered by the happy memory of his knuckles crushing Dr. Zellermann's lips against his teeth. But he felt much more embarrassed for Avalon. The puzzling hint of a smile had left her lips altogether, and something else was coming into her eyes that Cookie should have been smart enough to recognise even if she was too alcoholic for ordinary discretion.

He said quietly: "The customer insulted her, Cookie——"

"You dirty liar!" shouted Zellermann.

"—and he had it coming to him," Simon went on in the same tone. "I saw it all happen. Why not just throw him out and let's go on with the fun?"

"You mind your own damn business!" Cookie blazed at him purply. Again she turned to the girl. "You drunken slut—I've had just about enough of your airs and graces and bull——"

That was it. Avalon's lips came together for an instant, and the suppressed blaze flashed like dynamite in her eyes.

"That's fine," she said. "Because I've had just about enough of you and your creep joint. And as far as I'm concerned you can take your joint and your job and stuff them both."

She whirled away; and then after only one step she turned back, just as abruptly, her skirts and her hair swooping around her. And as she turned she was really smiling.

"That is," she added sweetly, "if the Saint doesn't do it for you."

Then she was gone, sidling quickly between the tables; and there was a new stillness in the immediate vicinity.

In the local silence, the Saint put a match to his neglected cigarette.

Now he understood the paradoxical ingredient in Avalon's expression when she first saw him. And her revelation flared him into an equally paradoxical mixture of wariness and high amusement. But the barest lift of one eyebrow was the only response that could be seen in his face.

Cookie's stare had come back to him, and stayed there. When she spoke to him again her voice had no more geniality than before, and yet there was still

a different note in it.

"What's your name?"

"Simon Templar," he said, with no more pointedness than if he had said "John Smith."

The effect, however, was a little different.

The muscular captain took a step back from him, and said with unconscious solemnity: "Gosh!"

Dr. Ernst Zellermann stopped mopping his mouth with a reddening handkerchief, and kept still like a pointer.

Cookie kept still too, with her gross face frozen in the last expression it had worn, and her eyes so anchored that they looked almost rigid.

The Saint said peaceably: "It's nice to have met you all, but if somebody would give me my check I'd like to get some fresh air."

The melancholy waiter was at his side like a lugubrious genie, holding up the check by the time he had finished his sentence.

"Now, just a minute, Mr. Templar." Cookie's voice came through again with the sticky transparency of honey poured over a file. "These little things do happen in night clubs, and we all understand them. I didn't mean to be rude to you—I was just upset. Won't you sit down and have a drink with me?"

"No, thank you," said the Saint calmly. "I've already had several of your drinks, and I want to get my tummy pumped out before goldfish start breeding in it."

He peeled a bill off his roll and handed it to the waiter with a gesture which dismissed the change.

"Of course you thought you were doing the right thing," Cookie persisted. "But if you only knew the trouble I've had with that little tramp, I'm sure——"

"I'm quite sure," said the Saint, with the utmost charm, "that I'd take Avalon's suggestion—and throw Dr. Zellermann in for a bonus."

HE TURNED on his heel and sauntered away—he seemed tired of the whole thing and full of time to spare, but that effect was an illusion. He wanted very much indeed to catch Avalon Dexter before he lost her, and his long lazy stride took him to the door without a wasted movement.

The check-room girl was helping him into his coat when Ferdinand Fairfield, on his way to the gents' room, edged

past him at a nervous distance that was not without a certain coy concupiscence. The Saint reached out and took his hand.

"Don't you think that nail polish is a bit on the garish side, Ferdie?" he asked gravely. "Something with a tinge of violet in it would look much cuter on you."

Mr. Fairfield giggled, and disengaged his fingers as shyly and reluctantly as a debutante.

"Oh, you!" he carolled.

Slightly shaken, Simon let himself out and went up the short flight of steps to the street.

Avalon Dexter was on the sidewalk, talking to the doorman as he held the door of a taxi for her. Even with her back to him, the Saint couldn't have mistaken the long bronze hair that hung over the shoulders of her light wolf coat. She got into the cab as he reached the street level; and before the doorman could close the door Simon took two steps across the pavement, ducked under the man's startled nose, and sat down beside her.

He held out a quarter, and the door closed.

She gazed at him in silence.

He gazed at her, smiling.

"Good morning," she said. "This is cozy."

"I thought I might buy you a drink somewhere," he said, "and wash the taste of that dump out of our mouths."

"Thanks," she said. "But I've had all I can stand of creep joints for one night."

"Then may I see you home?"

Her candid eyes considered him for a bare moment.

"Why not?"

She gave the driver an address on Sutton Place South.

"Do you make all that money?" Simon asked interestedly, as they moved off.

"The place I've got isn't so expensive. And I work pretty regularly. At least," she added, "I used to."

"I hope I didn't mess everything up for you."

"Oh, no. I'll get something else. I was due for a change anyway. I couldn't have taken much more of Cookie without going completely nuts. And I can't think of any happier finale than tonight."

Simon stretched out to rest his heels on the folding seat opposite him, and drew another eighth of an inch off his cigarette.

He said idly: "That was quite an

exit line of yours."

"They got the idea, did they?"

"Very definitely. You could have heard a pin drop. I heard one."

"I'd give a lot to have seen Cookie's face."

"She looked rather like a frog that was being goosed by an electric eel."

The girl laughed quickly; and then she stopped laughing.

"I hope I didn't louse everything up for you."

"Oh, no." He doubled her tone exactly as she had doubled his. "But it was just a little unexpected."

"For a great detective, you've certainly got an awful memory."

He arched an eyebrow at her.

"Have I?"

"Do you remember the first crossing of the *Hindenburg*—the year before it blew up?" She was looking straight ahead, and he saw her profile intermittently as the dimmed street lights touched it. "You were on board—I saw your picture in a newsreel when you arrived. Of course, I'd seen pictures of you before, but that reminded me."

"And then a couple of nights later you were in a place called the Bali, opposite El Morocco. Jim Moriarty had it—before he had the Barberry Room. I was bellowing with the band there, and you came in and sat at the bar." She shrugged, and laughed again. "I must have made a tremendous impression."

He didn't remember. He never did remember, and he never ceased to regret it. But it was one of those things.

He said lamely: "I'm sorry—that was a lot of years ago, and I was crashing all over town and seeing so many people, and I can't have been noticing much."

"Oh, well," she said, with a stage sigh. "Dexter the Forgotten Girl. What a life! . . . And I thought you came to my rescue tonight because you remembered. But all the time you were taken up with so many people that you never even saw me."

"I'm sorry," he said again. "I must have been taken up with too many people. And I'll never forgive any of them."

She looked at him, and her smile was teasing and gay, and her eyes were straight and friendly with it, so that it was all only chatter and she was not even trying to sell him anything; and he could only smile back and think how much better it could have been if he remembered.

"Maybe you don't know how lucky you were," she said.

"Maybe I don't," he said.

And it was a curious thing that he only half understood what he was saying, or only half meant what he said; it was only a throwaway line until after it was spoken, and then it was something that could never be thrown away.

This was something that had never been in his mind at all when he abandoned himself to the simple enjoyment of smacking Dr. Ernst Zellermann in the smooch.

He lighted another cigarette with no less care than he had devoted to the other operation, and said nothing more until the taxi drew up outside a black and white painted brick building on the river side of Sutton Place South. He got out and helped her out, and she said: "Come in for a minute and let me fix you a real drink."

"That's just what I needed," he said, and paid off the taxi, and strolled up beside her as casually as if they had known each other for a hundred years, and it was just like that, and that was how it was.

CHAPTER IV



THE living-room was at the back. It was big and quiet and comfortable. There was a phonoradio and a record cabinet, and a big bookcase, and another tier of shelves stacked with sheet music, and a baby piano. The far end of it was solid with tall windows.

"There's a sort of garden outside," she said. "And the other end of it falls straight down on to East River Drive, and there's nothing beyond that but the river, so it's almost rustic. It only took me about three years to find it."

He nodded.

"It looks like three well-spent years."

He felt at home there, and easily relaxed. Even the endless undertones of traffic were almost lost there, so that the city they just left might have been a hundred miles away.

He strolled by the bookcase, scanning the titles. They were a patchwork mixture, ranging from *The African Queen* to *The Wind in the Willows*, from Robert Nathan to Emil Ludwig, from *Each to the*

Other to Innocent Merriment. But they made a pattern, and in a little while he found it.

He said: "You like some nice reading."

"I have to do something with my feeble brain every so often. I may be just another night-club singer, but I did go to Smith College and I did graduate from University of California, so I can't help it if I want to take my mind off creep joints sometimes. It's really a great handicap."

He smiled.

"I know what you mean."

He prowled on, came to the piano, set his drink on it, and sat down. His fingers rippled over the keys, idly and aimlessly, and then crept into the refrain of *September Song*.

She sat on the couch, looking at him, with her own glass in her hand.

He finished abruptly, picked up his drink again, and crossed the room to sit down beside her.

"What do you know about Zellermann?" he asked.

"Nothing much. He's one of these Park Avenue medicine-men. I think he's supposed to be a refugee from Vienna—he got out just before the Nazis moved in. But he didn't lose much. As a matter of fact, he made quite a big hit around here. I haven't been to his office, but I'm told it looks like something off a Hollywood set.

"His appointment book looks like a page out of the Social Register, and there's a beautifully carved blonde nurse-receptionist who'd probably give most of his male patients a complex if they didn't have any to start with. He's got a private sanitarium in Connecticut, too, which is supposed to be quite a place. The inmates get rid of their inhibitions by doing exactly what they please and then paying for any special damage."

"You mean if they have a secret craving to tear the clothes off a nurse or throw a plate of soup at a waiter, they can be accommodated—at a fancy tariff."

"Something like that, I guess. Dr. Zellermann says that all mental troubles come from people being thwarted by some convention that doesn't agree with their particular personality. So the cure is to take the restriction away—like taking a tight shoe off a corn. He says that everyone ought to do just what their instincts and impulses tell them, and then everything would be lovely."

"I notice he wasn't repressing any of his

impulses," Simon remarked.

The girl shrugged.

"You're always meeting that sort of creep in this sort of business. I ought to have been able to handle him. But what the hell. It just wasn't my night to be tactful."

"You'd met him before, of course."

"Oh, yes. He's always hanging around the joint. Cookie introduced him the other night. He's one of her pets."

"So I gathered. Is it Love, or is he treating her? I should think a little deep digging into her mind would really be something."

"You said it, brother. I wouldn't want to go in there without an armored diving suit."

H E COCKED a quiet eye at her.

"She's a honey, isn't she?"

"She is."

"Everybody's backslapper and good egg, with a heart of garbage and scrap iron."

"That's about it. But people like her."

"They would." He sipped his drink. "She gave me rather a funny feeling. It sounds so melodramatic, but she's the first woman I ever saw who made me feel that she was completely and frighteningly evil. It's a sort of psychic feeling, and I got it all by myself."

"You're not kidding. She can be frightening."

"I can see her carrying a whip in a white-slave trading post, or running a baby farm and strangling the little bastards and burying them in the back yard."

Avalon laughed.

"You mightn't be so far wrong. She's been around town for years, but nobody seems to know much about her background before that. She may have done all those things before she found a safer

way of making the same money."

Simon brooded for a little while.

"And yet," he said, "the waiter was telling me about all the public-spirited work she does for the sailors."

"You mean Cookie's Canteen? . . . Yes, she makes great character with that."

"Is it one of those Seamen's Missions?"

"No, it's all her own. She hands out coffee and coke and sandwiches, and there's a juke box and hostesses and entertainment."

"You've been there, I suppose."

"I've sung there two or three times. It's on Fiftieth Street near Ninth Avenue—not exactly a ritzy neighborhood, but the boys go there."

He put a frown and a smile together, and said: "You mean she doesn't make anything out of it? Has she got a weakness for philanthropy between poisonings, or does it pay off in publicity, or does she just dote on those fine virile uninhibited sailor boys?"

"It could be all of those. Or perhaps she's got one last leathery little piece of conscience tucked away somewhere, and it takes care of that and makes her feel really fine. Or am I being a wee bit romantic? I don't know. And what's more, I don't have to care any more, thank God."

"You're quite happy about it?"

"I'm happy anyway. I met you. Build me another drink."

He took their glasses over to the side table where the supplies were, and poured and mixed. He felt more than ever that the evening had been illumined by a lucky star. He could put casual questions and be casually flippant about everything, but he had learned quite a lot in a few hours. And Cookie's Canteen loomed in his thoughts like a great big milestone.

Before he was finished with it he would

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want more serious answers about that irreconcilable benevolence. He would know much more about it and it would have to make sense to him. And he had a soft and exciting feeling that he had already taken more than the first step on the unmarked trail that he was trying to find.

He brought the drinks back to the couch, and sat down again, taking his time over the finding and preparation of a cigarette.

"I'm still wondering," she said, "what anyone like you would be doing in a joint like that."

"I have to see how the other half lives. I'd been out with some dull people, and I'd just gotten rid of them, and I felt like having a drink, and I happened to be passing by, so I just stopped in."

NONE of it was true, but it was good enough.

"Then," he said, "I heard you sing."

"How did you like it?"

"Very much."

"I saw you before I went on," she said. "I was singing for you."

He struck a match, and went on looking at her between glances at the flame and his kindling cigarette.

He said lightly: "I never knew I was so fascinating."

"I'm afraid you are. And I expect you've been told all about it before."

"You wouldn't like me if you knew me."

"Why not?"

"My glamour would dwindle. I brush my teeth just like anyone else; and sometimes I burp."

"You haven't seen me without my make-up."

He inspected her again critically.

"I might survive it."

"And I'm lazy and untidy and I have expensive tastes."

"I," he said, "am not a respectable citizen. I shoot people and I open safes. I'm not popular. People send me bombs through the mail, and policemen are always looking for an excuse to arrest me. There isn't any peace and stability where I'm around."

"I'm not so peaceful and stable myself," she said seriously. "But I saw you once, and I've never forgotten you. I've read everything about you—as much as there is to read. I simply knew I was going to meet you one day, even if it took years and years. That's all. Well, now I've met

you, and you're stuck with it."

She could say things like that, in a way that nobody else could have said them and gotten away with it. The Saint had met most kinds of coquetry and invitation, and he had had to dodge the anthropophagous pursuit of a few hungry women; but this was none of those things.

She looked him in the face when she said it, and she said it straight out as if it was the most natural thing to say because it was just the truth; but there was a little speck of laughter in each of her eyes at the same time, as if she wondered what he would think of it and didn't care very much what he thought.

He said: "You're very frank."

"You won't believe me," she said, "but I never told anyone anything like this before in my life. So if you think I'm completely crazy you're probably right."

He blew smoke slowly through his lips and gazed at her, smiling a little but not very much. It was rather nice to gaze at her like that, with the subdued lamplight on her bronze head, and feel that it was the most obvious and inescapable thing for them to be doing.

This was absurd, of course; but some absurdities were more sure than any commonplace probabilities.

He picked up his glass again. He had to say something, and he didn't know what it would be.

The door-bell beat him to it.

The shrill tinny sound ripped shockingly through his silence, but the lift of his brows was microscopic. And her answering grimace was just as slight.

"Excuse me," she said.

She got up and went down the long hall corridor. He heard the door open, and heard a tuneless contralto voice that twanged like a flat guitar string.

"Hullo, darling!—oh, I'm so glad I didn't get you out of bed. Could I bring the body in for a second?"

There was the briefest flash of a pause, and Avalon said: "Oh, sure."

The door latched, and there was movement.

The raw clockspring voice said audibly: "I'm not butting in, am I?"

Avalon said flatly: "Of course not. Don't be silly."

Then they were in the room.

The Saint unfolded himself off the couch.

"Mr. Templar," Avalon said. "Miss Natello. Simon—Kay."

"How do you do," said the Saint, for want of a better phrase.

"Come in, Kay," Avalon said. "Sit down and make yourself miserable. Have a drink? You know what this night life is like. The evening's only just started. What goes on in the big city?"

Her gay babble was just a little bit forced, and perhaps only the Saint's ears would have heard it.

KAY NATELLO stayed in the entrance, plucking her orange-painted mouth with the forefinger and thumb of one hand. Under her thick sprawling eyebrows, her haunted eyes stared at the Saint with thoughtful intensity.

"Mr. Templar," she said. "Yes, you were at Cookie's."

"I was there," said the Saint vaguely, "for a while."

"I saw you."

"Quite a big night, wasn't it?" Avalon said. She sank back on to the settee. "Come on in and have a drink and tell us your troubles. Simon, fix something for her."

"I won't stay," Kay Natello said. "I didn't know you had company."

She hauled her angular bony frame out of its lean-to position against the entrance arch as gauchely as she put her spoken sentences together.

"Don't be so ridiculous," Avalon said. She was impatiently hospitable—or hospitably impatient. "We were just talking. What did you come in for, if you didn't want to stay for a few minutes?"

"I had a message for you," Kay Natello said. "If Mr. Templar would excuse us . . .?"

"If it's from Cookie, Mr. Templar was part of the ruckus, so it won't hurt him to hear it."

The other woman went on pinching her lower lip with skeletal fingers. Her shadowed eyes went back to the Saint with completely measurable blankness, and back to Avalon again.

"All right," she said. "I didn't mean to crash in here at all, really, but Cookie made such a fuss about it. You know how she is. She was a bit tight, and she lost her temper. Now she's getting tighter because she shouldn't have. She'd like to forget the whole thing. If you could . . . sort of . . . make it up with her . . ."

"If she feels like that," Avalon said, with that paralysing smiling directness which was all her own, "why didn't she

come here herself?"

"She's too tight now. You know how she gets. But I know she's sorry."

"Well, when she sobers up, she can call me. She knows where I live."

"I know how you feel, darling. I only stopped in because she begged me to. . . I'll run along now."

Avalon stood up again.

"Okay," she said, with friendly exhaustion. "I've taken a lot from Cookie before, but tonight was just too much—that's all. Why don't you beat some sense into her one of these times when she's receptive?"

"You know how she is," Kay Natello said, in that metallic monotone. "I'm sorry."

She hitched her wrap up once again around her scrawny shoulders, and her hollow eyes took a last deliberate drag at the Saint.

"Goodnight, Mr. Templar," she said. "It was nice meeting you."

"It was nice meeting you," Simon replied, with the utmost politeness.

HE CROSSED to the side table again and half refilled his glass while he was left alone, and turned back to meet Avalon Dexter as the outer door closed and her skirts swished through the entrance of the room again.

"Well?" She was smiling at him, as he was convinced now that nobody else could smile. "How do you like that?"

"I don't," he said soberly.

"Oh, she's as whacky as the rest of Cookie's clique," she said carelessly. "Don't pay any attention to her. It's just like Cookie to try and send an ambassador to do her apologizing for her. It'd hurt too much if she ever had to do it herself. But just this once I'm not going to—"

"I'm afraid you've missed something," Simon said, still soberly, and perhaps more deliberately. "Natello didn't come here to deliver Cookie's apologies. I've got to tell you that."

Avalon Dexter carried her glass over to the side table.

"Well, what did she come for?"

"You went out with a beautiful exit line. Only it was just too good. That's why Cookie is so unhappy now. And that's why she had Natello drop in. To find out what kind of a hook-up there might be between us. It happens that there wasn't any." The Saint put his glass transiently to his mouth. "But that isn't what Natello found out."

The break in her movements might have been no more than an absent-minded search for the right bottle.

"So what?" she asked.

"So I honestly didn't mean to involve you with anything," he said.

She completed the reconstruction of a highball without any other hesitation; but when she turned to him again with the drink in her hand, the warm brown eyes with the flecks of laughter in them were as straight as he had always seen them.

"Then," she said, "you didn't just happen to be at Cookie's tonight by accident."

"Maybe not," he said.

"For Heaven's sake, sit down," she said.

"What is this—a jitterbug contest? You and Kay ought to get married. You could have so much fun."

He smiled at her again, and left one final swallow in his glass.

"I've got be running along. But I'm not fooling. I really wish that nobody who had any connection with Cookie had seen me here. And now, to use your own words, you're stuck with it."

She looked at him with all the superficial vivacity thrown off, seriously, from steady footholds of maturity. And like everything else she did that was unexpected, after she had done it it was impossible to have expected anything else.

"You mean it might be—unhealthy?"

"I don't want to sound scary, but . . . yes."

"I'm not scared. But don't you think you might tell me why?"

He shook his head.

"I can't, right now. I've told you more than I should have already, as a matter of fact. But I had to warn you. Beyond that, the less you know, the safer you'll be. And I may be exaggerating. You can probably brush it off. You recognised me from a picture you saw once, and you were good and mad, so you threw out that parting crack just to make trouble. Then I picked you up outside, and you thought I'd been nice, so you just bought me a drink. That's the only connection we have."

"Well, so it is. But if this is something exciting, like the things I fell in love with you for, why can't I be in on it?"

"Because you sing much too nicely, and the ungodly are awful unmusical."

"Oh, fish," she said.

He grinned, and finished his drink, and put down the glass.

"Thow me out, Avalon," he said. "In

another minute dawn is going to be breaking, and I'm going to shudder when I hear the crash."

And this was it, this was the impossible and inevitable, and he knew all at once now that it could never have been any other way.

She said: "Don't go."

CHAPTER V



SIMON woke up with the squeal of the telephone bell splitting his eardrums. He reached out a blind hand for it and said: "Hullo."

"Hullo," it said. "Mr. Templar?"

The voice was quite familiar, although its inflection was totally different from the way he had heard it last. It was still excessively precise and perfectionist; but whereas before it had had the precision of a spray of machine-gun slugs, now it had the mellifluous authority of a mechanical unit in a production line.

"Speaking," said the Saint.

"I hope I didn't wake you up."

"Oh, no."

Simon glanced at his wrist watch. It was just after twelve.

"This is Dr. Ernst Zellermann," said the telephone.

"So I gathered," said the Saint. "How are you?"

"Mr. Templar, I owe you an apology. I had too much to drink last night. I'm usually a good drinker, and I have no idea why it should have affected me that way. But my behavior was inexcusable. My language—I would prefer to forget. I deserved just what happened to me. In your place, I would have done exactly what you did."

The voice was rich and crisp with candor. It was the kind of voice that knew what it was talking about, and automatically inspired respect. The professional voice. It was a voice which naturally invited you to bring it your troubles, on which it was naturally comfortable to lean.

Simon extracted a cigarette from the pack on the bedside table.

"I knew you wouldn't mind," he said amiably. "After all, I was only carrying out your own principles. You did what your instincts told you—and I let my

instincts talk to me."

"Exactly. You are perfectly adjusted. I congratulate you for it. And I can only say I am sorry that our acquaintance should have begun like that."

"Think nothing of it, dear wart. Any other time you feel instinctive we'll try it out again."

"Mr. Templar, I'm more sorry than I can tell you. Because I have a confession to make. I happen to be one of your greatest admirers. I have read a great deal about you, and I've always thought of you as the ideal exponent of those principles you were referring to. The man who never hesitated to defy convention when he knew he was right. I am as detached about my own encounter with you as if I were a chemist who had been blown up while he was experimenting with an explosive. Even at my own expense, I have proved myself right. That is the scientific attitude."

"There should be more of it," said the Saint gravely.

"Mr. Templar, if you could take that attitude yourself, I wish you would give me the privilege of meeting you in more normal circumstances."

The Saint exhaled a long streamer of smoke towards the ceiling.

"I'm kind of busy," he said.

"Of course, you would be. Let me see. This is Thursday. You are probably going away for the weekend."

"I might be."

"Of course, your plans would be indefinite. Why don't we leave it like this? My number is in the telephone book. If by chance you are still in town on Saturday, would you be generous enough to call me? If you are not too busy, we might have lunch together. How is that?"

Simon thought for a moment, and knew that there was only one answer.

"Okay," he said. "I'll call you."

"I shall be at your disposal."

"And by the way," Simon said gently, "how did you know my phone number?"

"Miss Dexter was kind enough to tell me where you were staying," said the clipped persuasive voice. "I called her first, of course, to apologise to her. . . . Mr. Templar, I shall enjoy resuming our acquaintance."

"I hope you will," said the Saint.

He put the handpiece back, and lay stretched out on his back for a while with his hands clasped behind his head

and his cigarette cocked between his lips, staring uncritically at the opposite cornice.

HE HAD several things to think about, and it was a queer way to be reminded of them—or some of them—item by item, while he was waking himself up and trying to focus his mind on something else.

He remembered everything about Cookie's Cellar, and Cookie, and Dr. Ernst Zellermann, and everything else that he had to remember; but beyond that there was Avalon Dexter, and with her the memory went into a strange separateness like a remembered dream, unreal and incredible and yet sharper than reality and belief. A tawny mane and straight eyes and soft lips. A voice singing. And a voice saying: "I was singing for you . . . the things I fell in love with you for . . ."

And saying: "Don't go. . . ."

No, that was the dream, and that hadn't happened.

He dragged the telephone book out from under the bedside table, and thumbed through it for a number.

The hotel operator said: "Thank you, sir."

He listened to the burr of dialling.

Avalon Dexter said: "Hullo."

"This is me," he said.

"How nice for you." Her voice was sleepy, but the warm laughter was still there. "This is me, too."

"I dreamed about you," he said.

"What happened?"

"I woke up."

"Why didn't you go back to sleep?"

"I wish I could."

"So do I. I dreamed about you, too."

"No," he said. "We were both dreaming."

"I'd still like to go back to sleep. But creeps keep calling me up."

"Like Zellermann, for instance?"

"Yes. Did he call you?"

"Sure. Very apologetic. He wants me to have lunch with him."

"He wants *us* to have lunch with him."

"On those terms, I'll play."

"So will I. But then, why do we have to have him along?"

"Because he might pick up the check."

"You're ridiculous," she said.

He heard her yawn. She sounded very snug. He could almost see her long hair spread out on the pillow.

"I'll buy you a cocktail in a few hours," he said, "and prove it."

"I love you," she said.

"But I wasn't fooling about anything else I said last night. Don't accept any other invitations. Don't go to any strange places. Don't believe anything you're told. After you got yourself thought about with me last night, anything could happen. So please be careful."

"I will."

"I'll call you back."

"If you don't," she said, "I'll haunt you."

He hung up.

But it had happened. And the dream was real, and it was all true, and it was good that way. He worked with his cigarette for a while.

Then he took the telephone again, and called room service. He ordered corned beef hash and eggs, toast and marmalade and coffee. He felt good. Then he revived the operator and said: "After that you can get me a call to Washington. Imperative five, five hundred. Extension five. Take your time."

He was towelling himself after a swift stinging shower when the bell rang.

"Hamilton," said the receiver dryly. "I hope you aren't getting me up."

"This was your idea," said the Saint. "I have cased the joint, as we used to say in the soap operas. I have inspected your creeps. I'm busy."

"What else?"

"I met the most wonderful girl in the world."

"You do that every week."

"This is a different week."

"This is a priority line. You can tell me about your love life in a letter."

"Her name is Avalon Dexter, and she's in the directory. She's a singer, and until the small hours of this morning she was working for Cookie."

"Which side is she on?"

"I only just met her," said the Saint, with unreal impersonality. "But they saw her with me. Will you remember that, if anything funny happens to me—or to her? . . . I met Zellermann, too. Rather violently, I'm afraid. But he's a sweet and forgiving soul. He wants to buy me a lunch."

"What did you buy last night?" Hamilton asked suspiciously.

"You'll see it on my expense account—I don't think it'll mean raising the income tax rate more than five per cent," said

the Saint, and hung up.

He ate his brunch at leisure, and saved his coffee to go with a definitive cigarette.

He had a lot of things to think about, and he only began trying to co-ordinate them when the coffee was clean and nutty on his palate, and the smoke was crisp on his tongue and drifting in aromatic clouds before his face.

NOW there was Cookie's Canteen to think about. And that might be something else again.

Now the dreaming was over, and this was another day.

He went to the closet, hauled out a suitcase, and threw it on the bed. Out of the suitcase he took a bulging briefcase. The briefcase was a particularly distinguished piece of luggage, for into its contents had gone an amount of ingenuity, corruption, deception, seduction and simple larceny which in itself could have supplied the backgrounds for a couple of dozen stories.

Within its hand-sewn compartments was a collection of documents in blank which represented the cream of many years of research. On its selection of letterheads could be written letters purporting to emanate from almost any institution between the Dozey Dairy Company of Kansas City and the Dominican Embassy in Ankara.

An assortment of visiting cards in two or three crowded pockets was prepared to identify anybody from the Mayor of Jericho to Sam Schiletti, outside plumbing contractor, of Exterior Falls, Oregon. There were passports with the watermarks of a dozen governments—driving licences, pilot's licences, ration books, credit cards, birth certificates, warrants, identification cards, passes, permits, memberships and authorisations enough to establish anyone in any rôle from a Bulgarian tight-rope walker to a wholesale fish merchant from Grimsby.

And along with them there was a unique symposium of portraits of the Saint, flattering and unflattering, striking and non-descript, natural and disguised—together with a miscellany of stamps, seals, dies and stickers which any properly conditioned bureaucrat would have drooled with ecstasy to behold. It was an outfit that would have been worth a fortune to any modern brigand, and it had been worth exactly that much to the Saint

on several previous occasions.

He sat down at the desk and worked for an unhurried hour, at the end of which time he had all the necessary documents to authenticate an entirely imaginary seaman by the name of Tom Simons, of the British Merchant Marine. He folded and refolded them several times, rubbed the edges with a nail file, smeared them with cigarette ash, sprinkled them with water and a couple of drops of coffee and walked over them several times until they were convincingly soiled and worn.

Then he finished dressing and went out. He took a Fifth Avenue bus to Washington Square, and walked from there down through the gray shabby streets of the lower east side until he found the kind of store he was looking for.

He couldn't help the natural elegance of his normal appearance, but the proprietor eyed him curiously when he announced himself as a buyer and not a seller.

"I've got a character part in a play," he explained, "and this was the only way I could think of to get the right kind of clothes."

That story increased his expenses by at least a hundred per cent; but he came out at the end of an hour with an untidy parcel containing a complete outfit of well-worn apparel that would establish the character of Tom Simons against any kind of scrutiny.

He took a taxi back to the Algonquin.

There were two telephone messages.

Miss Dexter phoned, and would call again about seven o'clock.

Miss Natello phoned.

Simon arched his brows over the second message, and smiled a little thinly before he tore it up. The ungodly were certainly working. Fundamentally he didn't mind that, but the persistence of the coverage took up the slack in his nerves. And it wasn't because he was thinking about himself.

He called Avalon's number, but there was no answer.

There are meaningless gulfs of time in real life which never occur in well-constructed stories—hours in which nothing is happening, nothing is about to happen, nothing is likely to happen, and nothing does happen. The difference is that in a story they can be so brightly and lightly skimmed over, simply by starting a fresh paragraph with some such inspired sentence as "Simon Templar went downstairs

again for a drink, and Wolcott Gibbs waved to him across the lobby, and they spent a couple of congenial hours lamenting sad standards of the current season on Broadway."

SIMON TEMPLAR went downstairs again for a drink, and Wolcott Gibbs waved to him across the lobby, and they spent a couple of congenial hours lamenting the sad standards of the current season on Broadway; and all the time Simon was watching the clock and wondering what held back the hands.

It was fifteen hours, or minutes, after seven when the call came.

"Merry Christmas," she said.

"And a happy new year to you," he said. "What goes?"

"Darling," she said, "I forgot that I had a date with my arranger to go over some new songs. So I had to rush out. What are you doing?"

"Having too many drinks with Wolcott Gibbs."

"Give him my love."

"I will."

"Darling," she said, "there's a hotel man from Chicago in town—he used to come and hear me bellow when I was at the Pump Room—and he wants me to go to dinner. And I've got to find myself another job."

He felt empty inside, and unreasonably resentful, and angry because he knew it was unreasonable.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"So am I. I do want to see you, really."

"Have you met this creep before?"

"Oh, yes. Lots of times. He's quite harmless—just a bit dreary. But he might have a job for me, and I've got to earn an honest living somehow. Don't worry—I haven't forgotten what you told me about being careful. By the way, you'll be glad to hear Cookie called me."

"She did?"

"Yes. Very apologetic, and begging me to drop in and see her."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I hate the joint and I hate her, but she knows everybody in town and she isn't a good enemy to have. I'll see what happens tonight. . . . What are you going to be doing later?"

"Probably carousing in some gilded cesspool, surrounded by concubines and champagne."

"I ought to be able to get rid of this creep at a sensible hour, and I would like

to see you."

"Why don't you call me when you get through? I'll probably be home. If I'm not, leave a number."

"I will." Her voice was wistful. "Don't be too gay with those concubines."

Simon went back to his table. He felt even emptier inside. It had been such a beautiful dream. He didn't know whether to feel foolish, or cynical, or just careless. But he didn't want to feel any of those things. It was a persistent irritation, like a piece of gravel in a shoe.

"What are you doing this evening?" Gibbs asked him.

"Having another drink."

"I've got to get some dinner before I go to that opening. Why don't you join me?"

"I'd like to." Simon drained his glass. He said casually: "Avalon Dexter sent you her love."

"Oh, do you know her? She's a grand gal. A swell person. One of the few honest-to-God people in that racket."

There was no doubt about the spontaneous warmth of Wolcott's voice. And measured against his professional exposure to all the chatter and gossip of the show world, it wasn't a comment that could be easily dismissed. The back of Simon's brain went on puzzling.

CHAPTER VI



THE Saint watched Mr. Gibbs depart, and gently tested the air around his tonsils. It felt dry. He moved to the cusp of the bar and proceeded to contemplate his nebulous dissatisfactions.

He ordered more of the insidious product of the house of Dawson and meditated upon the subject of Dr. Ernest Zellermann, that white-maned, black-browed high priest of the unconscious mind.

Why, Simon asked himself, should a man apologise for sticking his face in the way of a fast travelling fist? Why should Dr. Z wish to further his acquaintance of the Saint, who had not only knocked him tail over teakettle but had taken his charming companion home? How, for that matter, did Dr. Z know that Avalon Dexter might have the telephone number of Simon Templar?

Beyond the faintest shadow of pale

doubt, Brother Zellermann was mixed up in this situation. And since the situation was now the object of the Saint's eagle eyeing, the type-case psychiatrist should come in for his share of scrutiny. And there was nothing to do but scrutinize. . . .

Simon tossed off everything in his glass but a tired ice cube and went out into the night. The doorman flicked one glance at the debonair figure who walked as if he never touched the ground, and almost dislocated three vertebrae as he snapped to attention.

"Taxi, sir?"

"Thanks," said the Saint, and a piece of silver changed hands. The doorman earned this by crooking a finger at a waiting cab driver. And in another moment Simon Templar was on his way to the Park Avenue address of Dr. Zellermann.

It was one of those impulsive moves of unplanned exploration that the Saint loved best. It had all the fascination of potential surprises, all the intriguing vistas of an advance into new untrodden country, all the uncertainty of dipping the first fork into a plate of roadside eating stew. You went out into the wide world and made your plans as you went along and hoped the gods of adventure would be good to you.

Simon relaxed hopefully all the way uptown until the taxi decanted him in front of the windowed monolith wherein Dr. Ernst Zellermann laved the libido.

A light burned on the twelfth floor, and that was entree even though the lobby roster placed Dr. Zellermann on the eighteenth floor. Simon entered the elevator, signed "John Paul Jones" on the form for nocturnal visitors, said "Twelve" to the ancient lackey, and was levitated on greased runners.

He walked toward the lighted doorway, an emporium of Swedish masseurs, but wheeled on silent feet as soon as the elevator doors closed and went up six flights as swiftly and as silently as the elevator has ascended. The lock on Zellermann's door gave him little trouble, snick-ing open to reveal a waiting room of considerable proportions.

The pencil beam of his flashlight told him that the man who decorated this restful room knew the value of the pause that relaxes. "This is your home," the room said. "Welcome. You like this chair? It was made for you. The prints? Nice, aren't they? Nothing like the coun-

try. And isn't that soft green of the walls pleasant to the eye? Lean back and relax. The doctor will see you presently, as a friend. What else, in these surroundings?"

The Saint tipped his mental hat and looked around for more informative detail. This wasn't much. The receptionist's desk gave up nothing but some paper and pencils, a half pack of cigarettes, a lipstick, and a copy of *Trembling Romances*. Three names were written on an appointment pad on the desk top.

He went into the consultation room, which was severely furnished with plain furniture. A couch lay against one wall, the large desk was backed against an opaque window, and the walls were free of pictorial distractions.

YET this, too, was a restful room. The green of the reception room walls had been continued here, and despite the almost monastic simplicity of the *décor*, this room invited you to relax. Simon had no doubt that a patient lying on the couch, with Dr. Zellermann discreetly in the background gloom, would drag from the censored files of memory much early minutiae, the stuff of which human beings are made.

But where were the files? The office safe?

Surely it was necessary to keep records, and surely the records of ordinary daily business need not be hidden. The secretary must need a card file of patients, notations, statements of accounts, and what not.

Once more the pencil beam slid around the office, and snapped out. Then the Saint moved silently—compared to him, a shadow would have seemed to be wearing clogs—back into the reception room. His flash made an earnest scrutiny of the receptionist's corner and froze on a small

protuberance. Simon's fingers were on it in a second. He pulled, then lifted—and a section of wall slid upward to reveal a filing cabinet, a small safe, and a typewriter.

The Saint sighed as he saw the aperture revealed no liquid goods. Tension always made him thirsty, and breaking and entering always raised his tension a notch.

As he reached for the top drawer of the file to see what he could see, the telephone on the reception desk gave out a shrill demand. The Saint's reflexes sent a hand toward it, which hovered over the instrument while he considered the situation. More than likely, somebody had called a wrong number. It was about that time in the evening when party goers reach the point where it seems a good idea to call somebody, and the somebody is often determined by spinning the dial at random.

If it happens to be your telephone that rings, and you struggle out of pleasant dreams to curse any dizzy friend who would call you at that hour, and you say "Hello" in churlish tones, some oafish voice is likely as not to give you a song and a dance about being a telephone tester, and would you please stand three feet away from the phone and say "Methodist Episcopalian" or some such phrase, for which you get the horse laugh when you pick up the phone again.

This is considered top-hole wit in some circles.

If this were the case, Simon reflected, no harm could be done by answering. But what harm in any case? he asked himself, and lifted the receiver.

"Hullo."

"Ernst?" asked a sharp and vaguely familiar voice. "I'm glad you came early. I'll be there immediately. Something has

[Turn page]

CAN YOUR SCALP PASS THE
***F-N TEST?**



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1 "It's F-N, the test for men!" Scratch your head—if you find dryness or loose dandruff you need Wildroot Cream-Oil. Buy the large economy size.

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CREAM-OIL CHARLIE
SAYS: "IT CONTAINS
LANOLIN!"

3 TUNE IN: 2 NETWORK SHOWS!
"The Adventures of Sam Spade" Sunday evenings, CBS Network; "King Cole Trio Time" Saturday afternoons, NBC Network.



arisen in connection with Gamaliel Foley."

Click. The caller hung up. That click was echoed by the Saint's memory, and he directed his flashlight at the appointment pad to confirm it. There it was, sandwiched between the names of Mrs. Gerald Meldon and James Prather. Gamaliel Foley.

The Saint was torn between two desires. One was to remain and eavesdrop on the approaching meeting of Dr. Z and his caller with the vaguely familiar voice; the other was to find Gamaliel Foley and learn what he could learn. The latter procedure seemed more practical, since the office offered singularly few conveniences for eavesdropping; but Simon was saddened by the knowledge that he would never know what happened when the conferees learned that it was not Dr. Zeller-mann who had answered the call.

He replaced the wall panel and went away. On the twelfth floor he summoned the elevator, and he wasn't certain whether or not he hoped he wouldn't encounter Park Avenue's psyche soother. It might have been an interesting passage at charms, for the doctor could give persiflage with the best. But no such contretemps occurred on the way out; and Simon walked the block to Lexington Avenue and repaired to a drugstore stocked with greater New York's multiple set of telephone directories.

He found his man, noted the Brooklyn address, and hailed a taxicab.

FOR a short while Simon Templar gave himself over to trying to remember a face belonging to the voice that had spoken with such urgency on the telephone. The owner of that voice was excited, which would distort the voice to some extent; and there was the further possibility that Simon had never heard the voice over the telephone before, which would add further distortion to remembered cadences and tonal qualities.

His worst enemies could not call Simon Templar methodical. His method was to stab—but to stab unerringly—in the dark. This characteristic, possessed to such an incredible degree by the Saint, had wrought confusion among those same worst enemies on more occasions than can be recorded here—and the list wouldn't sound plausible, anyway.

So, after a few unsatisfactory sallies into the realm of Things To Be Remem-

bered, he gave up and leaned back to enjoy the ride through the streets of Brooklyn. He filed away the incident under unfinished business and completely relaxed. He gave no thought to his coming encounter with Gamaliel Foley, of which name there was only one in all New York's directories, for he had no referent. Foley, so far as he was concerned, might as well be Adam, or Zoroaster—he had met neither.

When the cab driver stopped at the address the Saint had given, Simon got out and walked back two blocks to the address he wanted. This was an apartment house of fairly respectable mien, a blocky building rising angularly into some hundred feet of midnight air. Its face was pocked with windows lighted at intervals, and its whole demeanor was one of middle-class stolidity.

He searched the name plates beside the door, found Foley on the eighth floor. The Saint sighed again. This was his night for climbing stairs. He rang a bell at random on the eleventh floor, and when the door buzzed, slipped inside. He went up the carpeted stairway, ticking off what the residents had had for dinner as he went. First floor, lamb, fish, and something that might have been beef stew; second floor, cabbage; third floor, ham flavored with odors of second floor's cabbage; and so on.

He noted a strip of light at the bottom of Foley's door. He wouldn't be getting the man out of bed, then. Just what he would say, Simon had no idea. He always left such considerations to the inspiration of the moment. He put knuckles to the door.

There was no sound of a man getting out of a chair to grump to the door in answer to a late summons. There was no sound at all. The Saint knocked again. Still no sound. He tried the door. It opened on to a living room modestly furnished with medium-priced overstuffed pieces.

"Hullo," Simon called softly. "Foley?"

He stepped inside, closed the door. No one was in the living room. On the far side was a door leading into a kitchen, the other no doubt led into the bedroom. He turned the kitchen light on, looked about, switched off the light and knocked on the bedroom door. He opened it, flicked the light switch.

There was someone here, all right—or had been. What was here now was not

a person, it was a corpse. It sprawled on the rug, face down, and blood had seeped from the back to the green carpet. It was—had been—a man.

Without disturbing the body any more than necessary, Simon gathered certain data. He had been young, somewhere in his thirties; he was a white-collar worker, neat, clean; he bore identification cards which named him Gamaliel Bradford Foley, member of the Seamen's Union.

The body bore no information which would link this man with Dr. Ernst Zeller-mann. Nor did the apartment, for that matter. The Saint searched it expertly, so that it seemed as if nothing had been disturbed, yet every possible hiding place had been thoroughly explored. Foley, it seemed, was about to become engaged to a Miss Martha Lane, Simon gathered from a letter which he shamelessly read. The comely face which smiled from a picture on Foley's dresser was probably her likeness.

Since no other information was to be gathered here, the Saint left. He walked a half dozen blocks to a crowded all-night drugstore and went into an empty phone booth, where he dialled Brooklyn police.

He told the desk sergeant that at such and such an address "you will find one Gamaliel Foley, F-o-l-e-y, deceased. You'll recognise him by the knife he's wearing—in his back."

CHAPTER VII



AT THE crack of ten-thirty the next morning, Avalon Dexter's call brought him groggily from sleep.

"It's horribly early," she said, "but I couldn't wait any longer to find out if you're all right."

"Am I?" the Saint

asked.

"I think you're wonderful. When do you want to see me?"

"As soon as possible. Yesterday, for example. Did you have a good time last night?"

"Miserable. And you?"

"Well, I wouldn't call it exciting. I thought about you at odd moments."

"Yes, I know," she said. "Whenever you did, I turned warm all over, and wriggled."

"Must have been a bit on the dis-

concerting side to your escort."

She laughed, bells at twilight.

"It cost me a job, I think. He'd peer at me every time it happened. I think he concluded it was St. Vitus. The job was in Cleveland, anyway."

"Some of the best people live in Cleveland," Simon said.

"But you don't, so I didn't go."

"Ordinarily, I'd have a nice fast comeback for such a leading remark, but I seem to have trouble finding any words at all."

"You could say 'I love you.'"

"I love you," Simon said.

"Me, too, kid."

"This being Friday," Simon said, "what do you say we go calling on people after we have brunchted together, and then let the rest of the day take care of itself?"

"That scrambling sound," she said, "is eggs in my kitchen. So hurry."

"Thirty minutes," said the Saint, and hung up.

He had never needed thirty minutes to shave, shower, and dress, but he needed to make a call.

Hamilton said: "What kind of a jam are you in this time?"

"If you can get anything on one Gamaliel Bradford Foley," the Saint said, "it might be useful. I'd do it myself, but you can do it faster, and I expect to be sort of busy on other things."

"What sort of other things?"

"I'm going to read the papers, and take my girl calling."

"The same girl?"

"But definitely," said the Saint.

"What have you learned?"

"Nothing," the Saint said, "that is of any specific use to us, but the wind is full of papers. I'm watching to see how they fall."

"I trust you know the difference between straws and hay," Hamilton said somewhat darkly, and rang off.

Simon picked up a paper on the way out of the hotel, and found the death of Gamaliel Bradford Foley recorded in two paragraphs on an inside page.

DEATH LOOKS IN ON TOP SEAMEN'S UNION OFFICIAL

Gamaliel Bradford Foley, secretary of the Seamen's Union, Local 978 (AFL), was found stabbed to death in his Brooklyn apartment early this morning by police.

A telephone tip—"you'll recognize him by the knife he's wearing, in his back"—sent patrol car 12 to the scene. Officers J. R. McCutcheon

and I. P. Wright found the corpse in the apartment bedroom, with a butcher knife in its back. An arrest is expected any moment, Inspector Fernack told reporters today.

It wasn't a smile that twisted the Saint's sensitive mouth as the taxi took him to Avalon's place—it was a grimace of skepticism. "An arrest is expected any moment." He shrugged. The police certainly knew no more than himself—not as much, as a matter of fact. He knew of the connection, however nebulous, between Foley and Dr. Zellermann. How could the police expect an arrest?

Ah, well. That was the sort of thing reporters put on copy paper. City editors had to be considered, too. If you, as a reporter, phoned your desk with a story, you wanted something to lead into a follow-up yarn, and "arrest expected" certainly indicated more to come.

Avalon met him in a housecoat of greenish blue that in a strange and not understandable way was completely right for her. She turned up her face and he kissed her on the mouth, that mouth so full of promise. They said nothing.

SHE led him to a divan, where he sat wordless with her beside him. Her tawny hair was shot with glints of gold. Her eyes, he noted in passing, were dark, yet alight. He thought of a title by Dale Jennings: "Chaos Has Dark Eyes."

She said: "Hullo, boy."

He grinned.

"I burgle joints and discover bodies. I am not a respectable character. You wouldn't like me if you knew me."

"I know you," she said. "I like you. I'll demonstrate—later."

She got up, went into the kitchen, and brought back a bottle of beer.

"I hope you belong to the beer-for-breakfast school."

"There's nothing like it, unless it's Black Velvet. But that's for special breakfasts."

"Isn't this?"

"Well, not quite, you must admit."

"Yes, I must admit." She gave him a smile, a short kiss. "Excuse me while I make eggs perform."

He sipped his beer and wondered about Mrs. Gerald Meldon, whose Park Avenue address he had decided to visit. Gerald Meldon was a name to conjure with in Wall Street. He was at one time the Boy Wonder of the mart.

If he went for a stock, it signalled a rush of hangers-on. This had caused him to

operate under pseudonyms, which the Saint considered having a touch of swank—a stock-market operator using phony names. If Meldon were known to be dumping a stock, this was another signal. Everybody who could get hold of the information, dumped his. The stock usually went down.

It had been Gerald Meldon, the son—obviously—of a rich father, who had made collegiate history by dressing in white coveralls, driving along Fifth Avenue, and stealing all the street lamp bulbs one afternoon. It had been Gerald Meldon who had been chosen by Grantland Rice as All-American tackle from Harvard, accent and all.

The Saint knew nothing of Mrs. Gerald Meldon, but he could understand that reasons might exist why she should seek psychiatric help from Dr. Z. Well, he would see what he would see.

It was easy enough to find Meldon's address in the directory, and after breakfast that was what he did.

When he and Avalon arrived there later—she was now in a tailored suit of tan gabardine—the first thing he saw caused him to clutch her arm.

"Sorry," he muttered, "but my eyes have suddenly gone back on me."

She put a hand on his. Her dark eyes clouded.

"What is it, darling?"

"I'm seeing things. It must have been the beer."

She followed his gaze.

"I'm seeing things, too."

"Surely not what I'm seeing. Describe to me carefully what you think you see."

"Well, there's a kind of liveried slave on the end of a dog leash. Then, on the other end of the leash is a mink coat, and inside the coat is a dachshund. The man is leading the dog—or vice versa—from, er, pillar to post."

The Saint sighed explosively.

"If you see it, too, there's nothing wrong with me, I guess."

The sad-faced little dog led the liveried attendant nearer. The dog wagged its tail at them, the attendant elevated his nose a trifle.

"Doesn't the little beast find that a trifle warm, this time of year?" he asked the attendant.

"It isn't a question of warmth, sir, it's—ah, shall we say face? He's a Meldon property, you know."

Simon could detect no trace of irony

in tone or attitude.

"But—mink? A trifle on the ostentatious side?"

"What else, sir?" asked the gentleman's gentleman.

The Saint rang the doorbell. He and Avalon were presently shown into the drawing room, furnished in chrome and leather, lighted by three excellent Monets, hooded in red velvet drapes. Mrs. Meldon came to them there.

She was most unexpected. She did not conform. She was beautiful, but not in the fashion affected by the house. Hers was an ancient beauty, recorded by Milton, sung by Sappho. She was tall and dark. Her hair reminded you of Egyptian princesses—black and straight, outlining a dark face that kings might have fought for. She walked with an easy flowing motion in high heels that accentuated a most amazing pair of slim ankles and exciting legs. These latter were bare and brown.

HER dress was of some simple stuff, a throwaway factor until you saw how it highlighted such items as should be highlighted. It clung with loving care to her hips, it strutted where it should strut. She had a placid smile, dark eyes brightened with amusement, and a firm handshake.

Her voice held overtones of curiosity. "You wanted to see me?"

The Saint introduced himself.

"I am Arch Williams, a researcher for *Time* magazine. This is my wife."

"Quite a dish," Mrs. Meldon said. "I'll bet you play hell with visiting firemen. I'm very happy to meet you. Drink? Of course. You look the types."

Her teeth, the Saint noted, were very white. She rang a bell with a brown hand. A servant appeared.

"Move the big bar in here, Walker." To the Saint: "Those monkey suits kill me. Gerry thinks they're necessary. Prestige, you know." She made the phrase sound like unacceptable language from a lady. "*Time*, hmm? What do you want from me? Never mind, yet. Wait'll we get a drink. You have lovely legs, Mrs. Williams."

"Thank you."

"Oh, don't thank me. I had nothing to do with it. But they are pretty. I hope your husband appreciates them. So many don't."

The Saint said nothing.

He wanted to watch.

"I think he appreciates them," Avalon murmured. "Don't you, dear?"

Simon smiled.

"So many don't," Mrs. Meldon said. "You can pour yourself into a sheer tube of a dress, like mine, and a husband will look at you, glance at his watch, and give you hell for being thirty minutes late. My God, how do men expect us to make ourselves— Oh, here are the drinks. Name your poison."

When they had drinks. Mrs. Meldon gave the Saint a slow smile.

"Well, Mr. Researcher, what now?"

"I have been assigned to find out what I can about Dr. Ernst Zeller mann. We're going to pick a Doc of the Year. No slowpoke, medicine, you know."

Mrs. Meldon stared at him.

"My God, you talk in that style! Don't you find it nauseating?"

"I quit," Simon said. "But could I ask you a few questions, Mrs. Meldon? We've picked some possible subjects from the professional standpoint, and it's my job to find out what their patients think of them."

"Why pick on me?"

"You're a patient of Dr. Zeller mann's?"

"Well—uh, yes."

The Saint filed her hesitation away for future reference.

"How do you like him?" he asked.

"He's rather colossal, in a nauseating way."

"So? I should think a feeling of that sort would hamper the—er—rapport between doctor and patient."

"Oh, it does," she said, "no end. He wishes I'd like him. A phony, he."

"Really? I thought he was quite reputable."

"What is reputable?" Mrs. Meldon countered. "Is it what empty-headed trollops say, who are suckers for a patriarchal look and soft hands? Is it what some jerk says—'Five hundred dollars I paid, for a single interview'—after he's stung? He has an M.D., so what? I know an abortionist who has one."

"It helps," said the Saint.

"What do you want to know about him?" Mrs. Meldon asked. "When he was three years old in Vienna, a butcher slapped his hands because he reached for a sausage. As a result he puts his nurse in a blue smock. He won't have a white uniform around him. He doesn't know this, of course. He has no idea that the

butcher's white apron caused a psychic trauma. He says he insists on blue uniforms because they gladden the eye."

"He begins to sound like not our kind of man," the Saint put in.

"Oh, go ahead and pick him," said the Egyptian princess. "Who cares? He wouldn't be the first mass of psychic trauma picked as an outstanding jerk. No inhibitions, says he. It's a little tough on somebody who's put inhibitions by the board to these many moons to go to him as a patient. Shooting fish down a barrel, I call it. Another drink? Of course. Mix it yourself."

SHE crossed her lovely legs in such a fashion that a good portion of thigh was visible. She didn't bother to pull down her dress. She seemed tired of the discussion, even a trifle embittered, and a pattern began to form in the Saint's mind. He put early conclusions aside in the interest of conviviality and mixed drinks.

"Tell me," he said, "how you expect to get psychiatric help from a man you hold in such disregard?"

She straightened up.

"Disregard? Nothing of the sort. He knows the patter, he has the desk-side manner. He can make you tell things about yourself you wouldn't tell yourself. Maybe it helps, I don't know. Yes, I must admit it does. It helped me to understand myself, whatever small consolation that may be. I don't want to understand myself. But Gerry insisted. He wants to keep up with things. Like mink coats on dogs."

"You would say, then, that your relations with Dr. Zellermann have been pleasant?"

She looked at him steadily as he handed her a drink. "Pleasant? What's that? Sometimes you get caught up in an emotion. Emotion is a driving power you can't ignore. When you get caught up in it, whatever you do seems pleasant at the time. Even if you curse yourself afterwards, and even if you don't dare talk about it."

"Do you mean, then, he isn't ethical?"

She twisted a smile.

"What's ethical? Is being human ethical? You're born human, you know. You can't help certain impulses. See Freud. Or Krafft-Ebing. To err is human."

"And he errs?"

"Of course he does. Even if he is a so-called witch doctor of the mind. Even if he has studied Adler and Brill and Jung and Jones. You don't change a character. All the things that went into making him what he is are unalterable. They've happened. Maybe some of his professors, or fellow psychiatrists, have helped him to evaluate those factors in their proper perspective, but he's still homo sapiens and subject to the ills they're heir to."

The Saint drank his drink, set the empty glass on the elaborate portable bar. "We've taken enough of your time. Thanks for being so helpful."

Mrs. Meldon rose to her full and lovely height. "I'm no cross section on the man. Many more think he's wonderful than not. And in some ways," she said thoughtfully, "he's quite a guy, I guess."

The Saint did not ask what those ways were. He took himself and Avalon away, and hailed a taxi. When they were in it, and he had given the address of James Prather to the driver, he let himself consider Mrs. Meldon.

"Blackmail," he said finally.

"Ah, beg pardon?" Avalon murmured. "Understanding not."

"It's in the picture somewhere," he insisted. "I don't care how free from inhibition she may be, she wouldn't be as bitter as she was unless he's bleeding her in some fashion. How, is the question."

"I don't expect to be of any help," Avalon said meekly, "but I suspect the lady has played fast and loose at one time or another with the doctor—or others."

"Could be," Simon answered. "And you are a help, you know, just by being."

That line of thought occupied them shamelessly during the remainder of the ride.

James Prather they found to occupy an expensive flat in an expensive neighborhood. He gave them a rather nervous welcome, bade them be seated, and did not offer a drink. James Prather paced the floor in house slippers, smoking jacket, and fawn-colored slacks. He was a man middling thirty, with great blue eyes that reminded you of a lobster. His chin was a hue, neither pale nor blue.

He twisted the question out between writhing fingers.

"Yes? What is it?"

The Saint represented himself again as a *Time* magazine man, and named the subject of his research.

"Yes, yes," Prather said. "What about Dr. Zellermann? What kind of a man, or what kind of a doctor?"

"Both," said the Saint.

"Ah, well——" The telephone rang. "Excuse me," Prather answered, listened intently for a moment. Then he shot a glance at the Saint. "Yes," he said. "Yes. I see. Goodbye."

He turned to Simon. "Will you please get out of here?"

THE Saint watched Mr. Prather at first with a mild disdain, as if he were watching a caterpillar in somebody else's salad; then with mild amusement, as if he had discovered the owner of the salad to be his dipsomaniac Uncle Lemuel; then with concern, as if he had remembered that Uncle Lem was without issue, and might leave that handpainted cufflink to his only nephew; then with resignation, as if it were suddenly too late to rescue Uncle—or the caterpillar.

Simon motioned Avalon to a tasteful divan, and seated himself. His eyes were now mocking and gay, with blue lights. His smile was as carefree and light as a lark at dawn. He took a gold pencil and a pad from his pocket.

"You were saying," he prompted, "about Dr. Zellermann?"

James Prather's fingers were like intertwined pallid snakes, writhing in agony.

"Please," he begged. "You must go at once. I have no time for you now. Come back tomorrow, or next week. An important appointment, unexpected. Sorry, but——"

He went to the door, and held it open.

The Saint considered, and after due and deliberate consideration rose and helped Avalon to her feet.

"I'd like to come back," he told Prather at the door.

Prather nodded nervously, watched the Saint and Avalon walk toward the elevator for a few feet, then almost slammed the door. Simon pushed the elevator button, and just before the door opened, planted a swift kiss on her startled but quickly responsive mouth.

"Wait for me in the lobby, darling," he whispered, and handed her inside the car.

He took up a post of observation further down the hall, so that the elevator door was halfway between him and Prather's door. He suspected he would not have long to wait before something happened. What that something might be, he was

unable to predict.

He thought of the false trails he had run down before he began to sniff around Cookie's Cellar. He wondered if this would turn out to be another. Each of his previous attempts to locate the object of his search had uncovered one or more nests of illegality.

One had led him to a sort of warehouse, a huge structure where vast numbers of bottles of bona fide liquors were made less intoxicating by the simple addition of faintly colored distilled water. All very healthful, no doubt, and tending to reduce the incidence of drunkenness among habitués of clip clubs like Cookie's—where, incidentally, one of the delivery trucks had led him.

This wholesale watering of drinks had another humanitarian aspect: it saved work for the bartenders. Still, when he remembered the quality of Cookie's drinks, the Saint concluded that she and/or her bartenders had initiative along that same line. The Saint felt that there was room for reasonable doubt that the reduction of the alcoholic potency of the drinks stemmed from compassionate motives, cynical though that conclusion might be.

Another trail had dragged across it a herring that had turned out to be the numbers racket. During his brief examination of exponents of mathematical larceny, he had been led again, by one of the collectors, to Cookie's.

He had run down a couple of false leads that led nowhere except to the decision that this was a Mecca for the chiseller, and that some of almost everybody's best friends are petty crooks at bottom.

The Saint was looking for bigger game. Perhaps the rising elevator would bring some.

IT REGURGITATED two young men who were beyond doubt fresh in from the sea. They wore shore clothes, but the sea was in their tanned faces, their hard hands, and the set of their legs, braced automatically for the roll of a deck. The Saint couldn't see their eyes in the hall's gloom, but he knew they would have the characteristic look of those who gaze habitually on circular horizons.

They walked without speaking to James Prather's door, thumbing the button, were admitted. The Saint moved catlike to the door, but listening brought nothing. The

door was heavy, the walls designed to give privacy to the occupant. Simon sighed, summoned the elevator, and joined Avalon, who was sitting in one of those chairs that clutter the lobbies of apartment houses and gazing at the uninspiring wallpaper with a forlorn expression.

"I beg your pardon, Miss," he said, "but I was attracted by your beauty, and can't help asking you a question. I am a representative of Grimes Graphite, Inc.—'Grimes' gets the grime,' you know—and felt certain that you must use it. Is that what makes your skin glow so?"

"My mother before me, and her mother before her, rubbed their faces each night with Grimes's graphite. But I don't use it myself. I loathe it."

"That is hardly the point at issue, is it? We can use that line about your maternal progenitors, run a photo of yourself—do you ski?—no matter, we can fix that. And we might even be persuaded to raise the ante."

"You twisted my bankbook," Avalon said. "I'm your gal."

"Really?"

She smiled. "Really."

They looked at each other for a long moment, until several persons came through the front door in a group, of which the male members stared at Avalon with very obvious admiration. The Saint took her outside.

"An idea has slugged me," he said, "and I don't want you to be seen talking to me until we're ready. I just hope our sailor boys give me a couple of minutes to tell you."

"What are you talking about?" she demanded as he hailed a passing taxi.

He helped her in.

"Wait," he told the driver, and closed the glass panel separating the production end of the cab from the payload.

"I have a faint hunch," he told Avalon in a low voice. "Two young men will presently issue from that door. Possibly you saw them come in. Tanned, one in a freshly-pressed gray suit, the other in blue? Did they notice you?"

"Looked right through me."

"Don't be bitter, darling. They had big things on their minds. On their way down, they'll be free of care and ready to paint the town. On the way down, they'll remember you, and would be anxious to spend their newly-acquired wealth on you."

"I don't know what you're talking

about," she protested.

By not so much as the twitch of a nerve end did the Saint reveal his thoughts. He had not talked too much; he never talked too much. But if Avalon were among the Ungodly—and his every red corpuscle stood up on its hind feet and howled at the thought—she would know whether he was breathing hard on the heels of truth or not. Her knowledge would then be communicated to the Boys Above.

He hoped, and was not prepared to admit even to himself how much he hoped, that his shadowy objectivity had no foundation in fact. But in his unorthodox plan of maneuvering, a failure to appraise situations and people with a fishy eye often led to the filling of mourners' benches. He'd helped to fill a few himself in his day.

AND so the smile he gave Avalon was gay as confetti on New Year's Eve.

"I'm not so sure, old thing, that I myself know what I'm talking about. But if I do, those boys will come out of there with one single first desire: transportation to celebration. And I'd rather they kept greedy eyes off our cab." He opened the glass panel. "Pull up to the corner and wait," he told the driver.

With one of those lightning decisions that was the despair of his enemies and the envy of his friends, Simon Templar reorganised his offense. He wanted to talk to those two young men who had gone a-knocking at James Prather's door, but he didn't want them to know that he wanted to talk to them.

He looked gravely at Avalon.

"Will you do something for me?"

"I'll bake a cake or slice a throat," she said softly. "Or cross Fortysecond and Broadway against the traffic light at Saturday noon."

"This is an even greater sacrifice," he said mockingly. "I want you to go back into that apartment house and do some lobby loitering."

Avalon didn't frown, didn't raise her eyebrows. She meditated for the space of ten seconds. Then she raised her eyes to his.

"I get the pitch, except for one thing. Who are you?"

"Your agent, of course."

"Of course. So I manage to be seen when they come down, and will be here at the curb with them when you drive up. I'll be telling them I can't go with them,

but you'll allow me to be persuaded, provided you come along. Then we all go off in your cab." She gave him a quick kiss. "I should fall for a ten percenter yet. Everything happens to me."

She was out and clicking along the sidewalk on slim heels. The Saint watched her for a moment and wondered. What a partner she would make! She had divined his scheme of action, and with no prompting. She had known, without words, what his plan was. All he had had to do was sketch the bare outlines, and she had filled in the details.

"Drive around the block," he told the driver.

It was on the third circumnavigation that the Saint saw Avalon and the two seamen at the curb in front of the apartment house. He amused himself with the idea that these were the only live persons he had seen on his rounds: all others had been members of the Bronx nobility walking their dogs.

"Stop there," he commanded, and the cab driver drew up with a satisfying squeal of rubber.

"Darling," the Saint said to Avalon, "I was afraid you'd have gone. I'm horribly late."

"Aren't you, just?" she said. "I was about to take off. Well, since you're here — By the way, these are Joe Hyman and Sam Jeffries. Joe is the one with the glint."

Simon shook hands.

"Simon Simphon, I," he said. "Hello, kids. Where away?"

Avalon looked dubious.

"I'm not sure you're invited on this jaunt, Simon. The boys and I were just setting out to give the town a reddish hue."

The Saint said: "But I'm your agent. You can't do anything without me."

She raised her eyebrows.

"Anything?"

"Well——"

The sailors snickered.

Avalon stamped a foot.

"You know what I mean."

"Miss Dexter," Simon told her sternly, "according to law, I am your agent. Perhaps that phrase carries implications which need not be considered here. I still say that I should be able to advise you on your goings about."

She put a curl into her lip.

"Because you're my agent?"

"Lowly though that may be, yes."

Joe Hyman, stocky, gray-suited, and Sam Jeffries, tall in blue, shifted from one foot to the other.

The Saint could have kissed her. She showed that perfect combination of camaraderie and contempt, of distrust and declination, that a temperamental artist exhibits toward her agent.

"How do you do?" the Saint said, and shook hands.

Joe Hyman was inarticulate, with small hard hands. He shook as if his life depended upon it. Sam Jeffries gave the Saint a handful of limp bananas.

"We were just about to go out and put an edge on the town," Jeffries said.

The Saint appeared to consider.

"A sound idea, seems to me. Why don't we all do it?"

Each of the boys looked at Avalon. They obviously didn't relish extra company. She looked at them, then at the Saint. She shrugged. Sam Jeffries said, "Why not?"

So they all climbed into the Saint's cab. As Simon followed them into the interior, he glanced upward. He saw peering from a window the face of James Prather.

CHAPTER VIII



THE first thing the Saint noticed, when he was seated in the jump seat — so he could watch through the rear window to see if they were being followed — was that Sam Jeffries had drawn from his pocket a snub-nosed revolver

and pointed it unwaveringly at the vitals of Simon Templar.

"My goodness," the Saint ejaculated mildly.

The revolver was held so that Avalon couldn't see it. She elevated exciting eyebrows. The Saint looked at her, then at Sam Jeffries. He shrugged. "The meter," he said, gesturing at his back. "It clicks and clicks."

The revolver seemed to waggle approbation.

Sam Jeffries eyed Simon for a long time.

"You're quite a guy, ain't you, bud?"

Simon shrugged.

"Oh—I wouldn't go that far."

"We think you're quite a guy," Sam insisted. "We've been told you're more'n that. You see, I recognized you. You've

had too many photos printed in the papers—Saint."

Simon smiled, a devil-may-care smile, a smile as light as butterflies' worries.

"So? And now that we're putting everything on the barrel-head, why are you holding that cannon on me?"

Avalon gasped, and glanced sidewise.

"Well," Sam Jeffries said, "I guess it ain't necessary. I really wouldn't shoot you without'n you done more'n you've did."

Simon grinned.

"Thanks. Just to get the record straight, I really am this young lady's agent. She's a nightclub singer."

Stocky Joe Hyman said: "Huh?"

Sam Jeffries made a threatening motion at his pal.

"'F she says she's a singer, she's a singer, see? 'N'f he says he's her agent, well, shaddup, see?"

"I didn't mean nothing," Joe said.

"Well, Mister?" Sam said to Simon.

The Saint eyed the gun, the neat blue suit, the maroon tie, the long tanned face of Sam Jeffries. He began to move one hand toward his inner coat pocket.

"May I smoke?"

"Sure," Sam said.

The Saint took out his cigarette case, that case which had special properties that had before now helped him out of tighter spots than this. Not that the case seemed to differ from any similar case made of gold and embellished with a tasteful amount of precious gems. No, it seemed functional in design, if a bit on the ornate side. And functional it was; for one of its edges could be used as a razor. The toughest beard would fall before that redoubtable keenness. Not only was it a weapon for cutting bonds or throats, it contained ammunition which could be applied in sundry ways to the confusion of the Ungodly.

Interspersed among his regular brand were other special cigarettes which could blind, frighten, and fling into chaos such unsavory members of the human race as the Saint wished to blind, frighten, or fling into chaotic action. Each of these explosive tubes consisted almost entirely of magnesium.

His sensitive fingers felt among the case's cargo to light upon a bona fide smoke, which he lighted. He puffed a blue cloud at the ceiling and placed the case in a convenient jacket pocket. There might be use for it later. In doing so,

he felt the outline of the small knife, Belle, which nestled in her case up his sleeve. He eyed Sam Jeffries with that devilish carelessness that had made his name not only a by-word but a guide to independence.

"What do you mean, what now?"

"Well," Sam said, "I didn't recognize you at first. But after we was in the cab, see, I says, 'Sam, that's the Saint,' I says. And I asks myself what would the Saint want of the likes of us, and I gets no answer, see. So then I says to myself it'd be a good idea maybe if I didn't take no chances, so I hauls out my rod."

"Which fails to comfort me," the Saint murmured. His inaudible sigh of relief was let out carefully and imperceptibly. His mind was concerned with one beautiful thought: Sam Jeffries hadn't expected him to show up.

AVALON hadn't, then, tipped them off. If she were one of the Ungodly, she would have warned the two sailor boys. But she hadn't, and that made for singing in the veins.

He caught up his sudden joy in two mental hands and looked at it. It could be a treacherous kind of joy, going off half cocked at the most stupid stimuli. Suppose she had warned Sam Jeffries. Would he be clever enough to put on an act of this sort? Perhaps not but perhaps yes, too. At any rate, Avalon might have been clever enough to instigate such an act.

So the whole situation solved nothing, as far as his estimate of Avalon was concerned. And it was becoming increasingly important that he arrive at a correct estimate of her intents and purposes.

For himself he had no fear. These were young men—boys, really, in experience—whom he could overpower, escape from, or capture, if he chose to do so. But if Avalon were in this with him, his actions might explode along a certain line; if she were not, they would certainly explode along other, more uncomfortable lines.

Not that the end result would be affected. The Saint felt that he was travelling along the right road. As soon as the sea came into the picture, he was convinced that at long last he was approaching the goal.

For he had mental visions of ships sailing out of New York harbour, through the Canals, Panama or Suez, heading west or east, but always with the Orient

at one end of the run. Small ships, 3,000-ton freighters, carrying cargo to Calcutta; big ships, 20,000-ton liners of the restless deep, taking men and women to build a new world from the shattered remains.

And on these ships he saw men—boys from Glasgow, oldsters from the Bronx, trim officers from Liverpool—with an idea: "Benny sent me."

That Open Sesame formula of speak-easy days applied here, too. Benny sent me. The grilled door opened, you could libate at the bar, the house was yours. Every prospect pleased, and only the liquor was vile. Here, too, and now. Benny sent me. An agent passed over a parcel, it was stowed away, returned to New York and eventually to Benny.

Benny, in this case, being James Prather.

Maybe. In any case, it was vital to learn what these boys knew. What cares had they while sailing the seven (Seven) the Saint could think of nine, (offhand) seas? What errands run, what messages carried? Were they unwitting or willing tools of—of whom?

That was the question.

And so the Saint said, in an effort to relax Sam Jeffries' upraised black brows and Joe Hyman's corrugated forehead: "Do you want to see my union card?"

This had not the desired effect on Joe's forehead, but Sam grinned sheepishly.

"That you're her agent? Naw, I guess not. Maybe I was a little quick on the draw, but I seen times when to be slow was to be too damned slow. Look, Mister, I'm sorry, I guess. What say we forget it?"

"Would you like to shake lefthanded," Simon asked pleasantly, "or would you like to put away that postage stamp pistol?"

Sam dropped it into his jacket pocket, grinned anew, and gave Simon a hand that was hard as iron.

"Less just have fun, Saint."

"A pleasure, Sam."

Avalon went "Phew!" in an explosive release of tension. "Pardon my nerves," she said, "but these unorthodox introductions have a tendency to throw me."

Joe looked at everybody at once, a feat that did strange things to his round face.

"Ya mean this guy's d' Saint? Th' guy what diddles cops an' crooks too, all to once? 'Zat who he is?"

Sam gazed patiently at his shipmate.

"Look, we been talkin' for fifteen minutes about who he is, while we run up three bucks on the meter and'll wind up in the drink if we don't tell the guy where to go, so shaddup."

"I didn't mean nothin'," Joe murmured. "But hully criminy, the Saint!"

"So he's th' Saint, so what? Right now he's a guy goin' along to put a few belts away. Got any arguments?"

"Naw, but it's like—well, you know, well, hell, I mean—"

"Shaddup." To Avalon, Sam said: "Uh, Miss Dexter, we asked you to come along with us, 'n it seems to me this oughta be your party. Whyn't you tell th' helmsman where to throw out the anchor?"

Avalon looked at the Saint. He looked away. She turned to Joe, who was still wandering around in wonder at the Saint's being present.

"I'll go wherever Joe wants to go."

She was rewarded by one of the most complete smiles she had ever seen.

NOT that Joe reminded you of a vaudeville comic hamming romantic em-
[Turn page]

"Extra! Extra! Midget Murdered at the Carnival!"



ED HUNTER looked at the headline. It sounded so simple, after all. What more logical place was there for a midget to be murdered? Only it wasn't right—there was a word missing. It should have read: "Midget murdered at the *wrong* carnival!"

The midget's killing is only the first of the brutal crimes Ed Hunter must solve in *THE DEAD RINGER*, a brand-new crime novel by Fredric Brown. It's a baffling and ex-

citing yarn, set in a colorful carnival background—a merry-go-round of murder in which the brass ring is the solution of the mystery! Featured in the gala 196-page Spring issue of our companion publication, *MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE*—now on sale everywhere, only 25c per copy!

barrassment; there was no calculation in his pleasure. It was just that: pure pleasure. His round face took on a glow that made it like a lamp in a mine tunnel.

The Saint took his eyes away from the back window, through which he had been scrutinising traffic in their wake, and let them rest on Joe. Where would Joe want to go? The Stork? 21? Leon and Eddie's? Or some waterfront joint—Bill's Place, or some such.

It seemed that Joe was going to require some time to decide. He was obviously accustomed to having decisions made for him: "Swab the deck," "Coil that rope," "Kick that guy in the kidneys." Here was responsibility, and he wasn't quite ready for it. If Avalon had simply told him to jump out of the cab window, there was no doubt in the world that he would have done it.

He might have asked if she wanted him to do a jackknife or a belly-buster, but his final action would have been to drape himself on the asphalt. But now there was a choice concerned, he was so pleased at having his opinion asked that the fact of the choice slipped his mind.

He sat grinning for so long that Sam jabbed him with: "Well?"

Joe blinked. His grin faded slowly, like sky writing in a gentle breeze.

"Huh? Oh. Well, gosh, I don't care."

The Saint was becoming very fond of Joe. Here was a boy would give out like a defective slot machine if manipulated properly.

"She ast ya," Sam said patiently. "So you don't care. We keep flitting around behind this meter till ya make up ya mind? Name some place, any place!"

Joe blinked, and you could almost hear unused mental machinery begin to rattle and clank. The machinery ground to a stop. His face once more was like a harvest moon.

"Cookie's!" he cried, and was quiet.

The Saint suppressed a groan. He didn't like Cookie's—Canteen or Cellar. He'd never visited the Canteen, but his mind was made up.

On the other hand—

He considered the other hand. James Prather had seen him and Avalon leave with Sam and Joe. That fact would be reported, if the Saint's ideas on the situation were correct. Those receiving the report would in some way be tied up with Cookie's.

Therefore, if they all turned up there

in the late afternoon, before the crowd began to thicken, some overt action might be taken. Anything, he thought, to get this thing out in the open. Another point to be considered was Avalon. In the event of a fracas of any sort at Cookie's, she'd be more likely to declare her allegiance there than elsewhere.

"Splendid," the Saint said, and Avalon's half-formed answer died in her throat.

She might have been about to say all the obvious things: the place would be dull at this time of day, she didn't like it, it was a clip joint, haven of highgraders. But when the Saint spoke, she shot him a puzzled glance and was still.

Simon gave instructions to the driver, and they took off on a new tack.

"Why," Simon asked conversationally, "Cookie's?"

"All the guys," Sam Jeffries said, "keep tellin' ya if ya want a swell time, go there, if ya belong to th' Merchant Marine. Free drinks, free eats, maybe even a girl trun in. Joe here believes everything anybody tells 'im."

"Sometimes," Joe said, with the air of a great philosopher, "it turns out that way."

"Yeh!" Sam snorted. "Remember in Kobe how that——"

"Aw, that," Joe broke in. "He was ribbin' us."

Simon slipped in smoothly and took the conversation over. "How is the Orient?"

"Still shot to hell," Sam said. "Gonna be a long time before all them buildings go up again."

"Did you hear about Cookie's, even there?"

"Yeah, you know, guys on other ships."

"And you've never been to Cookie's before?"

"No."

"Where did you go on this last trip?"

While Sam launched a graphic account of their travels, Simon considered the fact that neither of these boys had been to Cookie's before. This seemed hardly in keeping with the pattern which Simon had begun to put together in his mind. He felt that the link must be somewhere between ships darting about the sea and Cookie's Cellar. James Prather?

Or the late lamented Gamaliel Bradford Foley?

Foley had been tied up with Dr. Zeller-mann. Dr. Zeller-mann with Cookie's, or some member of Cookie's entourage.

Therefore a link existed somewhere.

Anyway, here they were. Simon paid off the taxi, and they went inside. The place was almost deserted, but a few people were around.

Among these was James Prather, talking to Kay Natello. Prather looked up at the party's entrance, narrowed his eyes and walked toward them.

CHAPTER IX



THE Saint had never considered himself to be psychic. He had learned that by adding the factors of a situation he could forecast the probable moment when Death would leer at him over a gunsight, or ride the business end

of a club, or sing through the air on the point of a knife.

He had learned that, when he subconsciously placed such factors in their proper alignment and came up with a subconscious answer, his adrenal glands went quickly into action with a suddenness that brought a tingling to the back of his neck and the tips of his fingers.

He did not regard this sensation as the result of a psychic gander into the immediate future, nor as the brushing of the back of his neck by an ectoplasmic hand once belonging to the goose-over-a-grave school of premonitory shuddering. The tingle he felt when James Prather followed his bulging eyes across the deserted floor of Cookie's Cellar was, he knew, the result of his adrenals sitting up and taking notice.

For Simon had added the factors, and their sum total was danger. Not that he expected explosive action at the moment. He could have written the dialogue to come almost word for word. These characters weren't certain where and how the Saint fitted into the picture. Their motivation at the moment was the desire for such knowledge, and they would go about satisfying that desire in a fashion designed to be subtle and offhand.

Nobody would say, yet: "Just what the hell are you doing here?"

The Saint said under his breath to Avalon:

"Get a table. Yonder bucko would have words with me. I'll join you."

She sandwiched herself between Sam

and Joe and piloted them to the far wall, which had been pleasantly blank before Ferdinand Fairfield had agonized upon it in pastel, and the Saint waited for Prather.

"Just what the hell are you doing here?" Prather demanded.

The Saint did not allow so much as the quiver of an eyelash to acknowledge his downfall as a prophet. His lazy smile and mocking blue eyes only indicated amusement at the gauche approach. Prather flushed under the steady gaze, and his lobster-like eyes shifted away and back. In their shifting away, they touched on Joe Hyman and Sam Jeffries but showed no trace of recognition.

"Comrade," the Saint said, "far back in the history of this country certain gentlemen flung powder and shot about in the cause of freedom. Such points as they won have been traditionally passed down through the years, and one of those points is the untrammelled right to visit such places as this, with its steel-trap economy, its bad air and worse drinks. Just why anyone in his right mind should like to exercise his right to such dubious pleasure is beyond me, but there it is."

"There's something fishy about this," Prather said in a sort of bewildered whine. "First, you come to my place with a song and dance about research. Then you follow me here. Why? I know who you are. You're the Saint. But I can't see why you followed me."

"Follow you? Dear boy, I wouldn't follow you into the flossiest bagnio this side of Paradise. But now that you seem to have made such a lightning trip here, I'm happy to see you. Won't you join my party? I'm still gathering material."

Prather regarded the table where Avalon parried verbs with Sam Jeffries with the concentration of a man sucking a piece of popcorn out of a cavity.

"Thank you," he said with a grimness that was rather surprising. "I'll be glad to."

Sam was on his life story, apparently having begun at the present, and was working backward.

". . . and there was this guy we had to see in Shanghai. Joe wanted to get drunk right off, but I says no we gotta see this guy before . . ."

He broke off, looked up. No flicker of recognition moved his brown face as he glanced incuriously at Prather. To the Saint, Sam said: "I was just tellin' Miss Dexter about our last trip."

SOMETHING happened, but the Saint didn't catch it. It could have been a glance, a shake of the head, a kick in the ankle, from James Prather. For Sam suddenly froze. He didn't look at Prather, he didn't look at anybody, but you could see his thoughts and amiable chatter roll themselves up like armadillos and become impregnable and lifeless. All the warm lights went out of his eyes, and his smile became a fixed liability.

His social immobility somehow conveyed itself to Joe, who underwent little change to achieve Sam's frozen state. Both young men rose to shake hands as the Saint performed introductions, but, like Mudville on the night of Casey's disaster, there was no joy in them. Sam remained standing, long, lean, and brown.

"Guess we better shove off, huh, Joe?"

"Yeah," Joe said, meeting nobody's eye. "Guess so."

"Don't run away, boys," Avalon said. But she said it perfunctorily. She knew they were going. Her tone was a politeness, not an urging.

"When the party's just starting?" said the Saint. He, too, knew they were going. A kick, a frown, a shake of the head. These had made the boys jittery.

"Well, Saint," Sam said. "You know how it is. Just back from a long trip. We were kinda thinkin' of girls of our own. Course, I'll have to get one for Joe, here, but still——" He nodded at Avalon. "Thought we had something there—uh, Miss. But seems she's staked out. So we'll blow."

More handshakes, and they were gone.

Kay Natello came over to greet them, and in that voice like a nutmeg grater on tin cans, asked, "What'll it be?"

She didn't seem to be anxious to cut up old touchés with Simon, so he played it her way.

"Old Foresters all around. Doubles," he added, remembering the strength of drinks at Cookie's.

"Now," the Saint said when Kay had gone. "Tell me about Dr. Zellermann."

"What is there to tell?"

Prather didn't seem uncomfortable. There was, in his mind, nothing to tell. At least, he gave that impression.

"He's a psychiatrist," he went on. "A good one, maybe. Any rate, he gets good prices."

"Well," the Saint said. "Maybe we'd better drop him. Let's just have fun, kids."

Avalon looked several volumes of unprintable material at the Saint and asked: "How do you propose to do that?"

"By displaying my erudition, darling." The Saint smiled gently at her, and then bent attentive eyes on Prather as he said: "For instance. Do you know the word 'cougak'?"

This brought no response. Simon sighed inwardly. Might as well get it out into the open, he thought. "It's the term applied to the bloom of a certain plant known as *Pavarer somniferum*. It's cultivated chiefly in Asia. After the poppy flowers, and the leaves fall off, the remaining pod develops a bloom, easily rubbed off with the fingers, called cougak. Then it is time to make the incision."

"What are you talking about?" Avalon demanded.

"Mr. Prather, I think," said the Saint.

Prather blinked his overblue eyes at Simon.

"I'm sorry, but I don't know what you mean."

"It really doesn't matter," the Saint said. "Let's talk about something else."

He noted that Kay Natello, who had been hovering in the middle distance, took her departure at this point and vanished through the archway at the back. Had there been a signal? If so, he hadn't caught it.

"Mr. Prather," he said, "you must find life quite exhilarating. Contact with the major ports of the world, and all that."

Prather stared, his eyes more lobster-like than usual.

"What are you talking about?"

There was no mistaking the honest bewilderment in the prominent blue eyes, and this gave the Saint pause. According to his ideas on the organization he was bucking, Prather would be one of the key men. Sam Jeffries had substantiated this notion, in his interrupted story to Avalon: "... and there was this guy we had to see in Shanghai."

That fitted in with the whole theory of "Benny sent me." A contact was made here, instructions given, perhaps an advance made. Then the delivery of a package in the Orient or the Near East, which was returned to New York and duly turned over to James Prather or a prototype. All this made sense, made a pattern.

BUT here was James Prather, obviously bewildered by the plainest kind of a

lead. Was the man cleverer than he seemed? Was he putting on an act that could mislead that expert act-detector, the Saint? Or was he honestly in the dark about the Saint's meaning? And if he was, why was he here immediately after a visit from two sailors freshly back from the Orient?

Mr. James Prather, it seemed, was in this picture somewhere, and it behooved the Saint to find out where.

"Well," Simon said, "no matter. We have more important things to do, such as demolishing our—— But we have no drinks." He motioned to an aproned individual, who came to the table and assumed an attitude of servility. "Three more of the same."

The waiter took the empty glasses and went away. The Saint turned his most winning smile on Prather.

"I wasn't really shooting in the dark," he said. "But I guess my remarks weren't down the right alley."

"Whatever you say," Prather replied, "I like. You have a good quality of voice. Though I don't see why you should spend any time with me."

"Remember?" Simon asked. "I'm still doing research on Dr. Zellermann."

Prather laughed. "I'd forgotten. Ah, here come our drinks."

The waiter, an individual, like the village blacksmith, with brawny arms, came across the empty dance floor with a tray flattened on one upturned palm. It was obvious to the Saint's practiced eye that the man's whole mental attitude had changed.

He had gone away trailing a fretful desire to please; he approached with new-found independence.

He was a stocky individual, broad of shoulder, lean of hip, heavy in the legs. His face was an eccentric oval, bejewelled with small turquoise eyes, crowned with an imposing nose that overhung a mouth of rather magnificent proportions. His chin was a thing of angles, on which you could hang a lantern.

But the principal factor in his changed aspect was his independence. He carried the tray of drinks as though the nearest thing to his heart was the opportunity and reason to toss them into the face of a customer. Not only that, but each of the three glasses was that type known as "old fashioned." Each glass was short, wide of mouth, broad of base. And in each drink was a slice of orange and a cherry

impaled on a toothpick.

"Sorry," said the Saint as the waiter distributed the glasses, "but I ordered highballs, not Old Fashioneds."

"Yeh?" said the waiter. "You trying to make trouble?"

"No. I'm merely trying to get a drink."

"Well, ya act like to me you're tryin' to make trouble. Ya order Old Fashioneds, 'n then ya yell about highballs. What's comin' off here?"

"Nothing," Simon said patiently, "is coming off here. I'm simply trying to get what I ordered."

"Ya realize I'll hafta pay for this, don't ya?" the waiter demanded.

"I'll pay for them," Simon said in the same gentle voice. "If you made a mistake, it won't cost you anything. Just bring us three Old Foresters—highballs."

"And what's gonna happen to these drinks?"

"That," the Saint said, "I don't know. You may rub them into the bartender's hair, for all of me."

The waiter lifted his lip.

"Lissen, the bartender's my brother-in-law."

The Saint's lips tightened.

"Then rub them into his back. Will you get our drinks?"

The waiter stared sullenly for a moment.

"Well, all right. But no more cracks about my brother-in-law, see?"

He went away. The Saint watched him for a moment, decided against any action. His attention drifted from the waiter to the Fairfield murals.

"It's an odd mind," he remarked, "that can contrive such unattractive innovations in the female form divine." He indicated a large sprawling figure on the far wall. "Take Gertie over there. Even if her hips did have Alemite lubrication points all over them, is it quite fair to let the whole world in on her secret?"

"What I like," Avalon said, "is the hedge for hair. That penthouse effect throws me."

"I'm sorry," James Prather said, "but I feel a little uncomfortable looking at those designs. This one over here, with each lock of hair ending in a hangman's knot. I——"

HE BROKE off, with an ineffectual gesture with his pale hands.

"The poor man's Dali," murmured the Saint. "Here come our—what *are* those

drinks he's bringing us?"

They were pale green, in tall flared glasses, each with a twist of lime peel floating near the top.

The Saint repeated his question to the sudden waiter.

"Lissen," that character said. "I got no time to be runnin' back and forth for you. These here are Queen Georgianas, 'n if you don't want 'em, rub 'em in your——" He glanced at Avalon, colored. "—well, rub 'em."

"But I ordered," the Saint said very patiently, "Old Foresters. Highballs."

"'N if you're gonna be fussy," the waiter said, "you're lucky to get anything. Wait a minute. Here comes the manager."

The manager was thin, dapper and dark, like George Raft in his halcyon days. He strode up to the table, took in the situation with an expressionless look of his dark eyes, and turned them on the Saint.

"Yes?" he said.

"Whom do you have to know here?" Simon inquired. "I've been trying to get some bourbon for about thirty minutes."

"Why don't you ask for it then?" suggested the manager.

"Look," Simon said. "I don't mind buying your watered drinks at about three times the normal prices. All I want is the right flavor in the water. I do not want Queen Georgianas, or Old Fashioneds. I want Old Forester. It's a simple thing. All the waiter does is remember the order until he gets back to the bar. I'll write it out for him if he has a defective memory."

"Nothin's wrong with my memory," the waiter growled. "Maybe you'd like these drinks in your puss, smart guy. You asked for Queen Georgianas, and you're gonna take 'em."

Simon clenched his hands under the rim of the table.

"Believe me," he said earnestly, "the last desire I have is to cause difficulty. If I must take these obscenities, I'll take them. But will you please, please get us a round of bourbon highballs?"

"Why don't you go away, if the service doesn't please you?" asked the George Raft manager.

"The service," the Saint said, "leaves nothing to be desired, except everything."

"Then why don't you just go away?" asked the manager.

The Saint decided to be stubborn.

"Why?"

"No reason," the manager said. "We reserve the right to refuse service to any-

one. Our sign says so."

He indicated a sign above the bar.

"And you are refusing me service?"

"No. Not if you don't cause trouble."

"And?"

The manager nodded to the waiter. "Get him his drinks."

"I'm not gonna serve him," the waiter said.

The manager stamped a gleaming shoe. "Did you hear me?"

The waiter went away.

"Now," the Saint said, "where were we? Oh, yes, we were discussing," he said to the manager, "the more obscure aspects of suicide in American night clubs. Would you have anything to add to our data soon?"

The manager smiled a crooked smile and departed. The Saint caught the eye of James Prather, and formed a question: "Now that we've gone through the preliminary moves, shall we get down to business?"

PRATHER goggled rather like a fish in an aquarium tank, but before the Saint could begin to explain he caught sight of the waiter returning with a tray of pink concoctions in champagne glasses.

"I," Simon announced, "am beginning to become annoyed. *Avec* knobs on."

The waiter slammed the tray on the table and distributed the drinks. The Saint eyed his.

It was definitely not a Pink Lady. Nor was it pink champagne. There was grenade in it, judging from the viscosity apparent to the eye. There might be gin, or even water. He raised his eyes.

"What—is—this?"

The waiter's eyes were like small blue marbles. "They're bourbon and sodas, see?"

"Pink bourbon?"

"Ja ever see any other kind?" the waiter snarled.

"I believe," Simon said gently, "that I have been patient. Compared to the way I've conducted myself, burros are subjects for straitjackets. You have brought four rounds of liquid abortions that no self-respecting canned-heat hound would dip a finger in. While this went on, I have kept my temper. Job himself would stack up beside me like a nervous cat. I have taken all your insults with a smile. But I warn you, if you don't bring the right order on your next trip, you are going to wish your mother had spanked

the bad manners out of you before I had to."

"So you wanta make trouble, huh?" The waiter signalled. "Hey, Jake!"

The bartender, who seemed to be Jake, stopped shaking a whiskey sour at the top of the motion, looking something like a circus giant caught in a ballet pose. He was pushing six feet and a half with shoulders perhaps not so wide as a door, but wide enough. He had a face like the butt end of a redwood log, and hands like great brown clamps on the shaker.

His customers turned to regard the table across the big room according to the stages of inebriety they'd reached. A middle-aged man with a brief moustache twirled it at Avalon. A lady of uncertain balance lifted one side of a bright mouth at the Saint. A young couple stared, and turned back to their private discussion, which, to judge from their expression, was going to wind up in the nearest bedroom.

Jake then set down the shaker, and walked around the end of the bar. At the same moment a third man, large and aproned, came out of the archway and joined him. They marched together across the dance floor, side by side, and advanced upon the Saint. It was obvious that he was their objective.

The Saint didn't move. He watched the approach of the brawny gents with the bright-eyed interest of a small boy at his first circus. He noted the width of Jake's shoulders, the practiced walk bespeaking sessions in a prize ring, and the shambling of his companion. He weighed them, mentally, and calculated the swiftness of their reflexes. He smiled.

He could see Avalon's clenched fists, just below the rim of the table, and from the corner of his eye he noted Prather's bug-eyed interest.

Jake directed a calm, steady, brown-eyed gaze at Simon Templar.

"Get out of here. Now."

Simon didn't seem to push his chair back. He seemed only to come to an astonished attention. But in that straightening motion, his chair was somehow a good three inches back from the edge of the table and he could come to his feet without being hampered.

"Yes?" he drawled with hopeful interest. "How jolly. Ask your boss to come out and explain."

"The boss don't need to explain," said the spokesman. "We'll do all the ex-

plainin' necessary."

"Then suppose you do, my lad."

"What is this all about, Jake?" Avalon asked.

"The boss don't want him here, that's all. And we'll throw him out if he don't scram." Jake turned back to the Saint. "Look, chum, we ain't anxious to spread your pretty face all around like gravy. But we can, and will, if'n you don't beat it. And don't come back."

THE Saint gestured at the table.

"You can see I haven't finished my drink. Nor has my lady friend."

"She can stay. It's just you that's goin'."

The Saint smiled mockingly. "It is always a mystery to me how human beings can become so misguided as to assume impossibilities. I should think anybody would know I'm not going out of here without Miss Dexter. She has an inflexible rule; namely, 'I'm gonna leave with the guy what brung me.' Namely, yours truly."

"Can the gab," Jake said. "You goin' out on your feet, or would you rather pick up teeth as you crawl out?"

Jake didn't seem to be angry, or impatient. He was merely giving the Saint a choice. Like: do you want your nails filed round or pointed?

Simon got lazily to his feet.

"Sorry, Mr. Prather," he said. "I was just getting interested in our conversation. Be with you in a moment. The children, you know. They get annoying at times and have to be cut back to size. . . . Jake, you shouldn't be such a naughty boy, really you shouldn't. Papa's told you before about interrupting your elders. Run along and play now, and you won't be chastised."

Jake nodded at his cohorts, and they moved at once. The Saint's first lightning move was to remove one from the fray with a short right jab that travelled no more than three inches but carried 180 pounds of muscled steel in motion behind it. The aproned bruiser folded his bulk against the wall between the widespread feet of one of Ferdinand Fairfield's figures and sat there with a vacuous mouth and eyes which, had they been stained, could have served as church windows.

In this move, however, Simon's attention was distracted for the fraction of a second from Jake, and that was

enough. Jake made a flying leap over one corner of the table and clasped the Saint around his waist with a fervor that would have reduced Jake's girl friend to panting acquiescence.

This threw the Saint slightly off balance, and the waiter tried to take advantage of this by kicking Simon in the groin.

The Saint twisted, caught the man's ankle with his free hand, wrenched his other hand loose and began to unscrew the man's leg from the knee joint. Several welkins split asunder as the victim howled like a wounded wolf. Presently, within the space of time required to bat an eye, there was a most satisfying crack as the leg came unjointed at the hip, and the Saint turned his full attention to the leech-like Jake.

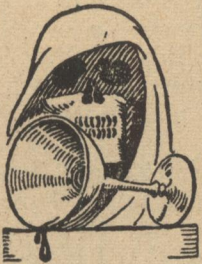
He went about that worthy's demolition with a detached and unhurried calm. A left to the chin to straighten him up, a right to the stomach to bend him in the middle, another left, another right, and Jake gave the appearance of a polite man with the stomach ache bowing to a friend.

One devastating right to the button, and Jake slid across the stamp-sized dance floor on his back. He came to a gentle stop and lay gazing empty-eyed at the ceiling.

Sounds came from the back, sounds indicating a gathering of fresh forces. The Saint turned to Avalon.

"Shall we go, darling?" he drawled.

CHAPTER X



WHICH was all highly entertaining, not to say invigorating and healthful, Simon reflected later; but it added very little progress towards the main objective.

Certainly he had been given evidence that his attention was unwelcome to sundry members of the Ungodly; but that was hardly a novel phenomenon in his interfering life. Once the Saint had exhibited any definite interest in their affairs, and had been identified, the Ungodly could invariably be relied on to experience some misgivings, which might lead rather logically to mayhem.

Certainly the proffered mayhem had recoiled, as it usually did, upon the initia-

tors, who would doubtless approach this form of exercise more circumspectly next time; but that could hardly be called progress. It just meant that the Saint himself would have to be more careful.

He had failed to learn any more about Mr. Prather's precise place in the picture, or the relationship of the other characters who flitted in and out of the convolutions of the impalpable organization which he was trying to unravel—or, for that matter, about Avalon's real place in the whole crooked cosmogony.

Simon forced himself ruthlessly to remember that. . . . With all their intimacy, their swift and complete companionship, he still knew nothing. Nothing but what he felt; and better men than he had come to disaster from not drawing the distinction between belief and knowledge.

The Saint had many vanities, but one of them had never been the arrogant confidence that sometime, somewhere, there could not be among the ranks of the Ungodly a man or a woman who would have the ability to make a sucker out of him. He had waited for that all his life; and he was still waiting, with the same cold and tormenting vigilance.

And yet, when he called Avalon the next morning, there was nothing cold in his mind when her voice answered.

"Good morning," he said.

"Good morning, darling," she said, and her voice woke up with it. "How are you today?"

"Excited."

"What about?"

"Because I've got a date for lunch."

"Oh." The voice died again.

He laughed.

"With a beautiful girl . . . named Avalon."

"Oh." Such a different inflection. As if the sun came out again. "You're a beast. I've a good mind not to be there."

"There are arguments against it," he admitted. "For one thing, we can't be alone."

"You mean the restaurant has to let other people in? We could fix that. Come over here, and I'll make an omelette."

"I'd like that much better. But it wouldn't work. I've still got a date. And you're going to keep it with me. We're having lunch with Zellermann."

"Did you call him?"

"He called me again, and I didn't see how I could get out of it. As a matter of fact, I decided I didn't want to. So much

persistence is starting to intrigue me. And I do want to know more about him. And I don't think he can do much to me in 21."

"Is that where we're going?"

"Yes. I'll pick you up at twelve o'clock."

"I'll put on my silliest hat."

"If you do," said the Saint, "I'll be called away in the middle of lunch and leave you with him."

They were on time to the minute, but when Simon asked for the table he was told that Zellermann was already waiting for them.

The doctor stood up as they threaded a way between tables to his. Simon noted with some satisfaction that Zellermann's lips were still considerably swollen, although the fact would not have been so obvious to anyone who was not acquainted with the medicine man's mouth in its normal state.

He looked very much the Park Avenue psychiatrist—tall, leonine, carelessly but faultlessly dressed, with one of those fat smiles that somehow reminded the Saint of fresh shrimps.

"My dear Mr. Templar. And Miss Dexter. So glad you could manage the time. Won't you sit down?"

They did, and he did.

Dr. Zellermann displayed as much charm as a bee tree has honey.

"Miss Dexter, I feel that I must apologise for the other night. I am inclined to forget that universal adjustment to my psychological patterns has not yet been made."

"Don't let it worry you," Avalon said. "You paid for it."

A SLIGHT flush tinted the doctor's face as he looked at the Saint.

"My apologies to you, too, sir."

Simon grinned. "I didn't feel a thing."

Dr. Zellermann flushed deeper, then

he gave Simon a smile.

"But that's all forgotten. We can be friendly together, and have a pleasant lunch. I like to eat here. The cuisine is excellent, the service——"

There was more of this. Considerably more. The Saint let his eyes rove over the dining room which clattered discreetly with glass and silverware. Waiters went unobtrusively from table to table. Those with trays held the Saint's eyes.

Dr. Zellermann finished his eulogy of the restaurant, followed Simon's gaze.

"Oh, a drink, a drink by all means. Waiter!"

The waiter, so completely different from those sampled by the Saint in Cookie's the day before, came to their table as if he had crawled four miles over broken glass.

"May I serve you, sir?"

"Martinis, Manhattans?" the doctor inquired.

The Saint and Avalon ordered double Manhattans, the doctor a Martini, and the waiter genuflected away.

"So nice of you to invite us," the Saint said across the table. "A free lunch, as my drunken uncle used to say, is a free lunch."

Dr. Zellermann smiled.

"I somehow feel that you haven't quite had your share of free lunches, Mr. Templar. I feel that you have quite a few coming to you."

"Ah?" Simon queried.

He looked at Avalon immediately after he'd tossed the monosyllabic interrogation at the doctor. She sat quietly, with her gold-brown hair immaculate, her brown eyes wide, her small but definite chin pushed forward in a questing motion. At that moment, the Saint would have wagered anything he ever hoped to have that this green-clad, trim, slim, smartly

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turned out girl knew nothing about the problem that was taking up most of his time.

"In my work as a psychiatrist," the snowy-maned doctor explained, "I have learned a number of things. One of the main factors I take into consideration in the evaluation of a personality is whether that person is behind in the receipt of rewards. Each individual as far as I have been able to discover, has put more into life than he ever gets out."

"Not according to what I was taught," Avalon said. "You get what you pay for. You get out of life, or a job, or a pail, or any damned thing, what you put into it, and no more. Otherwise, it's perpetual motion."

"Ah, no," Dr. Zellermann said. "If that were true, the sum total of all human effort would produce energies equal only to the sum total of all human effort. That would make change impossible. Yet we progress. The human race lives better, eats better, drinks better, each year."

"This indicates something. Those who are trying to cause the race to better itself—and they are less than the sum total of human beings, if not a minority—*must* be putting in more than they ever get out. If the law of equational returns is true, then it is quite obvious that a number of persons are dying before their time."

"I don't get you," Avalon said.

"Let's put it simply," the doctor replied. He broke off for the waiter to distribute their drinks. "If the energy you expend on living gives you only that amount of life, then your living conditions will never improve. Correct?"

"Umm."

"But your living conditions do improve. You have more and better food than your great-great grandmother, or your grandfather thirty-eight times removed. Much better. Somebody, therefore, has put more into life than he has taken out, as long as the general living level of the human race continues to improve."

"And so?"

"And so," Dr. Zellermann said, "if the theory that we get no more out of life than we put into it is true, somebody is in the red. A lot of somebodies. Because the human race keeps progressing. And if each individual got no more out of what he put into it, life on the whole would remain the way it is."

"Umm."

"Are ideas energy?" the Saint asked.

"There you have it," Dr. Zellermann said. "Are ideas energy." It wasn't a question. "Are they? I don't know. A certain amount of energy must go into the process of producing ideas which may be translated into practical benefits to the race. What that amount of energy is, or whether it can be measured, is a point to be discussed in future years by scientists who are equipped with instruments we have never heard of."

"But have we heard of the Orient?" asked the Saint.

"I don't follow you," Dr. Zellermann said.

SIMON paused while their drinks were delivered; and while he waited it crossed his mind that the trouble with all the creeps he had met so far in this business was that they responded to a leading question about as actively as a dead mouse would to a slab of Camembert. It also crossed his mind that a great deal of aimless chatter was being cast upon the chaste air of that burnished beanery.

Was there some dark and undefined purpose in the doctor's Hegelian calisthenics? Did that turgid bouillabaisse of unsemantic verbiage have significance, or was it only stalling for time? Surely the distinguished salver of psyches hadn't asked Simon and Avalon here to philosophise with them?

Well, the ulterior motives, if any, would be revealed in due course. Meanwhile, it seemed as if the vocal merry-go-round, if it had to keep rolling, could spin to more profitable propose.

So Simon Templar, in that completely unexpected fashion of his which could be so disconcerting, turned the channels of the conversation towards another direction of his own choosing.

"In the Orient," he said, "the standard of living remains a fairly deplorable constant. Millions of those people put an astounding amount of energy into the process of survival, and what do they get?" His shrug answered the question.

Dr. Zellermann made a small motion with one hand. He took his fingers from the stem of his Martini glass and moved them. The Saint, who happened to be looking at the hand, marvelled that so much could be expressed in a gesture. The small, graceful, yet definite motion said as clearly as if the thought were expressed in boxcar letters:

"But, my dear Mr. Templar!"

"What do they get?" Dr. Zellermann asked, looking somewhat like an equine bishop granting an indulgence. He answered his own question. "Life, my dear Mr. Templar—the only actually free gift in the universe. What they do with it is not only their business, but the end product is not open to censure or sympathy."

"Still the old free-will enthusiast?"

"That's all we have. What we do with it is our own fault."

"I can be president, eh, or dog catcher?"

"That's up to you," Zellermann said.

"A moment, old boy. Suppose we consider Chang."

The doctor's eyebrows said: "Chang?"

"As a guinea pig," the Saint explained.

"Chang, once upon a time, chanced to smoke a pipe of opium. It was free, and anything for a laugh, that's our Chang. Then he had another pipe, later. And another. Not free, now. Oh, no. There are dealers who have to make a living; and behind the dealers there are interested governments. So Chang becomes an addict. He lets his family, his home, everything, go hang. Where is the free will, Doctor, when he's driven by that really insatiable desire?"

"It was his decision to smoke the first pipe."

"Not entirely," the Saint pointed out.

"Someone was interested in making it available. You can't tell me that it wouldn't be possible to restrict the production of opium to established medical requirements if the principal world governments were really interested. Yet India alone produces more opium than the whole world could use legitimately. Very profitable. So profitable that governments have come out fighting to keep the market open. Do you happen to remember the so-called Boxer Rebellion?"

"Vaguely," Zellermann said in bored tones.

"All the wretched Chinese wanted was their own country back," said the Saint. "But the—ah, Powers, made a great pitch about rescuing their missionaries, and so put down the rebellion and so saved the market."

"Isn't this rather non sequitur?" asked the doctor.

"Is it?" Simon said. "If you're tired of Chang, throw him away—in his millions. He means no more personally than a tree-ful of yaks, because we have no contact with his daily so-called living. But take

Joe Doakes in Brooklyn."

"Really, Mr. Templar, your train of thought is confusing."

"It shouldn't be, dear boy. Just translate Chang into Joe, and consider the identical operation in New York. Even America the Beautiful, leave us face it, contains certain citizens who don't much care how they make a million dollars so long as they make it. And particularly don't care who gets hurt in the process. So now Joe's the boy we're after. He's like Chang, in the low income group, not averse to a bit of petty thievery, possibly ready for a pipe after a hard day's pocket-picking."

"Who," Zellermann inquired, "are 'we'?"

"We here at the table," the Saint said expansively, "for purposes of hypothetical discussion."

"Not me," Avalon interpolated. "I got troubles of my own, without including pipes."

"Let's say you are 'we,' Doctor. Your problem is twofold. You must transport the stuff, and then sell it. If you solve the transportation problem, you have to find Joe. The first problem is fairly elemental. Who goes to the Orient these days? Sailors. They can bring in the stuff. Finding Joe is easy, too. Go into the nearest pool hall and turn to your right."

"This leads us where, Mr. Templar?"

Dr. Zellermann asked. "Though I admit your conversation has its scintillating aspects, I fail to see—" He let it hang.

"To this point, comrade. A group of men putting drugs into the hands—mouths—of persons rendered irresponsible by economic circumstance are creating tools. Governments learned that a long time ago. Beat a man down enough, and he'll come to think that's the normal way to be. But private groups—shall we say rings—who are foolish enough to think they can get away with it couldn't be expected to do anything but follow an established lead."

The Saint watched for any reaction from the doctor. He would have settled for a tapping finger, but the Park Avenue psychiatrist would have made the Great Stone Face look like Danny Kaye.

Simon shrugged.

HE LOOKED at Avalon and winked.

"In other words, your theory—'*Faites ce que voudras*,' if I may borrow from an older philosopher—is jake so long as you and I are the guys who are doing

what they damn please. So far I only know one of your forms of self-indulgence, and you only know one of mine. I have others."

Avalon smiled; and the Saint marvelled that all those people who were so busy clattering their silverware, churning the air with inanities, and trying to impress a lot of people who were only interested in impressing them, shouldn't feel the radiance of that smile and halt in the middle of whatever they were doing. They should feel that smile, and pause. And think of things lost, of beauties remembered, and recapture rapture again.

But they didn't. The bebosomed Helen Hokinson woman at the nearest table giggled at the young man opposite her; the promoter type over there went right on citing figures, no doubt, blowing a bugle of prosperity; the Hollywood actress went on ogling the Broadway producer, who went on ogling her, being just as happy to get her in his highly speculative play as she was to have the chance of reviving a career which had failed to quite keep up with her press agent.

The Saint sighed.

He turned his attention back to Dr. Zellermann, waiting for a hint of the point that must be shown sometime.

"Another drink?" asked the doctor.

They had another drink; and then Zellermann said, with a thread of connection which was so strained that it sang: "I imagine one of the things you would like is forming theories about current crimes as the newspapers report them. That Foley murder in Brooklyn, for instance, rather intrigues me."

The Saint took a deep pull on his cigarette; and a little pulse began to beat way inside him as he realised that this, at last, whatever it was, was it.

His own decision was made in a split second. If that was how Zellermann wanted it, okay. And if Zellermann favored the shock technique, Simon was ready to bounce it right back without batting an eyelid and see what happened.

"Yes," he said, "even in these days of flowing lucre, it must be sad to lose a good patient."

"I wasn't thinking of the money," Dr. Zellermann began. He broke off suddenly, leaving the remainder of the thought unexpressed. "How did you know he was a patient of mine?"

The Saint sipped at his Manhattan.

"I saw his name on your secretary's

appointment pad," he said calmly.

"But look here, Templar. When were you in my office?"

"Oh, I thought you knew," Simon said with a touch of surprise. "I broke in on Thursday night."

CHAPTER XI



THIS brought motionless silence to Dr. Zellermann. He eyed the Saint coldly for a long moment. Then he said: "Are you in the habit of breaking and entering?"

"I wouldn't say it's a habit, old boy. The word habit has connotations of dullness. As a matter of fact, I should say I have no habits whatever, as such, unless you classify breathing as a habit. That is one to which I cling with—on occasion—an almost psychotic firmness. There have been times, I admit, when certain persons, now among the dear departed, have tried to persuade me to give up breathing. I am glad to say that their wiles had no effect on my determination."

The doctor shook his head irritably.

"You know you committed a felony?"

"By going on breathing?"

Dr. Zellermann raised his voice slightly. "By breaking into my office."

"Technically, I suppose I did," Simon confessed. "But I was sure you'd understand. After all, I was only applying your own pet philosophy. I felt like doing it, so I did."

"As the victim," Zellermann said, "I'm surely entitled to hear your reason."

The Saint grinned.

"Like the bear that came over the mountain, to see what I could see. Very interesting it was, too. Did Ferdinand Fairfield do your decorating?"

Dr. Zellermann's face was impassive.

"A philosophy, Mr. Templar, is one thing. Until the world adopts that philosophy, the law is something else. And under the present laws you are guilty of a crime."

"Aren't you sort of rubbing it in a bit, Ernst?" Simon protested mildly.

"Only to be sure that you understand your position."

"All right then. So I committed a crime. I burgled your office. For that matter, I burgled the late Mr. Foley's apartment

too—and his murder intrigues me just as much as you. So what?"

Dr. Zellermann turned his head and glanced across the room. He made an imperious gesture with a crooking finger.

The Saint followed his gaze and saw two men in inconspicuous blue suits at a far table detach themselves from the handles of coffee cups. One of them pushed something small and black under the table. Both rose and came towards Dr. Zellermann's table. They had that deadpan, slightly bored expression which has become an occupational characteristic of plainclothes men.

There was no need for them to show their badges to convince the Saint, but they did.

"You heard everything?" Dr. Zellermann asked.

The shorter of the two, who had a diagonal scar on his square chin, nodded.

Simon ducked his head and looked under the table. He saw a small microphone from which a wire ran down the inside of one of the legs of the table and disappeared under the rug. The Saint straightened and wagged an admiring head.

"That, my dear doctor, is most amusing. Here I thought that I was talking privately, and it would be your word against mine in any consequent legal name-calling. It simply didn't occur to me that you'd—er—holler copper."

Dr. Zellermann paid no attention to Simon. He spoke to Scar-chin.

"You know this man is the Saint, a notorious criminal, wanted in various parts of the world for such things as murder, blackmail, kidnaping, and so forth?"

"Not wanted for, chum," the Saint corrected him amiably. "Merely suspected of."

Scar-chin looked at his partner, a man with sad spaniel eyes. "Guess we better go."

Spaniel Eyes laid a hand on the Saint's arm.

"One moment," Simon said. This was said quietly, but there was the sound of bugles in the command. Spaniel Eyes withdrew his arm. The Saint looked at Zellermann. "Your information came from somewhere. You didn't deduce this by yourself and so lay a trap. Did Avalon tip you off?"

"Oh, Simon!" she cried. "No, darling, no!"

Her voice was brimming with anguish

and outrage. Real or simulated, the Saint couldn't tell. He didn't look at her. He held the doctor's eyes with his own.

DR. ZELLERMANN showed no expression whatever. He looked at the Saint woodenly, with a supreme disinterest. He might have been watching a fly he was about to swat.

"Once one understands a certain type of mind," Dr. Zellermann said almost contemptuously, "predictions of action patterns are elementary——"

"My dear Watson," the Saint supplied.

"You visited Mrs. Gerald Meldon and James Prather," Zellermann continued. "Theirs were two of the three names on my appointment pad. It follows that you also visited Foley. It was obviously you who telephoned the police—the phrasing of the message fits your psychological pattern exactly. Foley was dead when you left. The police are looking for a murderer."

"I knew that my office had been entered, of course, because someone answered the telephone when no one should have been there. I suspected that 'someone' was you; and the rest followed. It was only necessary to have you confirm my deductions yourself."

The Saint's smile held a wholly irrational delight.

"I see," he said softly. "You know, Ernst, my esteem for you has raised itself by its mouldy bootstraps. I bow to you. From now on, life will have a keener edge."

"Life, if any, Templar. In spite of what you read in the papers, murderers frequently do go to the chair."

"Not this one, dear old wizard." The Saint turned to Spaniel Eyes. "Shall we begin our invasion of Sing Sing?"

"Yerk, yerk," Spaniel Eyes said.

As the Saint got to his feet, Avalon stood beside him. He looked into her dark eyes deeply and ironically. Her gaze didn't waver.

"I didn't," she whispered. "I didn't."

Simon kissed her lightly.

"Be a good girl. Don't forget to eat your vitamins."

"But you're not going like a lamb," she cried. "Aren't you even going to try to do something?"

That gay and careless smile flashed across his face. "My dear old Aunt Harriet always said that as long as there's life there's life. Thanks for the drinks,

my dear Doctor."

He was gone, walking straight as a magician's wand between Scar-chin and Spaniel Eyes. Their passage between the tables was leisurely and attracted no notice, aside from a bold and admiring glance now and then from women lunchers. They might have been three executives headed back to their marts, or three friends popping off to green and manicured pastures to chase a pellet of gutta percha from one hole to another. Certainly no one would have suspected that the Saint was a prisoner—in fact, any speculations would have tended to reverse their rôles.

But under his calm exterior, thought processes moved at incredible speed, toying with this idea, discarding that. He didn't put it beyond himself to stage a spectacular escape as soon as they were outside; but on the other hand it would be no help to him to become a fugitive. He even wondered whether Dr. Zeller-mann's system of psychological projection had anticipated an attempt to escape and was even now listening with one ear for the rattle of shots which would mean that the shadow of the Saint's interference had perhaps been lifted permanently.

Simon saw too many arguments against obliging him. His best bet at the moment seemed to be discretion, watchful waiting, and the hope that the cell they gave him to try on for size would have southern exposure.

Spaniel Eyes hailed a cab. Scar-chin climbed in first, followed by the Saint, and Spaniel Eyes gave short inaudible directions to the driver.

"Well," the Saint said after a few moments of riding, "how about a swift game of gin rummy?"

"Shaddup," Spaniel Eyes said, and looked at his watch.

"By the way," Simon asked, "what are visiting hours in the local calabozos?"

"Shaddup," Spaniel Eyes said.

They rode some more. They wound through Central Park, entering at Columbus Circle, curving and twisting along the west side of that great haven for nurses, sailors, nurses and sailors, up around the bottleneck end of the lake, south past the zoo.

The Saint looked significantly at the flat backs of the animal cages. "What time," he asked Spaniel Eyes, "do you have to be back in?"

"Shaddup."

"This," the Saint said conversationally to Scar-chin, "has been most illuminating. I suppose I shouldn't ever have taken this drive otherwise. Very restful. The lake full of rowboats, the rowboats full of afternoon romance, the—oh, the *je ne sais quoi*, like kids with ice creamed noses."

Scar-chin yawned.

Simon lighted another cigarette and brooded over the routine. He considered his chances of getting a lawyer with a writ of habeas corpus before things went too far. Or was it the scheme of Scar-chin and Spaniel Eyes to spirit him away to some obscure precinct station and hold him incommunicado? Such things had been done before. And at that stage of the game the Saint knew he could not afford to disappear even for twenty-four hours.

Spaniel Eyes looked at his watch as they neared the exit at Fifty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue.

"Okay," he called to the cab driver.

The driver nodded and drove to—of all places—the Algonquin. Scar-chin came back to life.

"Awright," he said. "Go on up to your room."

"And then what?"

"You'll see."

Simon nodded pleasantly, and went up to his room. The telephone was ringing.

"Hamilton," said the voice at the other end. "I wish you'd be more careful. Do you think I haven't anything else to do with my men except send them to pull you out of jams?"

CHAPTER XII



FOR a considerable time after the Saint had left, there was a nominal silence in the dining room of 21. Nominal, because of course there was never any actual silence in that much-publicised pub except when it was closed for the night.

The chatter of crocks, cutlery, concubines and creeps went on without interruption or change of tempo, a formless obligato like the fiddling of insects in a tropic night which could only be heard by forced attention. It washed up against the table where Zeller-mann and Avalon sat, and still left them isolated in a pool of stillness.

Of Avalon one could only have said that she was thinking. Her face was intent and

abstracted but without mood. If it suggested any tension, it was only by its unnatural repose.

Dr. Zellermann avoided that suggestion by just enough play with cocktail glass and cigarette, with idle glances around the room, to convey a disinterested expectation that this hiatus was purely transitory, and that he was merely respecting it with polite acceptance.

He turned to Avalon at last with a sympathetic smile.

"I'm so sorry," he said in his best table-side manner.

She shrugged.

"Sorry? For what?"

"It is not my desire, Miss Dexter, to cause you anguish or heartache."

"I've been watching out for myself for some time, Doctor."

"That, my dear, is your chief attraction. One would expect a girl who is as beautiful as you to be dependent. You have a magnificent—er—contempt for the conventional behavior of beautiful women. If I may say so."

"You have, Doctor. Which all leads up to an exit line. Goodbye."

He raised a soft white hand.

"Don't go. You haven't had your lunch."

"I'm not hungry."

"Then please listen. I have information that may be to your advantage to know."

She settled back, but did not relax. She had the appearance of a motionless cat, not tense, yet ready to leap. Her dark eyes were alert, wide and bright.

"About Mr. Templar," the psychiatrist began. "Although I am glad to confess a personal interest in your welfare, what I am about to say is of an academic nature."

Avalon smiled with one side of her mouth.

"Anyone will grant that he is a romantic figure, Miss Dexter. He must have a tremendous attraction for women, especially young and beautiful girls who are trying to carve out a career. He represents all they strive for—poise, charm, fame and respect from many psychological types. But he is not a stable person, Miss Dexter."

Avalon smiled with both sides of her mouth. It was a tender smile, with secret undertones.

"His path through life," said Zellermann—"and I don't mean to sound like a text book—is inevitably beset with adventure, crime, and personal danger. I happen to

know that many who have allied themselves with him have died. Somehow, he has come through all his adventures. But the day will come, my dear Miss Dexter, when Lady Luck will frown on her favorite protégé."

Avalon rose abruptly.

"And so on and so on," she said. "Let's skip the soul analysis. You heard him fling me to the wolves. I informed on him, he said. I told you about what he's been doing. I don't think I'm in danger of being hurt—or even being near him, for that matter. So long."

She walked out of the hotel, straight and tall and lovely. When she was on the sidewalk, three cab drivers rushed up to claim her for a fare. She chose one.

"The Tombs," she said; and the man blinked.

"Caught up with th' boy friend, hey? 'Stoo bad, lady."

"My grandmother," Avalon said icily, "is in jail for matricide. I'm taking her a hacksaw. Will you hurry?"

ALL the way to the gloomy pile of stone, the cab driver shook his head. When Avalon paid him off, he looked at her with troubled eyes.

"Scuse me, lady, but why would the old dame steal a mattress? It don't make sense."

"She got tired of sleeping on the ground," Avalon told him. "Some people just can't take it."

She went inside and was directed to the desk sergeant. He was a large man, and the lines in his face had not been acquired by thinking up ways to help his fellow man. He was busy at the moment she arrived before him, studying some printed matter on his desk. He didn't look up.

"Excuse me," Avalon said.

The sergeant paid no attention. He continued his study of the papers before him. He held a pencil in one huge fist and made a check mark now and then.

"I beg your pardon," Avalon said.

Still there was no evidence that the sergeant had heard her. He continued to peruse his mysterious papers. Avalon, like those who also serve, stood and waited. Presently the sergeant made a check mark after the name Sir Walter in the fourth at Pimlico and looked up.

His eyes were without expression. They roved over the convolutions of beauty as if they had been inspecting a prize farm animal. They penetrated, yes, and Avalon

could feel her clothes falling off her; but there was no lust, no desire, in the sergeant's eyes—only boredom.

"Yeh?" he said.

"I want to see a prisoner you have here," she said. "His name is Templar." She spelled it.

The sergeant's eyes said "Dames!" as he reached for a heavily bound ledger. He scanned it.

"When did he get here?"

"An hour ago, or less."

"Nobody's been here in the last hour."

"Where would he be, then?"

"What's the rap?"

"Oh, he hasn't even been tried. No charge has been made."

The sergeant's eyes groaned, rolled skyward.

"Lady, he'll be booked at Centre Street headquarters. He won't come here till he's been convicted."

"Oh. I didn't know. Where is it?"

He told her. She flagged a cab, and went there.

As she mounted the wide flight of stairs, she was joined by Kay Natello and Ferdinand Fairfield.

Ferdinand was resplendent in purple scarf, gray plaid jacket, dove-gray trousers, gray suede shoes and lemon-colored socks. His hands were white butterflies emerging from cocoons.

"Darling!" he cried, like bells from *Lakmé*.

Kay Natello might as well have been dressed in a fire hose, for all the blue cotton dress did for her gaunt frame. She said nothing, and Avalon was grateful for being spared that.

"Myrmidons," Avalon murmured. "What's the rap?"

Ferdinand put butterflies on her arm and she shivered.

"Quaint girl," he purred. "We were down to see a lawyer on Wall Street, and we were just passing in a cab—with the most brutal driver, my dear, simply delicious—and Kay said 'There's Avalon!' And since we'd been looking all over for you—" His shrug was as graceful as feathers on a little wind.

"Looking for me?"

"Yes, come on," Kay Natello said, in the voice which was so like an overstrained buzz-saw.

"The most marvellous thing, darling," Ferdinand burred. "Magnamound's going to do a picture around Cookie's Canteen. We'll all be in it. And you're to

have a good rôle. So come along. Cookie wants to be sure you'll play before she signs up with Mr. Pfeffer."

"Mr. Pfeffer being——?"

"The producer, dear girl. He's very quaint."

Avalon stood in indecision for a moment. She seemed to find nothing to say. But at last she said: "Okay. You two run along. I'll join you shortly. At Cookie's?"

"But you can't possibly," Ferdinand objected. "And surely you haven't anything to do in this dismal place. You couldn't be interested in any of the sordid characters who find their way in here. What are you doing here anyway?"

"I lost a gold compact and a pair of earrings out of my purse in a taxi," she said. "I thought this would be the place to report it. Not that I expect it'll do much good."

"It probably won't," Ferdinand said. "But I'll help you talk to these dreadful barbarians, and then we can all ride back up town together."

CHAPTER XIII



THE two young men who rang James Prather's doorbell might have been well-dressed haberdasher's assistants, shoe salesmen, or stockbrokers. They told the goggle-eyed Mr. Prather that they were attached to the Treasury Department and had credentials to prove it. One of them, a calm blond boyish young man, said his name was Harrison. He introduced the other, who was red-headed and freckled, as Smith.

Prather's pale hands fluttered in the direction of the divan.

"Sit down, will you? What's the matter? Income Tax trouble?"

Smith placed his blue felt hat on his well-pressed knee and said nothing. He seemed intensely interested in the hat. Harrison pushed his own hat back on his tow hair and seemed to develop a curiosity about the ceiling. Nobody said anything. Prather remained standing, not quite twisting his hands together; and his lobster-like eyes moved from Harrison to Smith and back.

Harrison broke the silence lazily: "You know a man named Sam Jeffries, I believe?"

Prather frowned.

"Jeffries? Jeffries? No, I think not."

"He said he was here to see you. He was quite definite about the location."

Prather frowned again.

"Oh . . . Yes. Yes, I think I remember who you mean. Yes. He was here, all right. What about him?"

Smith raised his freckled face.

"How's Shanghai these days?"

Prather blinked.

Harrison said: "Specifically, 903 Bubbling Well Road."

Prather blinked again. The effect was rather like raising and lowering a curtain rapidly over thickly curved lenses.

"I don't know what you're talking about, of course."

"Ah?" Smith said.

"Oh?" Harrison said.

"And I don't understand why the Treasury Department should be interested in me."

Harrison leaned back and looked at the far corner of the room. "I believe Sam Jeffries brought you a package—or packages?"

"Yes. He picked up a piece of carving for me in Shanghai—an old Chinese monk carrying a basket of fish. Very pretty."

"Where is it?" Smith asked.

"I—uh—I gave it to a—well, you know how it is—a girl."

"U'mm," Smith said.

"H'mm," Harrison said. "Where did you meet this Jeffries?"

"Oh—uh—you know—around—I don't remember."

Smith pushed a hand through his red hair and looked directly at Prather.

"According to the information that we have," he said, like a class valedictorian reciting, "you met Sam Jeffries for the first time in a place known as Cookie's Canteen on August eighteenth, last year. At that time you entered into some kind of agreement with him, which required a handshake to seal it, and he went on his way. On November thirtieth, Sam Jeffries met you here in this apartment and brought with him his friend, Joe Hyman. Why? What agreement did you enter into with the two of them?"

"If you two guys would give me some idea of what you're trying to find out," Prather said, "I might be able to help you. So far you haven't made any sense at all."

Harrison moved his eyes, giving the impression of a Government Man on an

important job.

"Suppose you answer a few questions for a change, Mr. Prather. We could take you downtown with us and make quite a business of this, you know."

"What goes? All you've done so far is make innuendoes. You haven't accused me of anything specific, and—well—hell! I don't like it!"

Smith turned his freckled face directly on Prather.

"What is 903 Bubbling Well Road to you? What did you say to Sam Jeffries? Who's the guy above you? How do you think you're going to get out of all this? There, my friend, are some specific questions."

James Prather's cock-lobster eyes regarded Mr. Smith with a sort of frantic intensity.

"But—but—but——"

Harrison said: "I see. Maybe you'd better come along with us, Mr. Prather."

PRATHER, it was quite obvious, searched his conscience, his capabilities, and appraised his ingenuity. He looked at Harrison. He looked at Smith, and his thoughts retreated into the inside of his own mind. From somewhere he gathered a certain nervous courage, and he set his mouth in a quivering line.

"I don't know what you're after, but I do know one thing. I can stand on my constitutional rights. Unless you have any formal charges to bring against me, I don't have to say anything to you. Good day, gentlemen."

"Well," Harrison said.

"Ho-hum," Smith said.

The two young men got lazily to their feet and eyed the jittering Prather without expression for a long time. Then they went away. Prather was also on his way as soon as he could get into a jacket and grab a hat. He flagged a taxi in front of the apartment house, and directed the driver to Dr. Zellermann's Park Avenue offices.

Zellermann was not happy to see him. His long face would have made ice-cubes seem like firecrackers. He chose his words carefully, as if he were picking each one out of a hat.

"And so you led them directly to me. Mr. Prather, I consider this a very ill-advised move on your part."

"I didn't lead them to you. I wasn't followed."

"May I ask just how you know that?"

In your present condition you wouldn't see an elephant following you." Dr. Zellermann picked up his phone, and dialed a number. "Bring two of your boys with you immediately."

"What—what are you going to do?" Prather asked. He repeated the question three times.

Dr. Zellermann made a triangle with the thumb and forefingers of his two white hands, and rested his chin upon the apex. He looked at James Prather as if he were a subject being discussed by a class in zoology.

"One of the principal aims of this particular organization, as you know, is to take care of our own. You, inadvertently, have placed us in a position where you are in danger—physically, morally and legally. We believe that it is to the interests of the organization to protect you. That was the purpose of my call."

"You mean then you're not——"

"Going to——"

"Well—uh——"

"Liquidate you? My dear Mr. Prather, please! As I said before our prime motivation in these present circumstances is to take care of our own. While we are waiting, I want you to tell me exactly what you told the Government men."

James Prather's mind was a roil of emotions. Uppermost, of course, was the instinct of self-preservation. He not only had no desire to die, but his every thought was directed strictly towards keeping himself alive. He cast into his mind for motives, inferences, and implications in Dr. Zellermann's attitude which might be at odds with that inherent drive which is born into every man.

"I didn't tell them anything. They seemed to know more than you could possibly expect them to. When their questions reached a certain point I did what I had to do, and that was to clam up."

"What exactly did they seem to know about?"

"They mentioned Jeffries and Hyman. They knew that they'd visited me and brought me something from Shanghai. And they asked me if I knew 903 Bubbling Well Road."

"Which of course you denied."

"Naturally. But how would they know about Jeffries and Hyman?"

into trouble. There are all kinds of situations in which they might talk. Luckily, however, they have nothing to talk about—except yourself. And you would never be indiscreet."

Prather swallowed.

"Of course not. I know I'm worried. But if you don't let me down——"

Dr. Zellermann nodded.

"I knew we could depend upon you, Mr. Prather."

And then silence fell. Dr. Zellermann seemed to have said all that he wished to say and James Prather was afraid to say anything more. They sat quietly, not meeting each other's eye. They sat like this for an undeterminable time, and their tableau was disturbed by Dr. Zellermann's blond secretary, with the sleeked-back hair, who stuck her head into the office and said:

"Mr. Carpenter to see you with two friends."

"Show them in."

The trio who entered the office were large hard-eyed men, pushing middle-age. They had one characteristic in common: they were ready to take orders and carry them out.

"Mr. Carpenter, Mr. Prather."

The two men shook hands. Prather was nervous, Carpenter matter of fact.

"Mr. Prather," Dr. Zellermann continued, "has unfortunately attracted some undesirable attention. It's up to us to see that he comes to no harm in the hands of the authorities. Mr. Carpenter, you know what to do."

Prather stood up.

"Dr. Zellermann, I can't thank you enough. I——"

Dr. Zellermann waved away his protestations of good will.

"Nonsense. One looks out for one's own."

James Prather twiddled his thumbs nervously as the long black car wound through traffic for an hour or more and left behind the city limits of New York. At long intervals farmhouses appeared on each side, and it may be presumed that birds sang in the trees nearby. Prather had no ear for our feathered friends and no eyes for rustic architecture.

He sat rigidly in the back seat between the two nameless companions of Mr. Carpenter, while that gentleman drove expertly and swiftly to their unrevealed

ZELLERMANN spread his hands.

"Who can tell? Seamen with money get drunk, sometimes they get

destination. The others initiated no trivial conversation, and Mr. Prather was in no mood to start any himself.

When they had travelled another hour, Carpenter swung down a narrow sideroad, whose pavement gave way presently to a sandy surface. Another turning brought them into a lane which was distinguished by car tracks and overhanging maples. After a half-mile's travel along this road, Carpenter stopped the car. He got out.

"This way," he said.

Prather, not without inner misgivings, followed the big man through a barbed-wire fence, across a pasture, and deep into a green orchard of apple trees.

"Where are you taking me?" Prather asked in a small voice.

Carpenter turned to face him.

"No place," he said. "You're here."

He took an automatic from under his left arm and pointed it at Prather's chest. The first shot would have been enough; but Carpenter, a conscientious man, gave him a second bullet to make certain.

CHAPTER XIV



THE man who went down the back stairs of the Algonquin Hotel and slipped quickly and inconspicuously through the lobby from the service door could never have been mistaken for the debonair and immaculate Mr. Templar

who had lately become accepted as one of the brighter landmarks of that possessive caravanserai.

He wore heavy black shoes that were cracked and stained and down at heel, heavy black wool socks drooping untidily over his ankles, dark blue trousers with baggy knees and a shiny seat, a soiled white shirt with a dark tie knotted and twisted like an old rope, a dark blue reefer jacket that was wrinkled across the shoulders, patched in one elbow, and threadbare at the cuffs, a vaguely nautical peaked cap without insignia that looked as if it was used to combining the functions of head-gear and brass polisher.

His shoulders sagged and his chest slouched, so that he didn't seem very tall. His complexion was ruddy and weather-beaten. What could be seen of his hair was a drab gray that matched his bushy

eyebrows and straggly moustache and the close-cropped fringe of beard around his chin.

He was out of the hotel so quickly that nobody really noticed him, but he was not bothered about being seen. If any leg men of the Ungodly were watching for him in the lobby, he was quite sure that they would patiently continue to sit and watch. The man who had become Tom Simons right down to his grimy fingernails was prepared to submit his creation to any ocular inspection—including that of the doorkeeper at Cookie's Canteen.

The doorkeeper, who was a woman with dyed red hair and a face like a dyspeptic camel, examined his identification papers and gave him a stock smile which displayed many large teeth tastefully mounted in gold.

"Glad to have you with us, Mr. Simons," she said. "Go right in and make yourself at home."

The Saint went in.

He found himself in a big barren room which had probably once been a restaurant, for one side of it was still broken up into upholstered booths. The rest of the furnishings were less ornamental, consisting of plain bare wooden tables and chairs, all of them scarred from much service. On the side opposite the booths there was a low dais with little more than enough room for the grand piano that stood on it.

The walls were plastered with posters of female nubility and cartoons from *Esquire*. Near the entrance there was a rack of tattered popular magazines. At the back of the room there was a service bar from behind which two very wavy-haired young men in their shirtsleeves were dispensing sandwiches and bottles of non-alcoholic throat irrigation. A juke box blared inexorably through the hit parade.

The room was crowded with men of all ages, some in ordinary civilian clothes, some in costumes that tried nebulously to look like a sort of seafaring uniform. Some of the parties at the tables were engrossed in games of cards or checkers. Other men danced with the hostesses in a clear space in front of the piano, clumsily or stiffly or flashily according to type.

The hostesses were mostly young and pert and passably good-looking. They wore aprons with star-dotted borders and *Cookie's Canteen* embroidered across

them. A few other smooth-skinned young men in identical aprons moved among the tables picking up empty bottles and dirty plates.

Aside from the rather noticeably sleek fragility of the male helpers, the place was fairly typical of the numerous oases that had mushroomed across the country during the war to offer chaste and sheltered recreation to men of the services, in line with the current concept of tea and parlor games as the great spiritual need of a warrior between battles.

But whereas practically all the prototypical estaminets were sponsored and protected by public organisations, Cookie's Canteen was a strictly free-lance and unofficial and unendorsed post-war benevolence. And in all of that there were questions to which the Saint wanted many answers. . . .

HE EDGED his way through the tables to the service bar and asked for a Pepsi. With the bottle in his hand, he turned back towards the room, scanning the crowd through the thick fog of smoke that hung under the low ceiling and wondering what his move should be.

A girl in an apron stopped in front of him.

"Hello," she said. "You got everything you want?"

"Yus, thank yer, miss."

"Gee, you must be English."

"That's right, miss." The Saint's voice was hoarse and innocent. "Strite from Aldgate. 'Ow did yer guess?"

"Oh, I'm getting so I can spot all the accents."

"Well now!" said the Saint admiringly.

"This your first time here?"

"Yus, miss."

"When did you get to New York?"

"Just got in larst night."

"Well, you didn't take long to find us. Do you have any friends here?"

"No, miss. . . ."

The Saint was just saying it when a face caught his eye through the blue haze. The man was alone now in a booth which a couple of other seamen had just left, and as he shifted his seat and looked vacantly around the room the Saint saw him clearly and recognised him.

He said suddenly: "Gorblimy, yes I do! I know that chap dahn there. Excuse me, miss—"

He jostled away through the mob and squeezed unceremoniously into the booth,

plonking his bottle down on the stained tabletop in front of him.

"Ullo, mite," he said cheerfully. "I know I've seen you before. Your nime's Patrick 'Ogan, ain't it?"

"Shure, Hogan's the name," said the other genially, giving him a square view of the unmistakable pugnosed physiognomy which Simon had last seen impaled on the spotlight of Cookie's Cellar. "An' what's yours?"

"Tom Simons."

"I don't remember, but think nothing of it. Where was it we met?"

"Murmansk, I think—durin' the war?"

"It's just as likely. Two weeks I've spent there on two trips, an' divil a night sober."

It appeared that Hogan found this a happy and satisfactory condition, for he had obviously taken some steps already towards inoculating himself against the evils of sobriety. His voice was a little slurred, and his breath was warmed with spicier fluids than passed over the counter of Cookie's Canteen.

"This 'ere's a bit of orl right, ain't it?" Simon said, indicating the general surroundings with a wave of his bottle.

"There's nothing better in New York, Tom. An' that Cookie—she's a queen, for all she sings songs that'd make your own father blush."

"She is, is she?"

"Shure she is, an' I'll fight any man that says she isn't. Haven't ye heard her before?"

"Naow. Will she be 'ere ternight?"

"Indeed she will. Any minute now. That's what I come in for. If it wasn't for her, I'd rather have a drink that'll stay with me an' a girl I can have to meself to roll in the hay. But Cookie can take care of that too, if she's a friend of yours."

He winked broadly, a happy pagan with a girl and a hangover in every port.

"Coo," said the Saint, properly impressed. "And are yer a friend of 'ers?"

"You bet I am. Why, last Sunday she takes me an' a friend o' mine out to that fine club she has, an' gives us all the drinks we can hold; an' there we are livin' like lords until daybreak, an' she says any time we want to go back we can do the same. An' if you're a friend o' mine, Tom, why, she'll do the same for you."

"Lumme," said the Saint hungrily. "Jer fink she would?"

"Indeed she will. Though I'm surprised at an old man like you havin' these ideas."

"I ain't so old," said the Saint aggrievedly. "And if it comes ter 'aving fun wif a jine—"

A figure loomed over the table and mopped officiously over it with a checkered rag. The hand on the rag was pale and long-fingered, and Simon noticed that the fingernails were painted with a violet-tinted lacquer.

Hardly daring to believe that anything so good could be true, the Saint let his eyes travel up to the classical features and pleated golden hair of the owner of that exotic manicure.

IT WAS true. It was Ferdinand Pairfield.

Mr. Pairfield looked at the Saint, speculatively, but without a trace of recognition; discarded him, and smirked at the more youthful and rugged-looking Hogan.

"Any complaints, boys?" he asked whimsically.

"Yes," Hogan said flatly. "I don't like the help around here."

Mr. Pairfield pouted.

"Well, you don't have to be *rude*," he said huffily, and went away.

"The only thing wrong with this place," Hogan observed sourly, "is all those pretty boys. I dunno why they'd be lettin' them in, but they're always here."

Then the truculent expression vanished from his face as suddenly as it had come there, and he let out a shrill joyful war-cry.

"Here she is, Tom," he whooped. "Here's Cookie!"

The lights dimmed, as he was speaking, giving focus to the single spotlight that picked up the bulbous figure of Cookie as she advanced to the front of the dais.

Her face was wide open in the big hearty jolly beam that she wore to work. Throwing inaudible answers back to the barrage of cheers and whistling that greeted her, she maneuvered her hips around the piano and settled them on the piano stool. Her plowman's hands pounded over the keyboard; and the Saint leaned back and prepared himself for another parade of her merchandise.

"Good evening, everybody," she blared when she could be heard. "Here we are again, with a load of those songs your mothers never taught you. Tonight we'll try and top them all—as usual. Hold on to your pants, boys, and let's go!"

She went.

It was a performance much like the

one that Simon had heard the night before; only much more so. She took sex into the sewer and brought it out again, dripping. She introduced verses and adlibs of the kind that are normally featured only at stag smokers of the rowdiest kind.

But through it all she glowed with that great gargoyle joviality that made her everybody's broadminded big sister; and to the audience she had, much as the USO would have disapproved and the YMCA would have turned pale with horror, it was colossal.

They hooted and roared and clapped and beat upon the tables, demanding more and more until her coarse homely face was glistening with the energy she was pouring out. And in key with his adopted character, and to make sure of retaining the esteem of Patrick Hogan, the Saint's enthusiasm was as vociferous as any.

It went on for a full three-quarters of an hour before Cookie gave up, and then Simon suspected that her principal reason was plain exhaustion. He realised that she was a leech for applause: she soaked it up like a sponge, it fed and warmed her, and she gave it back like a kind of transformed incandescence. But even her extravagant stamina had its limit.

"That's all for now," she gasped. "You've worn me down to a shadow." There was a howl of laughter. "Come back tomorrow night, and I'll try to do better."

She stepped down off the platform, to be hand-shaken and slapped on the back by a surge of admirers as the lights went up again.

Patrick Hogan climbed to his feet, pushing the table out and almost upsetting it in his eagerness. He cupped his hands to his mouth and split the general hubbub with a stentorian shout.

"Hey, Cookie."

His coat was rucked up to his hips from the way he had been sitting, and as he lurched there his right hip pocket was only a few inches from Simon's face. Quite calmly and almost mechanically the Saint's eyes traced the outlines of the object that bulged in the pocket under the rough cloth—even before he moved to catch a blue-black gleam of metal down in the slight gape of the opening.

Then he lighted a cigarette with extreme thoughtfulness, digesting the new and uncontrovertible fact that Patrick Hogan, that simple spontaneous child of

nature, was painting the town with a roscoe in his pants.

CHAPTER XV



COOKIE sat down with them, and Hogan said: "This is me friend Tom Simons, a foine sailor an' an old goat with the gals. We were drunk together in Murmansk—or I was drunk anyway."

"How do you do, Tom," Cookie said. "Mustn't grumble," said the Saint. "'Ow's yerself?"

"Tired. And I've still got two shows to do at my own place."

"I certainly did enjoy 'earing yer sing, ma'm."

"This your first visit?"

"Yus, ma'm."

"Call me Cookie. Everyone does."

"Yus, ma'm."

"I bet it won't be his last," Hogan said. "Eh, Tom?"

"Not arf it won't," said the Saint. "If you'll 'ave me. But I dunno as I'll 'ave a lot more charnces on this trip."

Cookie took out a pack of cigarettes, offered them, and lit one for herself. She looked at the Saint again.

"Aren't you staying long?" she asked conversationally.

"Naow. Back on board by supper-time on Tuesday, them's the orders—an' we only drops the 'ook yesterdye. Be a s'ilor an' see the world—I don't think."

"That's too bad."

"Aow, it's orl in the dye's work, ma'm. But I ses ter meself, I'm goin' ter see New York while I got the charnce, by crikey."

"Where are you heading for next?"

"Through the canal an' strite to Shanghai. Then back from there to Frisco. Then—"

"Say, Cookie," interrupted Hogan brazenly, "how's about a drop of real liquor for a couple o' good friends who've dried their throats to a cinder with cheerin' for ye?"

She took a deep man-sized drag at her cigarette, flicked ash from it on the table, and glanced at the Saint again with expressionless and impersonal calculation.

"I might find a drop," she said.

She stood up and started away; and Patrick Hogan nudged the Saint with one

of his broad disarming winks as they followed her.

"What did I tell ye, Tom?"

"Cor," said the Saint appreciatively, "you ain't arf a one."

They went through a door at the side of the service bar, which took them into a kitchen that might once have been bustling and redolent with the concoction of rare dishes for the delectation of gourmets. Now it looked bare and drab and forlorn. There was no one there.

A centre table was piled with loaves of bread and stacks of sliced ham and cheese, and littered with crumbs and scraps. Cases of soft drinks were pyramided in one corner. The only thing on the stove was an enormous steaming coffee pot; and a mass of dirty cups and plates raised sections of their anatomy, like vestiges of a sunken armada, out of the lake of greasy water in the sink.

Cookie led the way into another room that opened off the kitchen. It was so tiny that it must once have seen duty as a store room. Now it barely had space for a couple of plain chairs, a wastebasket, a battered filing cabinet, and a scarred desk scattered with bills and papers. Kay Natello sat at the desk, in front of an antique typewriter, pecking out an address on an envelope with two clawlike fingers.

"Hullo, Kay," Hogan said familiarly. "An' how's me swateheart tonight?"

"We're just going to have a quick one," Cookie said. "Be a darling and find us some glasses, Kay, will you?"

Kay Natello got up and went out into the kitchen and Cookie opened a drawer of the desk and pulled out a half-empty bottle of Scotch. Natello came back with four wet glasses and put them on the desk.

"This is Tom Simons—Kay Natello," Cookie said. "Tom's only just got in, and he's sailing again on Tuesday."

"Too bad," said Natello.

"We all 'ave ter work, Miss," Simons said modestly. "At least we got plenty o' grub an' a nice clean bed ter sleep in, as long as it don't sink under us."

Cookie finished pouring four powerful slugs, and picked up one of them.

"Well, boys," she said. "Down the hatch."

THE drinks duly went down the hatch. "You were sailing soon, too, weren't you, Pat?" asked Natello.

"Next week. Off to South Africa, India,

Singapore, and back the same way."

"We'll miss you," said Cookie. "What about you, Tom—are you going to England?"

"Shanghai," said the Saint, wiping his droopy moustache. "Through the canal. An' back to Frisco."

Cookie poured herself another drink, and downed it at one gulp like a dose of medicine. Perhaps that was what it was for her.

"I've got to leave you," she announced. "Got my next show to do."

She helped herself to another small jolt, as an afterthought, just in case she had made a mistake and cheated herself on the last one. The effect on her was not even noticeable. Her small piggy eyes summarised the Saint with the quick covert shrewdness of an adept Fifty-second Street head waiter taking the measure of a new customer. She said with perfectly timed spontaneity: "Look, why don't you boys come over to the Cellar when you get through here? On the house."

Hogan thumped her heartily on the back without even jarring her.

"Darlin', what did ye think we were waitin' for? Sure, we'll be there shoutin' for ye. Won't we, Tom?"

"Crikey," said the Saint, with a wistful break in his voice. "You ain't arf giving us a time, ma'm. I mean, Cookie."

"That's fine," Cookie said. "Then I'll be expecting you. Kay, you take care of them and bring them along. See you all later."

She gathered her foundation around her, gave a last hesitant glance at the Scotch bottle, and made a resolute exit like a hippopotamus taking off to answer the call of Spring.

Kay Natello took care of them.

Simon didn't keep very close track of the caretaking, but the general trend of it was quite simple. After the Scotch was finished and they left the canteen, it involved stopping at a great many bars on the way and having a drink or two in each of them. Hogan acquired more blarney and boisterousness as it went on: he said that Kay was his girl, and an Irishman's girl was his castle, or something that sounded like that.

He beamingly offered to pulverise various persons whom he suspected of dissenting from his opinions about Oliver Cromwell, Michael Collins, De Valera and Kay Natello. Simon Templar did his best to keep in time with the mood, and sur-

reptitiously dribbled as many drinks as he could into the nearest cuspidor.

Through it all, Kay Natello only became more stringy and more removed. She responded to Pat Hogan's elephantine flirtations when she remembered to; in between, she was more like a YWCA chaperone trying to keep up with the girls. Simon was quite relieved that she didn't at any point offer to break into significant *vers libres*. . . . But it still seemed to take a long time to reach Cookie's Cellar.

Once they were there, however, it was a repetition of the night before from another viewpoint. This time, the Saint was one of the reluctant heroes under the spotlight. Cookie sang the same kind of songs, giving and receiving the same enthusiasm.

After one of the more turbid numbers, Kay Natello nudged the Saint and said proudly: "I wrote that for her."

"Cor!" said the Saint respectfully.

That was only a mild expression of what he thought. The idea of a poetess of Kay Natello's school composing those kinds of lyrics in her lighter moments had an austere magnificence which he hoped to dwell on some quiet evening when he had nothing else at all to do.

IT WAS like the night before again, with a difference, because Avalon Dexter was there.

She wasn't there to work. She was just another customer, wearing a simple afternoon dress, sitting at a table at the back of the room; but he saw her long tawny hair dance as she talked and looked around. It gave him a queer sensation to watch her like that and have her glance pass over him in complete unawareness. It was like being invisible.

And it also gave him a sort of guilty feeling, as though he was hiding and spying on her. Which at that moment he was.

The man with her was slightly rotund and slightly bald. He wore horn-rimmed glasses and he had a round and pleasant pink face that looked very clean and freshly barbered. He was not, you could tell very quickly, another Dr. Zellermann in his manual recreations. He behaved like a nice wholesome middleaged man who was enjoying the company he was in.

Any impartial observer would have conceded that he was entitled to that, and quite undeserving the unreasonable malignance with which Simon regarded him. Simon knew it was unreasonable, but that didn't blunt the stab of resentment that

went through him when he saw her chattering with this complacent jerk. He was surprised at his own symptoms, and not too pleased about them either.

Cookie finished at last, with Hogan and the Saint competing in the uproariousness of their appreciation. The melancholy waiter brought some more drinks, bowed down into profounder misery by the knowledge that this was one table which he dared not discourage, and that at the same time it was one table where the tip would certainly be no compensation.

Cookie ploughed through the room, stopping to give jovial greeting to various tables, and surged on to the bar, where there were other members of her following to be saluted and the bartender had been trained to have three ounces of Scotch waiting for her with a cube of ice in it.

It was twenty minutes before she breast-ed back to her own table, and then she had Dr. Ernst Zeller mann in tow.

Cookie introduced him, and mopped her face and reached for the first drink that arrived.

"Tom's sailing on Tuesday," she said. "Shanghai."

The Saint had already begun to let it look as if his liquor consumption was catching up with him. He lurched in his chair, spilt some of his drink, and gave a wink that was getting heavy and bleary.

"Gonna find aht if it's true abaht China," he said.

"I may be able to tell you a few places to go," Zeller mann said smoothly. "I spent quite a time there once—in the good days before the war."

He looked very noble and full of unfathomable memories; and Simon Templar, dimly returning his gaze, felt coldly and accurately like a specimen on a dissecting table.

Zeller mann picked up his glass and turned to Cookie with the utmost charm.

"You know," he said, "I don't know why you don't invite more people like Mr. Hogan and Mr. Simons out to Long Island. After all, they deserve to be entertained much more than I do."

"That's an idea," Cookie said. "How about it, boys? I've got a little shack on the beach at Southampton. We close this joint on Sundays anyhow. Why don't you come along? I'll see that you're back in town on Monday. You can swim in the ocean and get some sun on the beach, and we'll make a party of it and it won't cost

you a cent."

"Dr. Zeller mann and I will drive you out as soon as we've closed this place. We'll have a grand weekend. I'll have company for you, too. The most attractive girl you've ever seen." Simon was much too drunk to catch the glance that flashed between them—or at least he had been able to convince everyone of that. "Dexter is coming along," Cookie said.

CHAPTER XVI



THE Saint mumbled something about seeing a man about a dog, and was able to get out alone. There was a telephone booth near the entrance. He called the Algonquin and asked for Avalon.

Miss Dexter was not there at the moment, as he knew; but could they take a message?

"When is she likely to get it?" he asked.

"I couldn't say, sir, but she's been calling in about every half hour. She seems to be expecting a message. Is this Mr. Templar?"

The Saint held his breath for a moment, and took a lightning decision.

"Yes."

"I know she's asked whether you called. Can she call you back?"

The Saint said: "I'm afraid she can't reach me, but tell her I'll see her tomorrow."

Nothing could have been more true than that, even if she didn't understand it; and somehow it made him feel better with himself. It meant something to know that she had hoped he would find a way to get in touch with her—no matter why. She would not know that he had been back to the Algonquin since his "arrest," for that had been taken care of; and she must continue to believe that he was locked up somewhere downtown. But she had asked . . .

Both of them had become hooked to an unwinding chain that was going somewhere on its own. Only it happened to be the same chain for both of them. It seemed as if the hand of destiny was in that—Simon didn't want to think any more, just then, about what that destiny might be.

When he got back to the table, everything had been settled. Patrick Hogan

proclaimed that when his great-grandfather sailed for America, all the luggage he had was in his coat pockets, and he could do anything that his great-grandfather could do. He was certain that, next to his great-grandfather and himself, his pal Tom Simons was just as expert at light travelling.

"I can take you in my car," Zeller mann said convivially. "There's plenty of room."

Simon didn't doubt it was a car you could play badminton in.

"I'll have to stay till the bitter end," said Cookie, "and Dexter will probably want to pick up some things. I'll bring her."

It was worked out just as easily and rapidly as that. But Simon knew that aside from the hospitable co-operation, Avalon Dexter was not intended to know that Dr. Zeller mann would be a member of the house party. Or he hoped he knew it.

He had some confirmation of that when they were leaving. Avalon seemed to be on her way back from the powder room when they started out. There was a rather lost and apart expression on her face that no one else might have seen. Zeller mann half stopped her.

"Good evening, Avalon," he said, half formally and half engagingly.

"How are you?" Avalon said, very brightly and very cheerfully and without a pause, so that before he could have said anything else she was neatly past him and gone.

Zeller mann stood looking after her without a ripple of reaction, his face as smooth as a head of marble.

Simon recalled that he had also hit Dr. Zeller mann in the eye, and realised that some momentary inaccuracy had made him fail to leave any souvenir contusion on the eyelid. All he could detect, in the brighter light of the foyer, was a small area of matt surface just above the cheekbone. Dr. Zeller mann's peripalpebral ecchymosis, clearly, had received the most skilled medical and cosmetic treatment.

The encounter had made Hogan and the Saint drift further on towards the door, and Kay Natello had excused herself on a farewell visit to the powder room. It was a chance that might not recur very quickly.

Simon said: "Pat, 'oo is this Dexter jine?"

"She used to work here, Tom me boy, an' a swate singer she was too. That was

her just went by. But you'll meet her when we get to Southampton. An' if Cookie says she's for you, ye're in luck."

"She's a corker, orl right," said the Saint. "If that's 'oo yer mean. Although she wouldn't 'ave much time fer an ole goat like me. Clarss, that's wot she is . . ." He staggered just a little, and put his arm around Hogan's broad shoulders, and decided to take a chance on Hogan's unpredictable pugnacity. "But if it comes ter that, mite, wot djer see in an ole sack o' bones like that there Natello?"

HOGAN laughed loudly and clung to him for mutual support.

"She's okay, Tom," he said generously. "An' she's a friend of Cookie's, an' she's me swateheart. Is it her fault if she's an old sack o' bones? She reminds me of me old Aunt Eileen, an' she's been kindness itself to me iver since we met, so I'll fight any man that says she's not the toast o' the town."

That was how they piled into Dr. Zeller mann's car, which was not only big enough to play badminton in but could probably have accommodated a social set of tennis as well.

Hogan and Natello sat in the back, and after a few lines of noisy repartee seemed to get close together and go to sleep. Dr. Zeller mann steered them out over the Triborough Bridge with surgical care and precision, while he chatted urbanely about the sea and world commerce and logistics and the noble part that was being played by such unsung paladins of reconversion as Tom Simons. The Saint sat beside him, making the right answers as best he could improvise them, and remembering Avalon Dexter and many various things.

Apparently, as he had worked it out, Avalon's arrival at Southampton to find Zeller mann there already was meant to be a surprise for her. Apparently, then, there was an idea extant that she wouldn't have accepted the invitation if she had known Zeller mann would be there. Certainly she had brushed him off coolly enough that night, with merely conventional politeness. That was what any ordinary person would think.

But Simon Templar was still alive for no more fundamental reason than that he had never thought what any ordinary person would think—or was intended to think. So that he could stand far back and see that if he were the Ungodly and he wanted to hook Simon Templar, he

might easily play the cards something like that.

And why had Avalon accepted the invitation anyhow?

The Saint's lips hardened over the reminder that he always had to think like that. He had had to do it for so long that it was a habit now. And now, for the first time in an infinitude of years, he was conscious of it again.

And it wasn't any fun at all, and there was no pleasure at all in the knowledge of his own wisdom and vigilance; because this was Avalon, and this wasn't the way he wanted to think about Avalon.

Avalon with her russet locks tossing like the woods of New England in the fall, and her brown eyes that laughed so readily and looked so straight.

But Patrick Hogan with his ingenuous joviality and the gun on his hip. Patrick Hogan with his uninhibited young sailor's zest for a spree, and his cheerful acceptance of Kay Natello. Patrick Hogan, whom the Saint had hooked so deftly as a sponsor—who had been so very willing to be hooked.

And the Parkway stretching ahead, and the soothing murmurs of movement.

And Avalon with the friendliness and the passion meeting at her mouth, and the music always in her voice.

And the great hospitality of Cookie and Zellermann, and the glances that went between them.

And the headlights reaching out to suck in the road.

And Avalon . . .

The Saint slept.

He woke up presently out of a light dream mist in which sane thought and diaphanous fantasy had blended so softly and lightly that it seemed like a puzzle in clairvoyance to separate them.

Then, as you sat still and probed for them, they slipped away elusively and faded at the last fingertip of apprehension, so that it was like searching for shadows with a lantern; and in the end there was nothing at all except time gone by and the headlights still drinking up the road—a road over which pools of thin white fog loomed intermittently and leapt and swallowed them and were gone like the dream.

THE Saint lighted a cigarette and glanced at the pale, precise, sharply graven profile of Dr. Zellermann on his left.

"We're nearly there," Zellermann said, as if there had been no hiatus at all.

Houses and hedges rose at the headlights, dodged adroitly, and were left behind. Southampton, Long Island, slept in peace, exposing nothing in common with its parent town of Southampton, England—not bombed, not scarred by war, and not knowing the other battle that swept through it in the sleek car that Dr. Zellermann drove.

They touched the end of Main Street, turned right and then left again presently, and then after a little while they swung into a driveway and stopped. Simon knew where they were—somewhere in the long line of ambitious beach-fronted houses which had expanded along that coast.

Cookie's summer hideaway may have been only a shanty in new shanty town, but her description of it as "a little shack" was rather modest. Dr. Zellermann let them in with a key, and found light switches with familiar assurance. They went through a panelled hall with quite a broad oak staircase, and into a living-room that was almost as big as Cookie's Cellar—which didn't make a barn of it either.

But it was still a large room, with tall french windows on the ocean side and glass tables and big square-cut modern couches, all of it reflecting the kind of fast-moneyed life which Simon could easily associate with the profits of a joint like Cookie's. And probably also reflecting, he thought in a flash of intuition, the interior decorating ideas of Ferdinand Fairfield—after the apotheosis of Kay Natello he doubted whether any of the members of Cookie's clique would be allowed to withhold their talents from practical application.

Zellermann slid aside a pair of pale green mirrors with geometrical designs frosted on them, disclosing a bar alcove with three chrome-legged stools in front and a professional array of bottles forming a relief mural behind. He stepped through the flap in the counter and said: "How about a drink?"

"Sure, an' that must have been what me throat was tryin' to tell me," said Hogan with a prodigious yawn, "when I was dreamin' about the Suez Canal on the way."

"I'll get some ice," said Natello, in the same lifeless twang, as if she was used to being useful and didn't think about it any more.

"And I'll help ye, if ye'll lead the way."

They went out. Simon sat on one of the stools, put one elbow on the bar, and

pushed back his disreputable cap. Zeller-mann set out a row of glasses, disregarded the finely representative stock behind him, and brought up a bottle of Old Mac-Sporran Genuine Jersey City Scotch Whiskey from under the bar and began to measure out doses.

"Are you and Patrick on the same ship?" he asked pleasantly.

"Naow," said the Saint. "We met in Murmansk."

"Of course. I should have remembered. He's going to Singapore and you're headed for Shanghai."

"That's right, guv'nor."

"Have you known Patrick long?"

"On'y since the larst bar we was in. In Murmansk, that was."

"Until you met at the Canteen tonight."

"That's right. An' I ses to 'im, Gorblimy, I ses, I've seen you before; an' 'e ses to me, Gorblimy, 'e ses——"

Simon went on with this.

Dr. Zeller-mann finished his general pouring, turned for a liqueur glass, and unobtrusively selected himself a bottle of Benedictine from the display shelves.

"A very fine instinctive type," he said suavely. "Quite unrepressed, given to violent mental and physical expression, but essentially sequacious under the right guidance."

The Saint rubbed his eyes.

"Blimey, guv'nor," he said, "yer can't arf tork, can yer? Strike me pink!"

He subsided into abashment when this miracle failed to occur, and devoted himself to the exotic nuances of Old Mac-Sporran as soon as Hogan and Natello returned with sufficient ice to numb his palate into by-passing its more caustic overtones.

He had a gift of being able to let time slide over him while he pretended to be linked with it, so that nobody noticed that his presence was somewhere else while he sat where he was. He was able to pass that knack on to Tom Simons, without making any change in the character he had created. But he had no important recollections of the next hour and more.

He knew that Dr. Zeller-mann was a flawless temporary host, dispensing adequate drams of MacSporran while he sipped Benedictine; that Patrick Hogan sang *Danny Boy* and *Did Your Mother Come from Ireland?* in a very uncertain tenor; and that Kay Natello made her original drink last all the time, with her head obligingly tilted on to Hogan's

shoulder and a rapt expression on her fallow face as if she had been mentally composing an elegy on the death of a gonococcus.

AND then there was a rush of machinery on the drive, and an involuntary lull, and the thud of the front door, and footsteps, and the barge-like entrance of Cookie. Followed by Avalon Dexter.

Followed, after another moment, by Ferdinand Fairfield, who had apparently been swept up enroute. But Simon paid scarcely any attention to him.

His eyes were on Avalon.

Her glance skimmed the room, and she saw Zeller-mann. She checked for the barest instant—it was so slight that it could have made no impression on anyone else. But the Saint was watching, and he saw it. And then she was still smiling, but her vivacity was skilled and watchful. Or so it seemed to him.

"Oh, company," she said, and flopped down on the sofa where Hogan and Natello were ensconced, and began chattering brightly and trivially to Hogan about night clubs and songs and bands.

Zeller-mann poured two drinks behind the bar, choosing the best bottles, and brought them out. He handed one to Cookie on his way, and carried the other over to Avalon.

"Since we have to be guests together," he said ingratiatingly, "couldn't we stop feuding and forgive each other?"

Avalon had to look up at him because he was on the arm of the sofa next to her.

"I'm being framed," she announced, very brightly. She dropped her voice after the general statement, but the Saint was still listening. She said: "I'll stop feuding and forgive you if you'll just get off my arm."

She went on bibbering to Hogan about musical trivia.

Simon Templar seized the opportunity to slip behind the bar, single out a bottle of Peter Dawson, and pour himself a nightcap that would last.

When he looked for Zeller-mann again, the doctor was standing beside Cookie with his attentive and invariable smile.

Patrick Hogan was trying to show Avalon how to sing *When Irish Eyes Are Smiling*.

Zeller-mann was saying: "... tomorrow will be soon enough."

"There's plenty of time," Cookie said.

They started towards the bar.

Mr. Fairfield had already drifted over there in a rather forlorn way—perhaps because nobody was offering him any immediate appreciation, and perhaps because of an understandable reluctance to invite any more of Hogan's uninhibited hostility. He had made another distasteful survey of the Saint's well-aged uncouthness, and averted his pure pretty face to review the color scheme of fluids and labels on the background shelves.

"I wonder," he muttered, with almost pathetic audibility, "if I'm in the mood for some Crème Violette?"

Simon didn't violently detest Mr. Fairfield, and all his instincts were against wasting gratuitous abuse on such creatures; but he was irrevocably playing a part, and he was still sure that Hogan was the star to which his wagon had to stay hitched until a better form of traction came along.

"Wot?" he said sourly. "Ain't there no Cream Pansiette 'ere?"

Mr. Fairfield was emboldened by his surroundings to tilt an offended nose.

He said superciliously: "I beg your pardon?"

"You 'eard," growled the Saint trenchantly, in the time-honored formula of Cockney repartee. "You ain't got clorf ears."

That was when Cookie and Dr. Zellermann arrived.

Cookie said overwhelmingly: "Ferdy, don't be so sensitive. Tom's got a right to enjoy himself——"

Dr. Zellermann sidled behind the bar and leaned over towards the Saint and said with his monastic charm: "You know, in my studies of psychology nothing has ever fascinated me so much as the symbolism of the sailor. Of course you've heard all that stuff about the 'girl in every port' and 'what shall we do with the drunken sailor' and so on. Really a fine synopsis of the natural impetuous life.

"But why? . . . You have a proverb which says there is no smoke without fire. Then where is the fire? The sailor—the sea. The sea, which once covered the whole earth. The sea, out of which our earliest protoplasmic ancestors first crawled to begin the primitive life which you and I are now enlarging . . ."

The Saint gaped at him with adoring incomprehension.

COOKE was absent-mindedly pouring herself another year or two of Old

MacSporran, and saying to Mr. Fairfield: "Now for God's sake, Ferdy, have some Violette and stop fussing. And then you can be a good boy and see if the beds are all ready, there's a dear."

"Now take your own case, Tom," Zellermann was pursuing engagingly. "When you get to Shanghai, for instance——"

There was a sudden mild crash as Patrick Hogan spilled two glasses and an ash-tray off the table in front of him in the act of hoisting himself to his feet.

"I'm goin' to the little sailor boy's room," he proclaimed loudly.

"Second door on your right down the hall," said Kay Natello, as if she had been reciting it all her life.

"Run along, Ferdy," Cookie was saying with a certain kindness, "and see if you can't think what we ought to do about those pictures in the dining-room."

"Iver since I was born," Hogan challenged the whole world, "a little sailor boy's room has been in the sea. An' what was good enough for Nelson is good enough for me."

He hauled the drapes away from one of the french windows and began fumbling stubbornly with the door latch.

Fairfield the Unconvinced went over to help him, drew the curtains together again, and then slipped timidly out into the garden after him.

"When you get to Shanghai," Zellermann resumed blandly, "as soon as you go ashore, the first thing you'll want is a drink, and after that a girl. During your stay there you'll probably have many drinks and many girls. But you will have no furtive feeling about these girls, as you would have at home. On the contrary, you'll boast about them. Because you are a sailor, and therefore girls are your traditional privilege. Have you been to Shanghai before?"

"Naow. This'll be the fust time." Simon leered at the doctor familiarly. "But don't fergit—yer promised ter gimme some phone numbers."

"I won't forget," Zellermann reassured him, with all the soothing earnestness that he would have tendered to a patient with an AA Dun & Bradstreet. "Although most of them have probably changed since the war. However, I will put you in touch with a friend of mine who'll take good care of you. I know you'll find him, because I heard from him just the other day."

"Knows all the numbers, does 'e?"

"All of them. A very interesting fellow. He used to send me art pieces for my collection. As a matter of fact, you might be able to bring some back for me—he wrote me that he had several things that I wanted, if he could only send them."

The Saint took another drink while he weighed what chance he should take. And he knew that he had to take it. The invitation might not come again.

"Too 'ot fer the post office, eh?" he ventured encouragingly.

"Not at all. I think you'd find them very dull. But there are still so many restrictions about importing antiques—"

"Just an honest spot o' smugglin', wot?" The Saint screwed up one eye in another ponderous wink. "Well, guv'nor, Tom Simons is yer man. To 'ell wiv the customs, that's wot I always sye."

Dr. Zellermann stared at him contemptuously.

At which second the window curtains flew apart like the portals of some explosive genesis, permitting the irruptive return of Ferdinand Fairfield accompanied by a bloodcurdling wail of horrific anguish which had started in the outside distance and arrived in the room with him before anyone else had been able to identify and classify it.

Mr. Fairfield was a remarkable sight, too. He was practically naked. His coat and shirt had been split down the back, so that the two halves of them hung and flapped like limp wings around his wrists. His trousers had completely disappeared, thus revealing that he wore pale jade silk drawers with his initials embroidered on them.

He ran to Cookie like a little boy running to his mother.

"Cookie!" he bawled. "That *dreadful* man! He tore my clothes, and he—he threw me into—into a lot of poison ivy!"

In that immortal moment, before anyone else could say anything, Patrick Hogan strode through the window like a victorious hooligan, beaming across every inch of his irresponsible pug-nosed face.

"Shure, an' I was just waitin' for the chance," he said joyfully. He lurched over to the bar, still with the same broad grin, and put his left hand on the Saint's shoulder and turned him a little. "But as for you, Tom, me boy, ye're no pal o' mine to have sent him afther me, bad cess to ye; an' if that's your idea of a joke, here's something that oughta tickle ye—"

Without the slightest additional warning, and while he was still grinning and stirring the Saint's shoulder with his other hand, his right fist rammed upwards at the Saint's jaw. Simon Templar was caught where he sat, flat back and relaxed and utterly off his guard. There was an evanescent splash of multicoloured flares in the centre of his head, and then a restful blackness in which sleep seemed the most natural occupation.

CHAPTER XVII



HE woke up in a very gradual and laborious way that was like dragging his mind out of a quagmire, so that although he knew in advance that he had been knocked out there was a lot of other history to struggle through before

he got to thinking about that. He remembered everything that he had been through since the beginning of the story—Cookie's Cellar and Sutton Place South, the Algonquin and a cheap secondhand clothing store, Cookie's Canteen and a drive out to Southampton.

He remembered people—Cookie, Natello, Fairfield, a melancholy waiter, even Wolcott Gibbs. And a girl called Avalon. And a hostess in Cookie's Canteen, and Patrick Hogan who had so much breezy fun and carried a gun on his hip—and who had socked him.

And Dr. Ernst Zellermann with his clean white hair and ascetic features and persuasive voice, betraying himself with his long ponderous words and the incurable cumbersome Teutonic groping for far-fetched philosophical generalisations which belonged so obviously in a germanic institute of Geopolitik. Zellermann, who was a phony refugee and a genuine master of the most painstakingly efficient technique that the same germanic thoroughness had ever evolved. Zellermann, who was the prime reason why the Saint had ever entered the circle at all. . . .

That was how Simon had to build it back, filling in the certainties where there had been questions before, in a dull plodding climb out of the fog.

He didn't open his eyes at once because there was a sort of ache between his temples which made him screw up his brows in protest, or as a counter-irritant;

and that made opening his eyes an independent operation to be plotted and toiled over.

It came to him out of this that he had been knocked out before, seldom with a bare fist, but several times with divers blunt instruments; but the return to consciousness had never been so lagging and sluggish as this. He had been drugged before, and this was more like that.

After that stage, and deriving from it, there was a period of great quiet, in which he reviewed other things. He tested his sensations for the drag or the pressure of a gun anywhere on him, and remembered that he had held so strictly to his created character that he had set out unarmed. Still without moving, he let his skin give him tactile confirmation of the clothes in which he had left the Algonquin.

The only doubt he had about his make-up concerned the gray of his hair and eyebrows, which was provided by talcum powder and could have been brushed out. His face coloring was a dye and not a grease paint, and his straggly moustache had been put on hair by hair with waterproof gum—both of them were secure against ordinary risks.

Then after a while he knew why he was thinking along these lines. Because somebody was washing his face. Or dabbing it with a cold wet cloth. Somebody was also shaking him by the shoulder and calling a name that he knew perfectly well.

"Tom! . . . Tom!"

A curiously low voice, for anyone who was trying to call him. But a voice that he knew, too. And a faint fragrance in the air that had been in his nostrils before, some other time when he had heard the voice.

He decided to try opening his eyes, and finally he made it. But there was no difference. Only blackness swimming around him. And he knew that his eyes were open.

He wondered whether he had gone blind.

His head hurt very much, and the shaking at his shoulder made him dizzy. He wished it would all go away.

"Tom! Wake up!"

A voice that filled out words like a cello; a voice and a fragrance that would be in his memory always.

"Avalon darling," he murmured sleepily, "I love you very much, but can't you do anything about your insomnia?"

Then everything was utterly still, ex-

cept for the far faint lulling whisper of the sea.

IT SEEMED like a good time to go to sleep again.

Then there was a face soft against his cheek, moving; and a dampness that was not the wet cloth, but warmer; and the fragrance sweeter and stronger in his senses; and arms and hands clinging and pressing; and the same voice talking and making sounds that merged with the slow soft roll of the sea, and breaking strangely where there were no waves breaking, and speaking and stirring, and this was something that happened a million years ago but had only been waiting a million years to happen, and he had to do something about it even if it meant smashing his way out of an iron vise that was holding him in that absurd and intolerable suspension, and there was the sweetness and the voice saying: "Simon, darling . . . Oh, darling, my darling . . . Simon, wake up, Simon!"

And the voice saying: "I didn't know—I'm such a dope, but I should have . . . Simon, darling, wake up! . . . Simon, wake up. . . ."

And then he was awake.

A moment of clarity drifted towards him like a child's balloon, and he caught it and held on to it and everything was quite clear again while he held it.

He said very carefully: "Avalon, I left a message for you that I'd see you tomorrow. Well, this is tomorrow. Only I can't see you. That's silly, isn't it?"

She said: "I had to put the light out again because I didn't want it to show under the door. . . . Simon, dear, wake up! Don't go to sleep again!"

He said: "Why did you come here anyway?"

"Because that creep I was with knew Cookie, and she'd apologised, and she was being as nice as she can be, and I have to work and Hollywood came into the picture, and it seemed like the only graceful thing to do, and I can't fight the whole night club racket, and . . . Simon, you must stay awake!"

"I am awake," he said. "Tell me what happened."

"After Pat hit you, Cookie said that it wasn't your fault that Ferdy went after him—he went by himself, or she sent him, or something. And he was broken-hearted. So we all put you to bed, and everything broke up. Zeller mann said that you'd sleep it off—"

"I bet he did. But I never had to sleep off a crack on the jaw before."

"Pat's a strong guy. He carried you upstairs all by himself."

"I've been slugged by strong guys before. Believe it or not. But it never felt like this afterwards. I feel as if I'd been drugged."

"You could have been. You were drinking."

"I was cheat-drinking. I poured the last one myself. But Zeller mann could have slipped something into my glass."

"I suppose he could have, in the commotion . . . Stay awake, Simon. You must!"

"I'm still awake. That's how I know. If I'd had it all, you wouldn't have been able to rouse me now. Hogan stopped that by slugging me. But Zeller mann still thought I'd sleep it off. I would have, too, if you hadn't worked on me."

"Simon, are you making sense now?"

"I'm doing everything in the wide world I can." It was still an unforgettable effort to speak concisely and intelligibly. "Give me a chance, baby. I'm working at it. I never was drunk tonight. I sound like it now, but I wasn't."

She was close to him and holding him, her face against his, as if she was trying to transmit her life and wakefulness to him from every inch of her body.

It seemed like a long time; and through all of it he was working through fluctuating waves of awareness to cling on to the wandering balloon that was his only actual link with this other world that he had to keep touch with against all the cruel violation of a dream and the fumes of a drug that kept creeping back to try and steal away his will.

She said after a few seconds or a thousand years: "Darling, you shouldn't have dressed up with that moustache." He knew that he had to shut out the note in her voice that hung between a sob and a hysterical giggle. "It tickles," she said.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Remind me to get rid of it. Any time when I know what I'm doing."

SHE roused up beside him.

"Darling, you won't go off again now, will you?"

"No." He rolled over and rolled up. The movement sent his head whirling away from his body on a weird trajectory that revolted his stomach. He caught it somehow as it came back, and held it firmly

in his hands. He said meticulously: "Look. You were dabbing my face with a wet cloth when I came to. You got the wet cloth from somewhere. Where?"

"There's a bathroom. Here."

Her fingers slid into his hand. He went stumbling through the dark where she led him, as if his limbs didn't belong to him any more.

Then he was alone for a while.

A while during which he used every trick and help that his experience could lend to him. Plus an overdose of aspirin from a bottle which he found in a cabinet over the washbowl.

Plus an effort of will that tore every nerve in his body to shreds and put it painstakingly together again. He never quite knew how he accomplished that. Part of it came from the native resilience of a perfect physique in pluperfect condition, the inestimable reserves of a phenomenal athlete who hadn't been out of training for sixteen years.

Part of it came from an unconquerable power of mind that would have torn every cell of its habitation apart and remodelled it to achieve the resuscitation that had to be achieved. The Saint didn't know, and had no sort of inward power to waste on analysing it. He only knew that it took every atom of inward power that he could gouge out of himself, and left him feeling as if he had been drawn through a steam wringer at the end. But he had done what he had set himself to do; and he knew that also.

He didn't even know how long it took; but he knew he had it when he was finished.

He knew it when he turned out the light in the bathroom and ventured back into the dark to find Avalon, feeling strangely light and vacuous in his bones, but with his mind queerly cool and alive, as if the discipline had purged and polished it to stratospheric limpidity and translucence.

He knew it when she was still waiting for him, and their hands met in the blackness that was not blind any more, and they sat side by side on the edge of a bed, and he could touch the warmth of her hair and say: "It's okay now, Avalon. Honestly. Everything's under control. Now tell me——"

"How did you do it?" she asked, huskily, and close to him, but not leaning on him. "Why were you putting on the act, and what are you doing here?"

"I bought myself a costume and some

war-paint," he said lightly, "and here I am, because I was invited. The important thing is—what were you doing, trying to wake me up in the middle of the night?"

"I was afraid," she said, very quietly now.

He could feel the tenseness of her like a strung wire beside him; but he said nothing, keeping her hand steadily in his hand and his shoulder lightly against hers, until she went on.

"I told you why I came here."

"I remember."

"I had a scare when I saw Zeller mann. Nobody had said anything about him, which they could hardly have helped doing unless they were holding out on purpose. But I didn't want to be silly, so I just tried to pass it off. You heard me. And I thought, Ferdy didn't count at all, and you and Pat were two outside guys who couldn't have been mixed up in anything, and nothing much could happen while you were around. But I was scared, in a silly way, inside. And then, when Pat picked on you for no reason at all, it all came up again."

"I know," said the Saint tonelessly. "And then?"

"Then I just tried to talk myself out of it, but I didn't get very far with that. But us Dexters never know when to say Uncle. . . . So then I went to bed when everybody else did, when Pat had broken everything up anyway. I thought I could go to sleep and forget it; but I couldn't. . . . I just lay awake and listened. . . . And nobody else seemed to go to bed."

"Nobody tried to open my door, which I'd locked, being a bright girl; but every time I was nearly asleep I could hear people creeping about and muttering. And it never sounded like the sort of noises they'd make if they were just trying to go on with a party. And I went on being afraid all the time. I'm a very imaginative character, don't you think?"

"No," he said. "Not any more than you should be."

"So finally I thought I just had to talk to somebody safe and ordinary again, and I thought you and Pat were the best bet there was. I didn't know what on earth I'd have said to you when I got here, but I'd have thought of something. I always can, being an old hardened expert. . . . But when I crept in here, and had the light on for a moment, and Pat hadn't been to bed at all, and you seemed to be out for keeps as Zeller mann said you would be—I sup-

pose I had a moment of panic. So . . . Simon, will you forget me being so stupid? I'm not usually like this. But it's sort of ridiculous, after everything that's gone on, for this to be you."

THE Saint seemed to have arms vaguely attached to his body, one of them pressing her against him and the other lying across his lap and becoming conscious of something sharp-edged and metallic in his pocket—something that was definably not small change creased into a fold of his trousers. Something that bothered his forearm and his thigh together, so that he put his hand into his trouser pocket, to fumble and identify it, while he was talking. . . . He still had to cling on to every item of his hard-won clarity, inch upon inch.

He said: "Avalon, I've got to tell you two or three things as sharply as I can make it. I'll fill in the details later, when we have time. If we have time. But probably you can do that for yourself anyway."

She said: "Yes, darling."

"If you can't, you'll have to take my word for it. We're right in the middle of a situation where human life is cheaper than the air. I'm going to try to make sense, and I want you to listen closely. I'm sure I can't do it twice."

"I won't interrupt," she said.

The Saint fastened his mind on what he wanted to say. He forced himself with tremendous effort to expand the phrase "Benny sent me" into a broad, coherent picture.

"The relationship between 903 Bubbling Well Road in Shanghai and Dean's Dock and Warehouse Company in Brooklyn is not apparent on any map. But it's there. I know it. I came along on this clambake to snap the cord that ties those two locations together. This joint is where one end of it is anchored. You've got to see the theory before you can understand the problem."

He rested for a moment. It was still harder than he would have believed to marshal his thoughts.

"Once there was a man who got an idea. For the sake of convenience let's call him Dr. Ernst Zeller mann, though it may be somebody else. His idea was utterly simple: If you can supply a man with narcotics you can make him into a tool. The war shot the dope-smuggling racket into its proper hell, but revival on a large scale

was forecast when Hiroshima became a subject for history books. And that's where 903 Bubbling Well Road entered the picture."

He paused again.

"Let's assume that some person or persons glauomed on to the bulk of available opium in the Orient. Collaborationists, almost certainly. They established a headquarters, stored their supplies, and awaited the inevitable ending of hostilities. They knew that merchant ships would soon be coming, and that many of these ships would have touched at New York. So Dr. Z collects a pal or two and sets up a place here. For the sake of clarity let's call it Cookie's Canteen.

"Merchant seamen are invited, everything free, even a roll of hay with whatever hostess a boy can promote. Our likely character is wined and dined at Cookie's Cellar, everything still on the house. If he exhibits certain desirable larcenous tendencies—which would be revealed under questioning by a clever psychiatrist—the pitch is made. And the Mad Hatter said plaintively: 'It was the best butter'—"

Avalon said: "Huh?"

The Saint took another grip on himself, brought his conscious mind up from whirling in dark chasms, lifted it with every ounce of will power he could command.

"Sorry, I wandered. . . . The pitch was made. 'How would you like to make some extra money, chum, and here's a hundred on account. Just go to 903 Bubbling Well Road and say Benny sent you. Bring back the packages you'll be given, bring them here, and collect some more money.'

"So our lad does it. Now the sale and distribution of the dope won't bring in enough to pay the overhead of a really big-scale setup like this, so Operation B goes into effect. A doctor can supply patients with narcotics, can turn them into hopheads more safely than anybody else. Then, by shutting off the supply, he can get almost anything in return for more dope to ease the craving. Blackmail—or services.

"That's where Dean's Warehouse and Docking Company is tied up with Operation A, or Shanghai. The hopheads knock it over, bring in the sheaves—of furs, jewels, whiskey, whatnot. Or a bank is held up, instead. Or anything. A whole empire of crime begins to spread out from one central system."

SIMON sighed. He was weary. Avalon took his hand in hers.

"So that's it," she said. "That explains a lot of things I didn't understand before. Why they'd go overboard for some creep who knew the difference between port and starboard and nothing else."

They were still keeping their voices very low, as if they were in a room full of ears.

"This is all new to you?" Simon asked expressionlessly.

"Why do you ask that?"

"I thought I would. I've told you all this because it doesn't matter now how much anybody knows I know."

The Saint's fingers had almost finished with the odd metal shape in his pocket. And the message which had begun to spell itself slothfully out from it by some multi-dimensional alchemy between his fingertips and his remembrance began to sear his brain with a lambent reality that cauterized the last limp tissues of vagueness out of his awakening.

He felt his own grip biting into her flesh.

"Avalon," he said, in a voice that came from a long way off in the dark. "You've been in this up to the neck from the beginning. You might even have started a lot of it—for all of us—by that parting crack of yours about the Saint after I socked Zeller mann. But the play-acting is over, and I must know something now."

"What, darling?" she asked; and her voice was so easy in contrast to his own that he knew where he had to keep his own sanities together.

"I must know which side you're on, Avalon. Even if you haven't had any sense—even if it's all words of one syllable now. Are you going all the way with me, or is this just an excursion?"

It seemed as if she stiffened beside him for an instant, and then softened so that she was closer and more real than ever before.

Her voice came from a great distance also in the darkness between them.

"You damn fool," she said. "I worship the ground you walk on. I want you more than I ever wanted anyone in my whole life, or ever will."

They were both very quiet then, as if something had been said which should never have been put into words.

And there were other sounds far away, faint frettings against the monotonous rolling of the sea.

The Saint's fingers touched the hard sharp metal in his trouser pocket for one last assurance, and brought it out. He said very matter-of-factly: "Can you find a match, Avalon?"

She was in movement all around him, and he kept still; and then there was a sudden hurtful flare of light that flickered agonisingly over the scrap of embossed metal that he had taken out of pocket and held towards her in the palm of his hand.

"No," he said, without any inflection. "Not mine. Pat Hogan must have stuck his badge into my pocket as a last desperate resort—as a clue or a signal of some kind. He never knew me from Adam. But he was an undercover man in this racket for the Treasury Department."

CHAPTER XVIII



THE match flickered once more and went out, leaving him with the moulding of her face stamped on his memory. And he knew that that was not only printed by one match, but by more lights than he had seen in many

years.

"How long have you known that?" she asked.

"Only since I found the badge and figured it out," he said. "But that's long enough . . . Until then, I'm afraid I was off with some very wrong ideas. When I picked him up at the Canteen this evening I happened to see that he was going heeled—he had a gun in his hip pocket—and I began wondering.

"I've been listening to his rather shaky brogue all night, and watching him sell the blarney to Kay Natello, who never could be a sailor's swateheart no matter what else; and I knew before we left town that there was something screwy in the setup . . . But I had everything else wrong. I had Hogan figured as one of the Ungodly, and I thought he was playing his game against me."

"If he wasn't," she said, "why did he pick on you and knock you out?"

"To get me out of the way. He didn't know who I was. I was playing the part of a blabber-mouthed drunken sailor, and just doing it too damn well. I was doing everything I could to make myself interesting to Cookie and Zeller-

mann anyhow. I was banging around in the dark, and I happened to hit a nail on the head by mentioning Shanghai. So I was something to work on.

"And I was being worked on, the last thing I remember. But Hogan didn't want me being propositioned. His job was to get the goods on this gang, so he wanted to be propositioned himself. I might have been too drunk to remember; or I might have refused to testify. So he had to create a good interruption and break it up. And he did a lovely job, considering the spot he was in."

"I'm getting some of my faith back," she said. "If a government man knocks you cold, that's legitimate; but you can't let anybody else do it. Not if I'm going to love you."

He smiled very fractionally in the gloom, and his hand lay on her wrist in a touch that was not quite a caress, but something to which nothing had to be added and from which nothing could be taken away.

"And now," he said, "I suppose you're wondering where I belong in this, and why Hogan doesn't know me."

"I didn't ask you."

"I might as well tell you. Hogan is doing his best, and so is the Department over him; but this thing goes too far over the world, into too many countries and too many jurisdictions. Only an organisation that's just as international can cope with it. There is such a thing, and I'm part of it. That's all I'm allowed to say."

"And meanwhile," she said, with a coldness that was not really her, "why isn't Pat in bed? And why did he leave you his badge?"

"Either because he's still trying to wring the last drop out of his act, or because he's trying to do some more dangerous snooping. Either because he hoped he could tip me off to keep my mouth shut and give him a chance, or because he knew he was facing the high jump and if he made a bad landing he hoped I might get some word out for him." The Saint stood up. "Either way, I'm going to find out."

He heard and felt the rustle of her quick movement out of his sight; and then she was in front of him, face to face, and her arms around him and his hands under the soft eaves of her hair.

"Simon—are you all right now?"

"I'm as much use as I'll ever be tonight." His smile was still invisible

through the darkness, and in some ways he was glad of it. His touch was strong and tender together. He said: "And Pat did his best, and I'm sure nothing is going to wait for him."

He kissed her again and held her against him; and he remembered a great many things, perhaps too many, and perhaps too many of them were not with her. But none of that mattered any more.

HE LET her go presently, and in time it had only been a moment.

"I suppose," he said, "you wouldn't happen to have any artillery in your weekend kit? A machine-gun might be useful; but if you're travelling light a small stiletto would help."

"I haven't anything better than a pair of nail scissors."

"I'm afraid," Simon said sadly, "it might be hard to persuade Zeller mann to sit still for that."

Light slashed through the room like a stealthy blade as he found the door handle and opened it.

The corridor outside was dim and lifeless; but as he stepped out into it the sea murmurs were left in the room behind him, and the other stirrings of sound that had crept through to him in there resolved themselves into their own individual pattern—a rumble and twitter of muffled voices and movement downstairs.

There was no movement that could be identified and no single word that could be picked out; but they had a pitch and a rhythm of deadly deliberation that spilled feathery icicles along his spine. He knew very well now why Avalon hadn't been able to sleep, and why she had come looking for Pat Hogan or Tom Simons or anyone else solid and ordinary and potentially safe and wholesome.

As she had said, they weren't the sort of noises that people made if they were just trying to go on with a party. You couldn't put a finger on any one solitary thing about them; but if you had a certain kind of sensitivity, you knew . . . There was a quality of evil and terror that could set a pace and a key even in confused and distant mutterings.

It made the Saint feel strangely naked and ineffectual as he moved towards it, with the whirling but no longer dizzy hollowness leir in his head by the drug, and the unaccustomed formality of his muscular co-ordinations, and the cold knowledge that he had nothing to fight

with but his own uncertain strength and uprooted wits.

But Patrick Hogan—or whatever his real name was—had exposed himself in just as lonely a way for the job that he had to do; and his gun couldn't have helped him much, or the sounds below would have been different. And other men on more obvious battlefronts had done what they could with what they had, because wars didn't wait.

He didn't feel particularly glorious or heroic about it: it was much more a coldly predestined task that had to be finished. It didn't seem to spread any emotion on the fact that it could easily and probably be his own finish too. It was just an automatic and irresistible mechanism of placing one foot in front of another on a necessary path from which there was no turning back, although the mind could sit away and watch its own housing walking voluntarily towards oblivion.

And this was it, and he was it, for one trivial tremendous moment, himself, personally—the corny outlaw who redeemed himself in the last reel.

It was quite funny, and a lot of fun, in the way he was thinking.

He was moving like a cat, his ears travelling far ahead of his feet, and a new sound began to intrude upon them. A sound of voices. One voice detached itself from the two that were in converse, and a bell rang inside the Saint's head with brazen clangor.

It was the voice that had called Dr. Zeller mann on the night the Saint had broken into the office.

And it was the voice of Ferdinand Pairfield.

Lightly and quickly, Simon pulled Avalon toward the closed door through which seeped the words of Dr. Zeller mann and the fair Ferdinand.

"I won't do it," Ferdinand said. "That is your job, and you must complete it. You really must, Ernst."

The Saint was shocked. This voice wasn't fluttery, seeming always ready to trail off into a graceful gesture. This voice was venomous, reminding one of a beautiful little coral snake, looking like a pretty bracelet, coiled to strike and inject the poison that is more deadly, drop for drop, than that of the King Cobra. Here was no witless fag with a penchant for Crème Violette; here was a creature who could command in terms of death.

The Saint's brain gave one last dizzy

lurch, and then settled into a clear thin stratospheric stillness as the last disjointed fragments of the picture he had been working for fell into mesh. In some strange way that one incongruous touch had reconciled all other incongruities—the freakish fellowship of Dr. Zellermann with Cookie and Kay Natello, of all of them with Sam Jeffries and Joe Hyman, even the association with the lobster-eyed James Prather and the uninhibited Mrs. Gerald Meldon.

His own mistake had been in accepting as merely another piece of the formula the one ingredient which was actually the catalyst for them all. It was a weird and yet strangely soothing sensation to realise at last, with the utter certainty of psychic confirmation, that the man he had been looking for, the anchor thread of the whole fantastic web, was Mr. Ferdinand Fairfield.

CHAPTER XIX



SIMON became aware of Avalon's fingers cramping on his arm, and knew that her perceptions were stumbling after his, less surely for one thing because she still lacked so much background that he had not been able to sketch

for her, but following him more in mad surmise than with the integrated sureness that directed him.

He pressed his hands over hers and went on listening as Fairfield said: "It'd be dreadful to lose you, but of course you know how much the FBI would like to know the truth about why you became a refugee from Vienna. I've taken care of you all this time, but I can't go on doing it forever. If you let me down and anything happens—"

"I don't want to let you down, Ferdinand," Zellermann said; and through all the measured confidence of his accents Simon had a vision of the smooth brow shining like damp ivory. "But our methods are getting nowhere. I think he'll die before he tells us what he knows."

"He'd better not," Ferdinand said in the same deadly bell-like voice. "I want all the information he has. And I shall not assist you. You know the sight of torture and pain sickens me. I should simply die."

"You didn't seem particularly affected

in the case of Foley."

"Oh, but I was! When I stuck that knife in him, I almost fainted. It was thrilling! But that's another case in point. It should have been unnecessary for me to do it. You knew that he was toying with the idea of selling us out, and blackmailing us to boot. You should have handled it."

The Saint could almost see Zellermann shrug.

"You won't come and help us?"

"I simply couldn't. Get down there again. I want that information immediately."

Simon pulled Avalon away from the door, and they fled on cat feet down the corridor and stood very still pressed against the wall. Dr. Zellermann came out of Ferdinand's room and went downstairs without a glance in their direction.

Now the Saint had purpose. Each task in its turn, and the silencing of the golden boy was first. He strode to the door and flung it open. Ferdinand, clad in a pale cerise dressing gown, turned and saw the Saint.

He looked up casually and a little irritably, as if he only expected to see Zellermann coming back with an afterthought excuse. When he saw the Saint, his expression remained outwardly unchanged. His reaction came from deep under his skin, instead of being the muscular contortion of a moment's shock. It came out as a dew of sweat on his face that swelled into and established wetness; and only after that was established his pretty face went pinched and pallid with terror.

He didn't have to say anything to make a complete confession that he was answering his own questions as fast as they could spiral through his reeling mind, and that he knew that the answers were all his own and there was nothing he could say to anyone else, anywhere. He wasn't the first dilettante in history who had been caught up with by the raw facts of life in the midst of all the daffodils and dancing; and he would not be the last.

The Saint felt almost sorry for him; but all the pity in the world didn't alter the absolute knowledge that Mr. Fairfield constituted a very real menace to the peace and quiet which Simon wanted for a few seconds more.

Mr. Fairfield's eyes inflated themselves like a pair of small blowfish at what they divined; his mouth dropped open, and his throat tightened in the preliminary formation of a scream. These were only the

immediate reflex responses blossoming out of the trough of terror that was already there, but they were no less urgent and dangerous for that. Something had to be done about them, and there was really only one thing to do.

Simon put out his left hand and grasped the lapels of Mr. Fairfield's dainty silk dressing-gown together, and drew him closer with a sympathetic smile.

"Ferdy," he said, "don't you know that it's time for all good little girls to be asleep?"

AND with that his right fist rocketed up to impinge on Mr. Fairfield's aesthetic chin, and sleep duly followed. . . .

Simon slid an arm under him as he crumpled, and carried him back into the room and dumped him on the bed. It was a nice encouraging thing to discover and prove that he still had that much strength and vitality in him, even though he knew very well that the power and agility that were required to anesthetise Ferdinand Fairfield would not necessarily be enough to cope with anyone who was at least averagely tough of mind and body.

It made him feel a new sureness of himself and a new hope that slipped looseningly and warmingly into his limbs as he tore one of Cookie's fine percale sheets into wide ribbons to tie Ferdinand's wrists and ankles to the bed and then to stuff into his slackly open mouth and gag him.

He found himself working with the swift efficiency of second nature; and that was a good feeling too, to be aware of the old deftness and certainty flowing into his own movements with increasing ease all the time, and the gossamer bubble of his wakefulness holding and not breaking but growing more clear and durable with each passing minute.

He finished, and then made a quick search of the room and the person of his test specimen, looking for one thing only; but it seemed that Mr. Fairfield's wanderings into wickedness hadn't taken the course of acquiring any of the useful armaments of evil. No doubt he was glad to delegate all such crudities to underlings. The Saint ended his brief quest still weaponless; yet he gave it up with a glance at Avalon that had all the carefree lights of supreme laughter in its blue brilliance.

"Knock 'em off one by one," he remarked—"as the bishop said as he sur-

veyed the new line-up of thespian talent at the Follies. That's our motto. Shall we move on to the next experiment?"

Their hands touched momentarily; and then he was out of the room and on his way down the stairs.

On his way, with the new chill ugly knowledge that the palpitating fright of Ferdinand Fairfield could only have been germinated by something that had been there in that house before any board creaked and Fairfield had thrown his door open and seen the Saint. And that that something, whatever form it took, could only be deadly for the federal man who had called himself Patrick Hogan—if it hadn't been conclusively deadly already.

Or if simple death might not be much better than what could be going on.

Simon was at the foot of the stairs, in the hall, with the front door only a few steps away; and Avalon was still close beside him. Escape would have been easy for them. But he knew without even wordless asking that neither of them had thought of that. Her eyes were steady and quiet and only inquiring as they met his again. The sounds that came through the solid closed door of the living-room were strangely distorted and dreadful in their muffled distortion.

The Saint saw her throat move as she listened and looked at him; but her gaze was only waiting, always.

Their hands met and held that time, for an instant; and something quirked over his lips that could have been a smile, but wasn't. Then he left her.

He didn't go to the living-room door, but vanished the other way, towards the kitchen.

In a few seconds more he was back, and he brought with him a stag-handled carving knife. The blade was strong and gleaming, and he tested it with his thumb before he slid it up his left sleeve and held it there with the pressure of a bent elbow against the flat of the blade.

His lips almost touched her ear, and he spoke in a voice that was only the echo of a whisper.

"Get on your horse, darling," he said. "Sneak out of here and grab one of the cars outside while I keep 'em busy. Drive into town and recruit some large healthy cops. Bring 'em back just as fast as you can. And have breakfast with me."

SHE only shook her head. Her long hair brushed his mouth.

He couldn't argue with her there.

He left her and hoped that she would go, and knew that she wouldn't. He was glad and yet bitter about that; but it was a confusion of things that he could only take as they broke over him and save to be struggled with some other time. He had to end this other thing first, no matter how.

He went to the door that the sounds came through, and stopped to put an eye to the keyhole for a second's preview of what he had to walk into. And it was curious that while his face turned to stone his only detached mental reaction was that it was merely exactly what he had imagined in a distant nightmare of unbearable understanding.

He had that unreal sensation of being a long way off from all of it, away somewhere, even while the nerve endings curdled under his skin and he began to move under an impetus that was altogether instinctive and altogether absurd.

Even while he heard the air-conditioned voice of Dr. Ernst Zeller mann, cool and persuasive like the voice of a society psychoanalyst in a darkened consulting-room, the only distinct articulate sound that he caught and held afterwards, saying: "Why not be reasonable, Patrick, and get it into your head that I must go on until you tell me exactly how much you've been able to accomplish with your masquerade?"

The keyhole glimpse wiped out into a full picture as Simon opened the door.

It was something that would haunt him all his life, something that belonged in a Grand Guignol school of outlandish horror, that was so much worse because the mind had heard all about it long ago and long ago dismissed it as a ghoulish fantasy. Now it was real after all, and the reality had a chill intellectual impact that was capable of leaving scars on the memory of even such a man as the Saint.

The figure of Dr. Zeller mann, standing poised and cool with his smooth silver locks and fine ascetic profile and a long cigarette clipped in his sensitive fingers and treasuring half an inch of unshaken ash, was a stock item in its way. So was the figure of Patrick Hogan, bound hand and foot in a chair, with the sweat of agony running down into his eyes and the lower half of his face covered with the gag through which some of those horrible formless strangled sounds had come.

It was the two women squatting beside him, Cookie with her crude bloated face

no longer wearing its artificial smile, and Natello with the sallow skin stretched tight over the bones of her skull and her haggard eyes smouldering with a light of weird absorption. The women, and what they were doing. . . .

And this was the reality of half-remembered legend-histories of Messalina, of tales of the Touareg women commissioned to the ritual torture of their captives, of witches out of a dim universal folklore bent to the consummation of some black sacrament of pain.

This was what gave a sudden dimension and articulation to his ambiguous impressions of Cookie and Natello, just as in their separate ways the performance seemed to breathe blood and life into them, hardening and enrooting the slobbish grossness of Cookie and illuminating Natello's starved ethereal gawkinsness—even throwing a pale reflection of its hot heathen glow on Zeller mann's satanically connoisseurish frigidity.

This, that somehow crystallised and focused all the twisted negations and perversions that were inherent in the philosophy they served. This new scientific and persuasive barbarism, aptly and symbolically framed in the gleaming chrome-plated jungle of a Fairfield-decorated parlour. . . .

But for Simon Templar it was a symbol too; and more than that it was a trial and evidence and verdict, and a sentence that only waited for an execution that would be a pride and a clean pleasure to remember with the ugliness that began it.

He walked into the room empty-handed, with the carving knife in his sleeve held by the pressure of his bent left arm.

ZELLERMANN held his cigarette with the ash unbroken in his left hand, and his right hand dropped into the side pocket of his coat. Aside from the lightning switch of his bleached gray eyes, that was his only movement. But it was quite adequate for what it meant.

The Saint didn't even seem to notice it. He was Tom Simons again, perfectly and entirely, for the few steps that he had to take. They seemed to stretch out for an infinity of distance and an eternity of time; but no one who watched him could have seen how every cell and fibre of him was wrung out in the achievement of that convincing unconsciousness of their importance. He lurched quite clumsily in his walk, and his stare trying to hold Zel-

lermann was blank and glazed—and those were the easiest tricks in his act.

"Ullo, Doc," he mouthed. "Wot abaht one fer the road?"

He was in a dream where every second seemed to take a week to crawl by, and you could stop overnight to analyse every inching flicker of event.

He saw Zellermann relax fractionally, even embark on the mental prologue to an elaborate clinical evaluation of drug reactions. He saw Cookie and Kay Natello rising and turning towards him with a mixture of uncertainty and fear and hope. He saw everything, without looking directly at any of it.

"You must be made out of iron, Tom," Zellermann said admiringly, and as if he had learned the formula from a book. "You just about put us all under the table. We were going to bed."

The Saint staggered closer to him.

"I bin to bed once," he said. "But I'm thirsty. Honester-gawd. Coudden I 'ave just one more drop before closing time?"

Then his wandering gaze seemed to catch sight of Hogan for the first time.

"Swelp me," he said, "that's 'im! The bugger 'oo 'it me! All tied up shipshake so 'e 'as ter be'yve. Just lemme 'ave one crack at 'im—"

"Patrick just had too much to drink," Zellermann said. "We're trying to get him to bed . . ."

He actually moved closer, suavely and with almost contemptuous skill, interposing himself between Simon and the uglier details of his specialized treatment for intoxication.

The Saint blinked at him blearily, swaying another step and two steps nearer.

It looked fine and perfect until the doctor's glance suddenly switched and hardened on a point beyond the Saint's shoulder, and the whole calm patronising balance of his body hardened with it as if it had been nipped in an interstellar frost.

And even then, only one precise unit of him moved—the hand that still rested in his coat pocket. But that movement was still as adequate and eloquent as it had been the first time.

Simon didn't need any manuals or blueprints to work it out. He knew, with that endless impersonality of comprehension, that Avalon Dexter had started to follow him into the room, and that Zellermann had seen her, and that the shining wheels that ran in Zellermann's brain had spun an instantaneous web together, and that

rightly or wrongly the web had enough tensile strength in Zellermann's mind for Zellermann to walk on it.

The Saint's own movement actually followed and resulted from Zellermann's; and yet it was like the clicking of a switch and the awakening of a light, so that it was almost simultaneous.

He heard the splitting blast of Zellermann's gun in the same quantum as he was aware of stumbling sideways and straightening his left arm so that the bone handle of the carving knife dropped into the curved fingers of his waiting left hand, and then he was aware of a searing pang in his left arm and a shocking blow that spun him half around, but he had his balance again in the same transposition, and his right hand took the haft of the knife as it dropped and drew it clear of the sleeve and turned it and drove it straight with the same continued gesture into Zellermann's chest, just a little to one side of the breastbone and a hand's breadth below the carnation in his buttonhole.

Then he left the knife there where it stuck and took Zellermann's automatic away as the doctor's fingers loosened on it, ripping it clear of the pocket at about the moment when Zellermann's shoulders rolled on the floor, and fired again and again while he was still rising and Cookie was starting towards him with her broad muscular hands reaching out and Natello was still swinging back the hot curling-iron that she had been playing with.

They were the first women that Simon Templar had ever killed, and he did it rather carefully and conscientiously, in the pellucid knowledge of what they were and what they had done, and to his own absolute judicial satisfaction, shooting Kay Natello three inches above her hollow navel and Cookie in the same umbilical bullseye, as closely as he could estimate it through her adipose camouflage.

CHAPTER XX



HAMILTON said almost plaintively: "Couldn't you arrange to leave more than one prisoner, just once in a while?"

"Could you arrange to have people stop attacking me?" asked the Saint. "Self-defense is so tempting. Besides, think how much I save the country on

trials and attorneys. I ought to get a rebate on my income tax for it."

"I'll speak to the President about it right away."

"Anyway, I left you the kingpin—and I think he's got the kind of imagination that'll do some real suffering while he's waiting for his turn in the death house. I feel rather happy about that—which is why I left him."

"Before your tender heart gets you into any more trouble," Hamilton said, "you'd better get out of here if you can. I'll talk to you again in New York. I've got another job for you."

"You always have," said the Saint. "I'll get out. Hogan can hold the fort long enough."

HE CRADLED the telephone and looked at the federal man again. He said: "It's all yours, Patrick. Washington wants me out of the limelight. As usual. . . . By the way, is the name really Hogan?"

The other nodded. Simon had done all that he could for him: he would be able to hold the fort. And other forts again. His face was still pale and drawn and shiny, but there was no uncertainty in it. It was a good face, moulded on real foundations, and durable.

"Sure," he said. "Hogan's the name. But I was born in New Jersey, and I have to work like hell on the brogue." He was studying the Saint while he talked, quite frankly and openly, but with a quiet respect that was a natural part of his reversion from the character part he had been playing, sitting very laxly but squarely in an armchair with the glass of brandy that Simon had poured for him, conserving and gathering his strength.

He said:

"You had me fooled. Your cockney's a lot better. And that make-up—it is a make-up, isn't it?"

"I hope so," said the Saint with a smile. "I'd hate to look like this for the rest of my life."

"I didn't expect anything like this when I left my badge in your pocket. I was just clutching at a straw. I figured it was a thousand to one it wouldn't do me any good. I thought you were just another drunken sailor—in fact, I let you pick me up just for that, so I could watch what this gang would do with you."

The Saint laughed a little.

Avalon Dexter finished binding up his

arm with torn strips of another of Cookie's sheets. She was very cool and efficient about it.

He moved his arm and tested the bandage approvingly; then he began to wriggle into his jacket again. Zellermann's one shot had missed the bone: the bullet had passed clean through, and the flesh wound would take care of itself.

He said: "Thanks, darling."

SHE helped him with his coat.

He said: "Go on quoting me as just another drunken sailor, Pat. You don't even have to bring me into this finale. The witnesses won't talk. So Tom Simons woke up, and was drunk and sore and scared, and scrambled the hell out. He went back to his ship, and nobody cares about him anyway. Let him go. Because I am going anyway, while you take the phone and start calling your squads to take care of the bodies."

"What about Miss Dexter?" Hogan asked practically.

"She was scared too, and she scrambled independently. You know about her and how they were trying to use her. Leave her out of it if you can; but if you need her we've got her address in New York. I'll steal one of the cars and take her back with me. Hamilton will okay it. The police in New York were warned long ago, it seems—when Zellermann tried to frame me at 21, they went through a performance to make Zellermann think he'd gotten me out of the way, but they turned me loose at once."

"Okay, Saint. When you call that Imperative exchange in Washington, I say Uncle anyhow. But I can look after this. And—thank you."

They shook hands around. Hogan stayed seated in his chair. He could keep going.

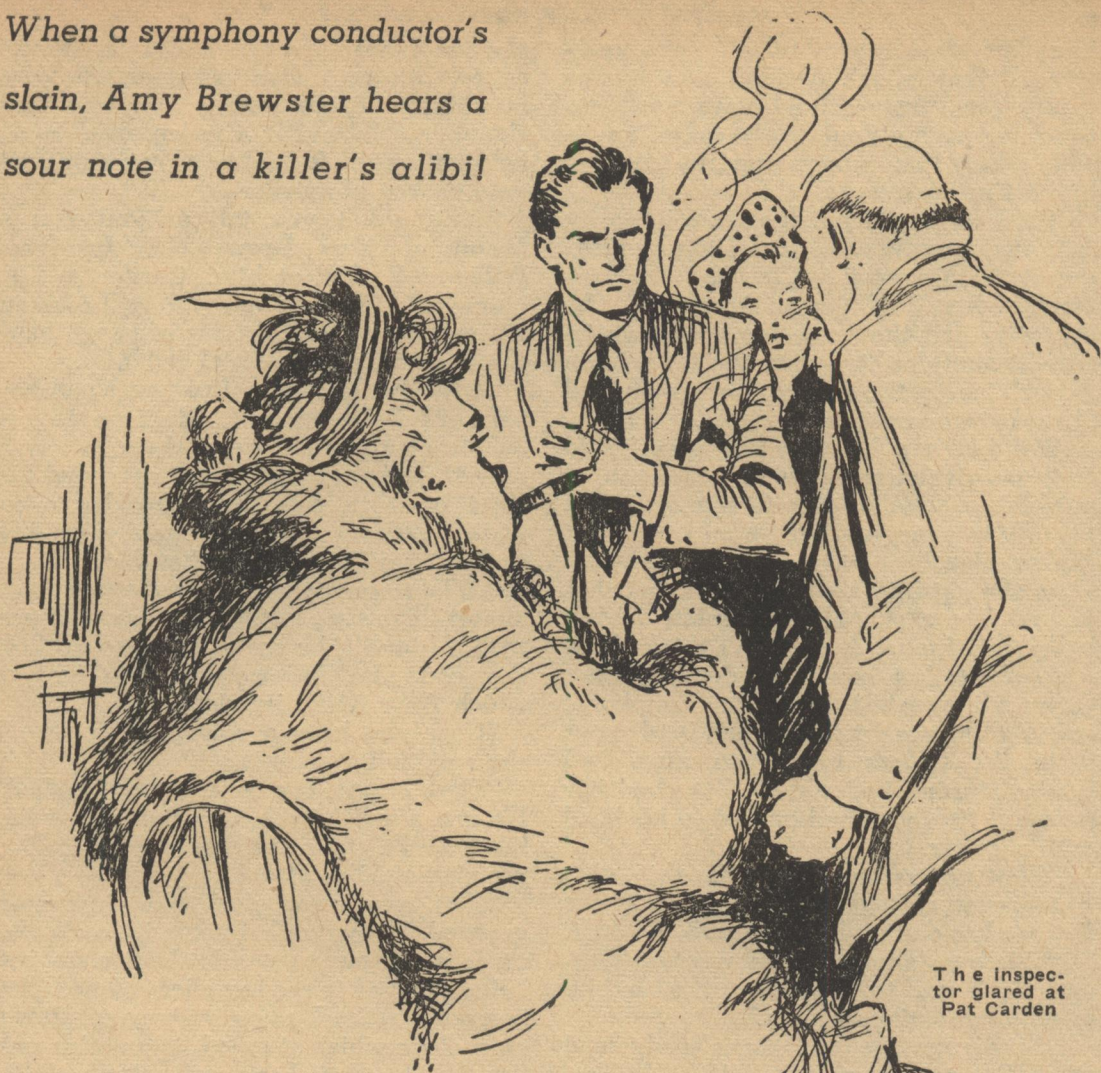
He was still full of questions, but he was too well trained to ask them.

"Let's get together one day," said the Saint, and meant it just like that.

He went out with Avalon.

They talked very ordinarily and quietly on the drive back, as if they had known each other for a long while, which they had, while the dawn lightened slowly around them and drew out the cool sweetness of the dew on the peaceful fields. The red-gold casque of her hair was pillowed on his shoulder as they slipped into the rousing murmur of Manhattan in the bright sunlight of another day.

*When a symphony conductor's
slain, Amy Brewster hears a
sour note in a killer's alibi!*



The inspector
glared at
Pat Carden

The MAESTRO'S SECRET

By SAM MERWIN, JR.

AMY BREWSTER drained the tumbler of straight gin and put it down on the table beside the immense arm chair in which her vast bulk reposed. Regretfully, after a final puff at the huge cigar in her plump, stubby fingers, she laid its remains to rest in an already overflowing ash tray. Then, with a series of grunts and groans, she hoisted her three-

hundred-pound body onto the feet that managed to support it in some miraculous manner that defied physics.

"All right," she growled. "Let's get going."

"Then you'll take the case?" the deep contralto voice of the blond young woman who sat facing her trembled slightly. Amy regarded Louise Norden without enthusi-

asm, her black, shoe-button eyes impassive. Privately she decided that it was a pity the singer should show such enthusiasm over a doubtlessly quite impossible young man who seemed to have got himself into a scrape.

If Norden could put the same intensity into her operatic roles she might be singing at the Metropolitan in New York instead of here in Chicago, Amy felt. The contralto had the voice for operatic success beyond doubt, but to the fat woman as well as to the critics, her work had always seemed a trifle too cold.

"I didn't say I'd take the case," said Amy peevishly, resentful at being routed out of her hotel suite before noon. "But I'll talk to your young man and see what can be done."

As she got into a costly sable coat that looked like a shapeless bearskin on her basketball frame, Amy didn't think there was much that could be done. Signor Gasparini, greatest of Italian symphonic conductors, was dead. She had read about it in the papers before an anguished Louise Norden had rudely disturbed her privacy. Someone had bashed in his head with a poker.

"What makes you so certain this—this Pat Carden of yours didn't kill him?" she inquired as she waddled toward the door. "By his own admission he went to Gasparini's house to have, it out with him over his attentions to you."

"But Signor Gasparini was already dead when Pat got there," she said. "Besides, Pat had no occasion to be jealous. Signor Gasparini's only interest in me was my voice."

Amy, who knew well the late conductor's reputation with the ladies, paused with her hand on the doorknob to give Louise Norden a doubtful glance. The young contralto, her usually pale face flushed with emotion, looked away.

"Oh, he tried, of course," she said. "But I never permitted—" She hesitated, then added irrelevantly, "Pat couldn't have. He told me so when he came to see me after finding the body—before he called the police."

"I see," said Amy. Love, she thought, was an eerie emotion, at least in its effect upon rationality.

BECAUSE she was a lawyer as well as a power in the world of high finance and was, personally, an irresistible force, it was scarcely half an hour later when

she led Louise Norden and a bristlingly angry Chicago police inspector who was in charge of the case into the official chamber where Pat Carden was being held before the formality of being booked on a charge of murder.

"Why didn't you tell us you was a friend of Miss Brewster?" Inspector Williams barked at him. Carden, a big, blue-eyed, black-haired young Irishman whose face bore symptoms of rough handling, glared at the official defiantly.

"Why should I when I've never met her before?" he countered. He rose to his feet from a plain wooden chair to tower over the others in the room, extended his right hand to Amy and revealed even white teeth in a sudden and charming smile. "May I assure you that the pleasure is at least one way." His manner was almost courtly but, from somewhere within himself, he seemed to be deriding the code he followed—a combination which Amy found irresistible.

"Hear you have a voice, young man," she rumbled. "How is it?"

"First class," the young man replied. He cast a look at the inspector, shook his head sadly. "Mr. Williams doesn't like my singing, I'm afraid."

"You young whelp!" the inspector growled. Amy quelled him with a glance, made a pertinent remark about a lawyer being allowed to see her client alone. The inspector retired, routed. Amy sat down on a chair which moaned its anguish under the impact of her overflowing weight. She lighted a fresh cigar and nodded to Louise Norden to follow the inspector, a command the young woman obeyed with reluctance. Amy winked at Pat Carden.

"If the fact that you were Signor Gasparini's illegitimate son ever comes out, Pat," she said solemnly, "you'll be in worse trouble than you are now. So I think we'd better keep it under cover."

The suspect opened his wide mouth to protest. Then, studying Amy's expression, he hesitated. The beginnings of a grin tugged at the corners of his mouth as he said, in a subdued tone:

"You're right, of course, Amy. But the fact is hidden pretty deeply. They'll never find records."

"Good," said the fat woman. She grinned faintly herself—a remarkable process in her perfectly round face. She was beginning to like young Carden. He not only had charm, he had his wits about him. If the police were listening in they

would be off on a fine wild goose chase—and if they revealed the fact of their listening-in in court, Amy could score a major point against them for violating the rights of lawyer to consult a client in privacy.

"Let's hear the story—the whole story," she added. As an afterthought she offered her vis-a-vis a cigar. He refused it and began to tell his tale.

It was simple enough as he told it. He had met Louise on the West Coast while she was on tour and he was "dubbing in" the voice of a famous non-singing movie star with an operatic role. They had fallen in love, been forced to part by the exigencies of their careers. Then he had landed a radio singing job in Chicago and Louise had accepted a season with the opera there.

"Everything was swell," he stated with undeniable sincerity, "until that old goat Gasparini went on the prowl for Louise. He may have been a great conductor but he was an unmitigated beetle personally. He was notorious.

"Louise didn't like it, of course, but she couldn't help being flattered. And he kept promising to give her a recommendation to Edward Johnson at the Met and—well, you can figure it out." He shrugged broad shoulders wearily.

"Any special reason why things came to a head last night?" Amy asked.

"No-o-o," said Pat Carden hesitantly. "It just built up—you know, broken dates, too many phone calls, flowers, presents. She always returned them. I just lost my temper, that's all. I went to see him and found him lying there on the floor of his living room with his head bashed in and the poker beside him."

"How did you get in?" snapped Amy. "Did you have a key?"

"Hardly," said the young man. "That's one part the police don't like about my story. Actually the door—the front door—was slightly ajar. When no one answered my rings I just walked in. I was that angry." He smiled ruefully.

"What did you do while you were in there?" the fat woman asked.

"Nothing," said Carden. "That is—I saw the body and stared at it like a goop. He was dead all right. There was no back left to his head. Then I felt a little sick and began to get scared. I got out of there and went to Louise's apartment. She told me to call the police. I did and here I am."

AMY puffed thoughtfully at her cigar, then shook her head.

"You've got a deck full of deuces, none of them wild," she said.

"Are you going to handle my defense?" Carden at last asked anxiously.

"That I'm not, Pat," Amy told him. "You haven't got a case. Not even Clarence Darrow could have cleared you of this one once it gets to court." She paused and his face fell. She added, dryly, "But I agree with Louise that you're telling the truth, Pat, heaven help you. If you had killed Signor Gasparini, you would have covered up better. The thing is to find out who did kill him before you get to court. As I'm supposed to be back in Boston tomorrow, I'll have to get busy." She sighed as if the prospect were too dismal to contemplate.

"Thanks, Miss Brewster," the young man said eagerly. "If you only can! I've heard of some of the killings you've solved."

"I won't say their solution was luck," said the fat woman, rising with her inevitable accompaniment of grunts and groans. "Most of it was done here." She tapped her forehead. "But don't get too hopeful. I might get *unlucky*."

With this somewhat cryptic remark Amy flourished her cigar in a farewell salute and departed. She found Louise pacing an anteroom tearfully and told the contralto to go home and stay there until she heard from Pat or herself. That done, Amy found herself confronted by a still-bristling Inspector Williams.

"If you think you're going to tear routine in the department to shreds the way you have in New York and Boston, you can get that idea out of your head, Miss Brewster," he said. "This case is open and shut."

"Call me Amy," said the fat woman with vague amiability. "It's open and shut, all right." She paused to let the official relax, then said, "With your permission I'd like to take a look at the scene of the crime."

The inspector, still suspicious, came with her, carrying the keys. The house of the late Signor Gasparini was a modernistic structure of concrete and glass brick that stood off Sheridan Drive. It had all the warmth and friendliness of a chain hotel bathroom.

Inside it was even more unusual. Its floors were of some composition laid out in diamond patterns of varying colors, un-

carpeted and resonant under foot. There were a dining room, a hall, a living room-music room combination on the main floor. Upstairs were two bedrooms, a dressing room, two baths and another hall. In the semi-basement were kitchen, storage space, cellar and servant's room and bath. Amy inquired about the help.

"Just one guy—a deaf mute," the inspector told her. "He was down on the South Side last night at a meeting of dummies."

"Hmmp," said Amy, thinking that the house contained a number of oddities—noisy floors and a deaf mute servant to begin with, to say nothing of an eccentric music master. They went into the living room-music room, where the body had been found. Its location was still marked by chalk near the center of the floor. Like every other floor in the house it was uncarpeted.

Amy chewed on her cigar and scowled. A library of music books comprised one entire wall. Another wall was glass brick, revealing dull, filtered light. In the corner of the other two walls stood the huge Steinway concert grand. The room revealed little.

Upstairs, however, Amy found more to interest her. One of the dressing rooms, obviously that used by the late Signor, was literally plastered with pictures of women. Amy's eyebrows went up and her little round mouth pursed in a soundless whistle as she examined this private gallery. A number of its inmates were women she knew or knew of.

She spotted Louise Norden's picture in a prominent position, but the inscription was formal and revealed nothing. Most of the others were written in terms which permitted no doubt as to their senders' relationship with the unfortunate Maestro. They included young actresses, musicians, debutantes, movie stars, wives of rich men—any woman, it seemed, with money, beauty or both.

"He had his fun all right," said the inspector complacently. He sighed.

"Why not—he was a great musician?" countered Amy, faintly annoyed by the inspector's smugness. She rapped blunt fingernails against a photograph of an extremely lovely young woman whose large, limpid dark eyes gazed adoringly out of an oval face framed by lustrous black hair. It was a portrait of a lady which was repeated three other times in varying poses, more than any other.

"Who's this?" she asked. "She seems to be current and choice."

"Oh, that's Mrs. Elwyn Rand," said the inspector, picking his teeth. "She is married to one of these society playboys. Used to be a night club singer. A good looking dish." He shrugged massive shoulders. "Looks like she was at home here too."

"How about her?" Amy snapped. "She seems to have figured largely in Signor Gasparini's life. Have you questioned her husband—or her?"

"They got an alibi," said Williams. "They was at the Regency Room at a big party all last evening." His attitude seemed to state that, since they already had the killer, why bother a lot of other people, especially society folk.

"Let it go," said Amy.

SHE went to a desk in a corner of the bedroom adjoining, opened its drawers one by one. In one of them she found a collection of old bank and check books made out to a major bank in the Loop. This, of course, was her meat. With a grunt she sat down and studied each in turn. The inspector stood by, moving restlessly at irregular intervals.

"Who paid the Signor's income?" she asked after awhile. "You can level with me on that because I can find it out anyway. According to these books he got between twenty-five hundred and three thousand dollars the first of every month. On the seventh or eighth he paid out a thousand even. By the fifteenth he deposited a thousand even. This has been going on for two years. He got other money, of course, but I figure it came from concert fees and record royalties and the like. This other is the only regular entry—and it doesn't add."

"I don't get you," said the inspector without evidence of interest.

"Let me explain," the fat woman said patiently. "Every month he got a pretty definite sum of money—my guess is it came from a trust fund or annuity or something of the sort. The variations suggest a trust fund. Then, every month within a week or so—time to let his deposit become clear at the bank—he drew a check for a thousand bucks, made out to cash."

"I'd like to have that much cash," said Williams. Amy looked her disgust.

"If he wanted it known where he spent that money, he'd have made it out to somebody," she said. "His household and

living expense records are here and it didn't figure in them. He used his concert fees and royalties to pay them.

"But the oddest item is this thousand in cash he banked by the fifteenth of each month," the fat woman went on. "It looks to me as if he paid somebody something and then got it back in cash—no profit, no loss, no anything. And it happened every month. There's something odd about it."

"Gasparini was screwy anyway," said Williams. "He comes out here a couple of years back and settles down in this house with his deaf mute. Until he gets here, people tell me he was a real jovial Joe—liked to have people around. But no more. He won't have nobody in the place except the dummy." He nodded toward the dressing room with its picture gallery. "And he won't talk to newspaper men even. He won't talk to anybody much, not even in rehearsals."

"How interesting!" said Amy. She scowled. "But somebody outside of the deaf mute must have known him. I want to talk to Mrs. Rand, the lady of the pictures. Would you care to come along, Inspector?"

"You're sweet," said Williams with heavy-footed irony. "I don't know what good it'll do you to talk to the dame but I'm coming." He was right behind her as she waddled past the murder room with its concert grand piano and its walls of topaz yellow plaster. . . .

"I suppose you saw the pictures," Margaretta Rand was a gorgeous object as she reclined gracefully on the obviously expensive chaise longue of burgundy satin. She wore cocktail pajamas of oyster white silk trimmed with sequins which brought out the pearly translucence of her ivory skin, provided brilliant contrast with the darkness of her eyes and long black hair. The chaise longue itself brought out the dark red of her full lips, the matching ovals of her finger and toenails. Even in deshabille she offered studied perfection.

"Yes, I saw them," said Amy. "I could hardly help it." She shot a look at Elwyn Rand, who was pacing nervously up and down the carpet, smoking a long cigarette. Blond to paleness, he looked the young man of too much leisure in a velvet smoking jacket with a silk muffler at his throat. The Rands were a decidedly and deliberately and expensively decorative young couple.

"You mustn't misunderstand," said

Margaretta Rand with a deprecatory gesture. "I used to sing for my supper you know—before Elwyn—" She paused to cast a fond glance at her husband. "Before Elwyn found and married me. Naturally I love music. Signor Gasparini was like an uncle to me. A good uncle."

"He taught you, perhaps," said Amy. She smiled to put the Rands more at ease. "I only called on you because I must know more about Signor Gasparini. He seems to have had so few contacts."

"I understand," said Margaretta tolerantly. "That poor young man under arrest." She nodded toward an evening paper on the table beside the chaise. "He is so good looking. Naturally you'd like to prove he didn't do it."

"He did it, all right," Inspector Williams said confidently.

AMY poured a tumbler full of the gin with which Elwyn Rand had provided her, drained it and smacked her lips appreciatively.

"I'm just checking every angle," she said, paused to belch loudly. "Perhaps you would tell me again what you did last night."

"Why, we went to a party at the Regency Room downtown," said Elwyn Rand. "Any number of people saw us there. I'd say we got there around eleven."

"Thank you," said Amy humbly. "Every detail counts. Perhaps you could tell me what you had on, just to enable me to check up more closely."

"You are thorough," said Margaretta Rand, laughing. "Elwyn wore a dinner jacket, of course. I—let me see—I wore a brown crepe with gold trimmings."

"Thank you," said Amy once more. She got to her feet once more and bade the Rands farewell. Williams lumbered out of the apartment after her.

"And the color scheme of the Regency Room is ice blue and white," said Amy, half to herself. "Inspector, I want to check up on the Rand bank account. She's a dish, isn't she?"

"You can say *that* again," Williams replied as they entered the elevator. "But why bother checking up on them? They got an alibi."

"Five will get you ten that it's a phony," said Amy crisply. "In fact, five will get you five hundred."

"What makes you so sure?" the inspector asked, looking faintly uneasy.

"The evidence of my eyes," said Amy.

"But it isn't the alibi that is troubling me. I want to get a look at the Rand finances."

She returned to her hotel, the inspector trailing along, and got busy on the telephone. First she ordered lunch sent to her room. A snack consisting of a five pound porterhouse steak, a triple order of hashed brown potatoes, a huge mound of French fried onions, a salad of six quartered tomatoes on a head of lettuce drenched with Russian dressing, a half lemon meringue pie, coffee and an extra bottle of gin.

"I'm on a diet," she said seriously. "I've cut out soup for lunch. What will you have, Inspector?"

Inspector Williams gulped and finally ordered corned beef and cabbage. While Amy ate he toyed with his food, his usually healthy appetite in a state of atrophy. The fat woman cleaned her plates, however, and sat back with a sigh.

"Now," she said, "I can think better." She pulled the telephone toward her and began a second round of calls. The banker upon whom she had put pressure to divulge the Rand account simply by threatening to withdraw her funds from his institution was ready with facts and figures. Amy took notes busily.

"I thought so," she said, turning to the inspector after hanging up. "It looks very much as if our decorative young friends, the Rands, had some interesting methods of gaining their money. Old Beaver—" she named the highly respectable bank president to whom she had been talking—"had to buy his son out of their clutches just last year. They still have a number of—clients."

"Blackmail?" said the inspector, his bushy eyebrows lifting.

"Exactly," said Amy. "Young Rand had money when his parents died but he had an idea he could double it and wound up with next to nothing and Margaretta on his hands. So they decided to live by their wits."

"Yeah," said Williams. "But I don't see the connection with Gasparini."

"On the ninth of every month Rand deposited a thousand dollars in cash and this has gone on for approximately two years," said Amy. "Does that spell anything to you?"

"It spells blackmail, maybe, but not murder," said Williams. Despite his stubborn defiance he was definitely shaken. Then his scowl faded. "But why should

Rand or his missus murder the man who was paying them all that dough?" he went on. "It's like that old story about the golden goose."

"More or less," said Amy. "Except that in this case the golden eggs were being handed back to the goose."

"I don't get it," said Williams.

"You will," said Amy, "if you put your men to work cracking the Rands' alibi. Get hold of their garagemen, the headwaiter at the Regency Room, taxi drivers, anyone who can check on their movements last night."

"Why should I?" he countered. "We already got the killer locked up."

"You've got an innocent man," said Amy. "If you don't do what I say, I'll do it myself and make monkeys out of you." She paused, her little eyes dreamy, added, "Patrolman Williams, walking a West End beat—"

"So help me—" Williams sputtered his indignation. Then, angrily, he snatched up his weather-stained fedora and left. He had been gone only a matter of minutes when the telephone rang. It was Louise Norden.

"Take it easy, honey," said Amy. "Inspector Williams is wrapping it up right now. Your luscious Pat should be clear by morning."

IT DIDN'T take that long. By five o'clock Inspector Williams was back in the hotel, hat in hand. Amy looked up from the high tea she was enjoying, a half meal consisting of mounds of hors d'ouvres and their inevitable liquid accompaniment. Louise Norden was sitting across from her nervously, an untouched plate before her.

"Well?" said Amy, looking up at him.

"I don't know how you done it," the inspector told her, shaking his heavy head. "But you was right. Both of them was there ahead of Carden."

"Thank heaven!" exclaimed the contralto softly.

"We found a hackman who drove Rand there at a little after ten," Williams went on. "He went inside and didn't stay long. Another cabbie picked him up and drove him to the Regency Room. He waited there for Mrs. Rand."

"She got her car out of the garage at ten twenty-five and drove out to Gasparini's house too. The cop on the beat noticed her—she was the kind of girl anyone would notice. She parked her car near there. A couple of minutes later it

was gone. The Regency Room attendants remember them. They met in the foyer just before eleven and went in together."

"Nice going, Williams," said Amy, taking a puff on her cigar.

"Yeah," he said. "But it still don't clear Carden. Mind you, Miss, I don't think he did it now." This to the opera singer. "What next?"

"We pay another visit to the Rands," said Amy, managing to assume the upright once more and obviously enjoying the inspector's dependence. "This time we may need help."

"Anything you say, Miss Brewster," said Williams.

"Call me Amy, Cletus," said the fat woman benignly.

The Rands were just preparing to go out for cocktails when Amy and the inspector, backed by a small phalanx of uniformed policemen, reached their apartment. Margaretta, stunning in a pale green dinner gown, regarded them with astonishment, her husband with annoyance ill concealed. Amy addressed Margaretta.

"Honey," she said, "did you know this man of yours killed Signor Gasparini last night? He took a cab ahead of you and did him in."

"Just what," said Elwyn Rand coldly, "is the reason for this extraordinary accusation?" He made, thought Amy, a very haughty picture indeed.

"The direct reason," she said, punching her words, "lies in a visit to the bank you made yesterday. There you discovered that, for some time, your wife had been repaying Gasparini the blackmail you received from him every month."

Margaretta put a hand to her mouth, regarded her husband with round eyes of suspicion. He reached for a cigarette.

"And just what do you compute blackmail on?" he countered coolly. "Surely you must know what Signor Gasparini was much too noted a—romantic figure to be vulnerable to blackmail over a woman, even a woman as lovely as my wife."

"You didn't blackmail him over your wife," said Amy firmly. "You blackmailed him because he was stone deaf and, if the fact ever got out, he was finished as a conductor."

Rand flinched as if he had been struck. He turned appealing eyes toward Margaretta, was just in time to fend off the clawing fury she had suddenly become. She was still spewing Italian curses and he was

nursing a scratch on the cheek when a pair of patrolmen managed to pull her off.

"You pig!" she shouted at him. "You filthy pig! I hope you hang."

"We use the electric chair in this state, madam," Williams said firmly. He turned to Amy, added, "I still don't see how you figured it."

"It was obvious," said Amy, "once you looked at things dispassionately. Here we have a famous conductor, a gregarious man occupying a position almost godlike in the musical world. Suddenly he moves to Chicago, settles in a house with a single servant, a deaf-mute, and refuses to see any but a few people—most of them women infatuated with him or desirous of obtaining his help."

"But he might have had anything else wrong with him," said Williams. "How did he conduct his concerts?"

"By memory," said Amy. "It was always famous. And he didn't conduct many—just enough to keep his reputation alive. No man with sensitive ears would suffer those carpetlike composition floors that echo to footsteps like gongs. And why a deaf-mute for a servant? Because it was the only kind who could not guess his trouble."

"Then too, why wasn't his body found in a corner of the room or in the doorway? Surely a man with hearing couldn't have helped but know that someone was sneaking up behind him with a poker. He would have turned, have struggled, have tried vainly to get away. He'd never have been caught in the center of the floor—not with so many directions of retreat."

WILLIAMS scratched his head. Then his eyes narrowed. "But how did you connect it with the Rands?"

"The pictures, of course," said Amy. "That started it anyway. There were four of them, only one apiece of the other women. Naturally I wanted to talk to her. When I saw her I realized that here was a creature made for love and intrigue. Also, she had a musical background. And the setup here was odd. So I asked a few questions and punctured her alibi."

"How did you do that?" said Williams, scowling.

"Remember, I asked her what sort of dress she was wearing last night at the Regency Room? Brown crepe with gold trimmings. Obviously Mrs. Rand is a person who thinks always of presenting a perfect picture against the background

in which she finds herself. Recall the oyster white pajamas on the Burgundy couch?"

"Yeah," said Williams. . . He shook his head once more.

"Well, she would never dream of wearing brown and gold to the Regency Room with its ice-blue background. But she didn't dare deny wearing the dress lest it puncture her alibi. Now, this made it obvious she actually intended to go somewhere else last night.

"She was going to see her lover—Signor Gasparini—whose living room is walled with topaz, a perfect background for the gown she was wearing. You see, she had fallen in love with the Maestro and could not abide continuing to blackmail him. So she simply drew the money from the Rand joint account every month and repaid it to him."

"Women!" said Inspector Williams.

"Remember," said Amy, "I'm a woman too."



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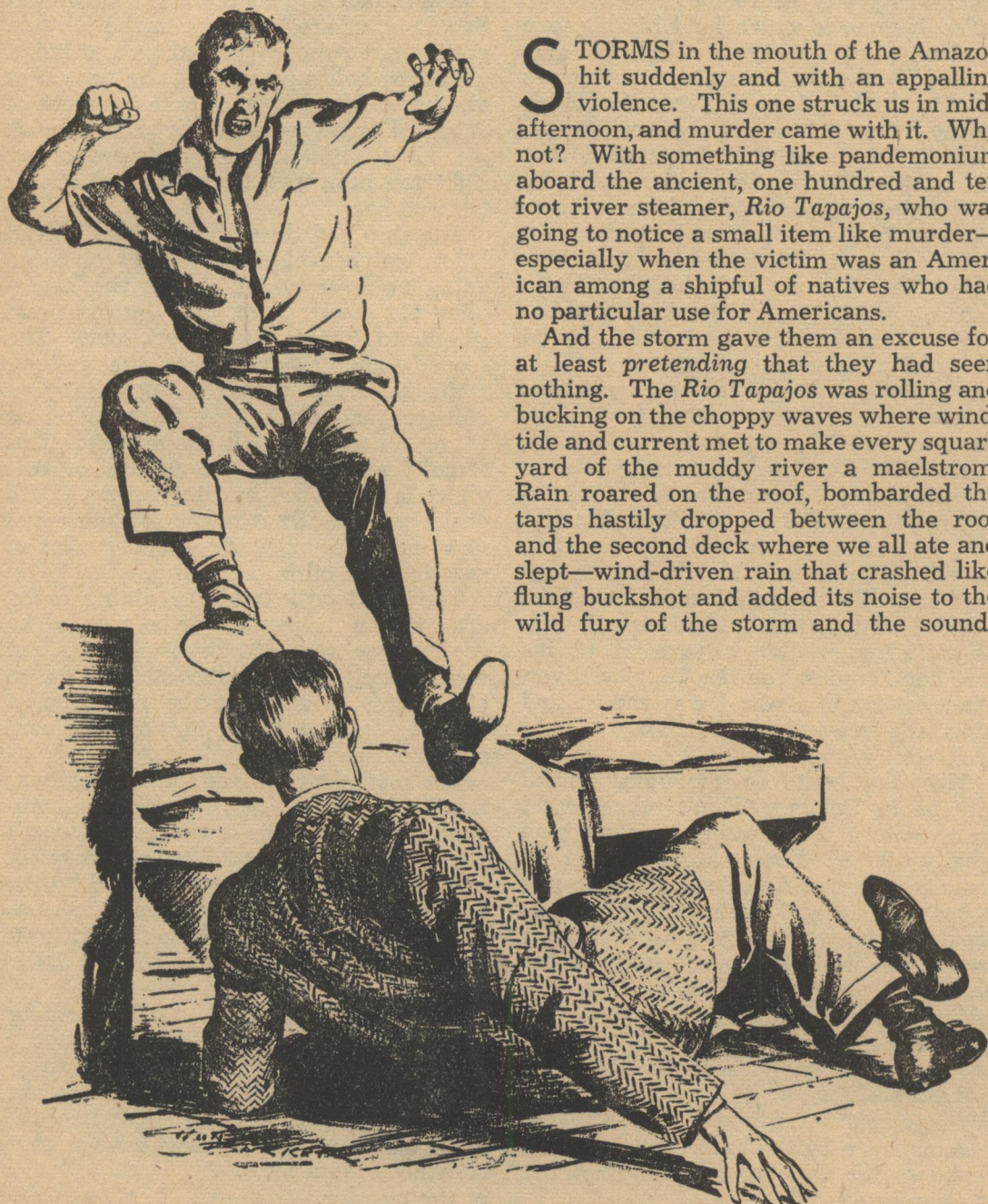
RIVER KILL

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

When sudden death stalks an Amazon steamer, Ross Landry seeks a clue behind a cloud of hostility!

STORMS in the mouth of the Amazon hit suddenly and with an appalling violence. This one struck us in mid-afternoon, and murder came with it. Why not? With something like pandemonium aboard the ancient, one hundred and ten foot river steamer, *Rio Tapajos*, who was going to notice a small item like murder—especially when the victim was an American among a shipful of natives who had no particular use for Americans.

And the storm gave them an excuse for at least *pretending* that they had seen nothing. The *Rio Tapajos* was rolling and bucking on the choppy waves where wind, tide and current met to make every square yard of the muddy river a maelstrom. Rain roared on the roof, bombarded the tarps hastily dropped between the roof and the second deck where we all ate and slept—wind-driven rain that crashed like flung buckshot and added its noise to the wild fury of the storm and the sounds



Before I passed out, I saw my attacker coming down on me with both feet

of human panic. Kids were screaming and crying, women praying aloud, men muttering and crying out.

In my experience as a kind of detective-of-fortune I had seen some strange murder weapons, but never a hammock. Maybe that sounds funny, but John Jimmy Jains didn't look funny. Not with his face blue, his eyes popping out, and his tongue protruding from his puffed lips. And the way he swayed with the sickening roll and plunge of the ship, his toes dragging the deck, was pretty gruesome.

The hammock which held his big, one hundred and ninety-pound body suspended by the neck was in the women's section of the ship, an area in which Jimmy Jains had moved about rather too freely. I knew who had occupied that hammock. Maria Terezinha Palos, a lovely nineteen-year-old girl en route to join her husband in Sao Luiz and not averse to a spot of flirtation now and then.

Brazilians are violently hostile to men who so much as look at women who belong to them, and Jains might have paid the penalty for some such mistake. However that might be, Jains was an American, and he was field manager for Damon MacLeish—and I was private eye for MacLeish on the *Rio Tapajos*, commissioned to keep the boat clean of trouble. The situation was in the lap of Ross Landry, forty-two and new on the job—meaning myself. Two days out of Belem on my third monthly trip—and now came this!

I had tied up with MacLeish, in the States, after reading a yarn about his Brazilian "empire" on the Tapajos River. I had written him who I was and he had cabled me fare and put me aboard the old TAP.

"Keep that boat free of trouble," he had told me in Belem. "Don't reveal what you're doing. Be a writer or something equally useless. People are out to get me because I'm new, American, and hanging on by my financial eyebrows. The Alto Tapajos Company is a gold mine if I can keep it. That old tub is my link with the markets. Anyone who hits me there can bust me wide open. See to it that no one does, Landry."

MAC LEISH had told me to keep an eye on Jains. He said, "He's the best field manager I ever had. But he has a weakness for women, and it sometimes gets him into trouble."

It had! Or something had. Jains would

never say what, now. Nor did anyone else show a disposition to enlighten me. The women, kneeling in prayer on deck, had their backs studiously to that dangling horror and they weren't having any part of the murder. They must often have seen Jains beside that hammock, flirting—harmlessly enough, by American standards probably—with Maria. If they had seen him killed, it was their secret. And Maria was not among the kneeling women.

I was on a spot. This thing could cost Damon MacLeish thousands of dollars at Sao Luiz, where his work in the jungles, getting out rubber, gold, skins and hides, would be held up awaiting the arrival of another field manager to take the place of Jains. Damon wouldn't be pleased with me. But Jains had not been out of my sight ten minutes. Someone had struck fast and hard.

The ship had three decks. The lowest, below water level, was jammed with cargo going up-river and with the ship's gargling old power plant, plus darkness and smells to knock your teeth out. The second—middle—deck held the galleys, stalls for cattle which, along with pigs, chickens and ducks had to be killed en route, for eating. All were noisy. This same deck held the mountains of fuel which fed the wood-burning boilers. Both decks were firetraps, more so than usual now, because we were carrying a lot of gasoline and oil in our cargo.

The third deck held the dining room, aft, with a tarpaulin for a roof. The roofed-over area, forward of this, had washrooms, showers and staterooms on either side, a store at the near end, a stairway leading down, piles of hides, and scores of hammocks.

The men slept in hammocks slung over the three mess tables, the women in hammocks forward of the store. My hammock was next to one that Jains had occupied, in a kind of isolated corral formed by the forward stateroom, the rail and the *comandante's* cabin. I had been walking aft on the starboard side when I found Jains' body.

I stood beside the dead man, looked over everybody I could see, glimpsed not a soul who so much as glanced in my direction. But there was tension in the air, in the squalling of the kids and in the rigid backs of the praying women that convinced me a lot of those people knew of the murder.

The next move was up to me. Did

Commandante Ernesto Queiroz know? He had skippered this ship since her maiden voyage—forty years—not missing a trip. Sixty-odd, mostly Bororo Indian, short, stocky, with snow-white hair, he knew the river, the boat, the people. He must have seen many murders. Did he know about this one? If so, what was he doing about it?

I left Jains and hurried along the port side, peering into the staterooms, none of which were locked, each of which was an oven, cheesebox-size. All smelled. Kids slept in some, women in others, but no Maria Terezinha Palos was anywhere to be found on this deck. I scoured the second deck with the same result.

Then I went down in the hold, thinking what a fine, dark place it was for a knife in the abdomen, and explored the smelly darkness with a pencil flash. No Maria. I returned to the third deck, went up a ladder to the roof, where spooners sometimes lingered in the moonlight.

Nothing! For all I could prove to the contrary, Maria was not on the boat at all. I thought of her beauty—olive skin, rosy cheeks, black hair and eyes—and I didn't much blame Jains for making a play for her. But the *Rio Tapajos* hadn't stopped for two hours, and I had seen them together less than an hour before. So, if she were gone, she was overboard! She might, though, have escaped my search, be in hiding somewhere. If so, then she knew who had killed Jains.

I went to the commandante's cabin, where Queiroz was primping up his white uniform to have it nice when we docked at Monte Alegre.

"Maria Terezinha Palos," I said in Portuguese, "I thought she might be here. I want to ask her to see Indian Rocks with me at Monte Alegre."

Queiroz stared at me from under his brown, overhanging forehead. He was all Indian at the moment, his eyes unreadable.

"As a good friend of her husband," he said coldly, "I shall advise her against seeing Indian Rocks with you. Let us talk to her."

HE ROSE, led the way to the murder hammock, and I followed, my heart hammering with excitement. Maria Palos wasn't there of course, but neither was Jimmy Jains! I swung on Queiroz, but his eyes were inscrutable, his face a mask. A lot of the passengers were looking at

me, now, with the same frozen expressions. They knew, and so did Queiroz!

"Jains, where is he?" I asked. "He was here—murdered—fifteen minutes ago. Now he's gone, and the girl is missing, too. As an American, I am interested in what happens to other Americans. What have you done with the body?"

The captain shrugged. "Is this the first time that Jains and Maria have been missing—at the same time—from the rest of the passengers? Don't start trouble, Landry. I'm commandante here."

He meant it. He was telling me plainly to keep my nose out.

"What kind of a report will be made?" I insisted.

"Jains was sweet on Maria," said Queiroz. "Maybe they took to the wilds at the last stop. What's wrong with such a report?"

"Plenty," I said. "For one thing, I saw Jains' dead body swinging from the hammock."

"Did anybody but you see that body?" Contempt was in his eyes and in his voice as he turned away, returning to his office. Cursing under my breath, I headed down the port side, prepared to search again.

I am usually pretty careful, for sleuthing in dangerous waters is an old story to me, but I must have gotten a little careless this time, for a hand reached out from one of the staterooms and got me by the neck. I was lifted bodily off the deck, hauled into the stateroom and the door closed before I could wink an eye. And I'm close to two hundred pounds, mostly man, myself. I had never been handled like that before.

A *Rio Tapajos* stateroom is the smallest built for man. Brazilians average about five feet four in height and the bunks are too short even for them. So a fight between two big men in one of them takes up most of the available space. This fellow was all set to choke me or break my neck, and I had to move fast. I got my feet against the bulkhead and tried to smash him against the other side. He crashed, cursing, against the wall.

But then I fell to the space between the bunks, and over me towered a brown-skinned man who must easily have weighed two hundred fifty pounds, with no fat on him. Instantly he jumped, trying to stamp me. I saw his big brogans coming, rolled out of the way just in time, grabbed a foot and twisted.

He went down, I rolled free, and then

we were both up and doing a job of slug-ging like none I'd ever experienced. His huge fists were like mauls, and whenever he landed he hurt me all through my body. He slammed me against the walls, knocked my head against the open port.

I punched him in the face and he didn't seem to feel it. I kneed him—same result. I got a good look at his face—scarred, savage, blue eyes filled with hate. I couldn't name his nationality, for I was taking such a beating that my vision was blurred.

But I did get in some good wallops. Once I got him against the door, banged his head on it, and snarled in his face:

"Where were you when I was hunting for Terezinha, *Palos*? Where have you been hiding, to trap your wife?"

For answer he came off that door with foam flecking his lips and his neck muscles bulging. He hammered me to the deck with a savage series of rights and lefts to the body. I passed out cold, my last sight of the attacker being his huge, broganed feet coming down at me a second time. And this time he didn't miss!

I came to myself in darkness, save for a dim light through the port. The ship was moored, I knew by the sounds. Somewhere I could hear the spat-spatting of bare feet as *caboclos* refilled the woodbins from great piles on the river bank. I must have been out for hours. It was night.

Groaning, I sat up, knew I had been dumped into one of the bunks. I put a foot down, but it didn't touch the deck. It touched something soft instead, and I knew what it was before I turned my flash on it. The body of Maria Terezinha *Palos*!

There came a knock on the door then, and the voice of *Commandante* Queiroz. "*Senhor Landry*, are you in there? Open up." I opened the door, confronted the stare of the captain and the men with him.

HE LOOKED at me for some moments, but I knew what lay between my widespread feet, even before he let himself look down at the crumpled, contorted body of the girl. Her neck was thoroughly twisted, and I knew at least one pair of hands that could have done it easily.

The *commandante's* eyes in his weather-beaten Indian face came back to meet my stare once more. "I see that you found poor Maria, *Senhor Landry*," he said softly. "Perhaps you will explain."

"I can't explain her presence here, *com-*

mandante," I said. "But when I passed this stateroom, this afternoon, her husband grabbed me, pulled me in here, and gave me a terrific beating. She wasn't here then. When I came to, she was—as you see her."

"Her husband is at Sao Luiz, eight days from here, on the Tapajos River," said the *commandante*. "You could not have fought with him."

"Would you think that Maria could have done this to me?" I asked.

"You could have hammered yourself against the walls."

"That's ridiculous, and you know it."

"Perhaps," said Queiroz. "But you are a prisoner until we reach Arumenduba and the police." He stepped back, motioning me out, and then I noticed the snub-nosed automatic in his hand.

Presently I stood with my back against the inboard wall of the captain's office, in the area where the women swung their hammocks. Behind and above me was a picture of the Holy Virgin to whom the women had been praying while the storm was raging, and John Jimmy Jains still swung crazily in the twisted hammock of Maria Terezinha *Palos*. The place was packed with men and women. No children. It looked like a trial, for two men came, bearing the body of Maria Terezinha *Palos*, which they laid almost at my feet.

"*Senhor Landry*," began the *commandante*, "just who are you, besides being a writer? This is your third trip aboard my vessel. Are you working for the company?"

"Are you?" I flung back at him with intended sarcasm.

"I am the captain—and the questioner at the moment. Answer, please."

In my best Portuguese, I told about finding the body of Jains. "I judged he had been strangled by the hammock, but he could have been killed beforehand," I said.

The women were staring down at the body of the girl, and muttering.

"She deserved what she got," said one.

"But what a brute this American is, to have twisted her neck so."

They went into a lot of detail about me and what might have happened to Maria Terezinha in the stateroom, and they were very blunt. I knew I was in the worst kind of jam.

"Too bad murder only calls for seven years," said one man. "This fellow, whatever we may think of Maria, deserves to

die as she did!"

There was a growl of agreement. It would take little to turn this into a lynch mob. Easy to heave me into the drink for the *piranhas* to take over, another colorful detail in the "report" to MacLeish.

"Every passenger is here," said Queiroz. "Did any of you see *Senhor* Jains in or around Maria's hammock at the time *Senhor* Landry says?"

There came a chorus of "nos," and I stared at them in unbelief.

"I searched the steamer for Maria," I said desperately.

"You meant to ask her to see Indian Rocks with you, you told me," Queiroz said. "You found her in that stateroom when you were seeking her, did you not? Perhaps she repulsed you, and you killed her. Perhaps she was dead when you came to me, and you merely sought an alibi."

"Then went there and knocked myself out until now," I said, "so as to be found with her body! I tell you I was making a further search when Palos—it must have been he—jumped me, knocked me out. Just why did you come hunting me, Queiroz? How did you know where to look?"

"I went to the stateroom, knowing it was Maria's, and knowing Maria," Queiroz said.

I didn't like that slur on the dead girl. I felt sure that she had been no more than mildly flirtatious with Jains.

"I don't think there was any real harm in her," I said.

That got the wrong reaction, angered them further. I am sure that they would have rushed me if the *commandante* had not had the situation in hand.

"I tell you Maria's husband is aboard," I said.

"You say you confronted him," said the captain. "Then describe him."

I RESORTED to deception, seeking to draw out something. "He's a small brown man," I said. "Handy with his fists. Wore ragged dungarees. I know he must be a white collar man, wore the dungarees in hiding, part of a plan to trap his wife in something that would justify murdering her. His hair is black, curly, his eyes black, his face pitted a little with smallpox scars."

The faces around me told me nothing when I had finished. "I shall now describe

Palos for you, *Senhor* Landry," said the captain, and proceeded exactly to describe my assailant of the afternoon. That confirmed his identity, if I could ever get to MacLeish with my story, but I wasn't sure I could. I was in a worse situation now than before.

"I could place you under guard, but I'll take your parole instead," Queiroz said. "You can't escape. The river is teeming with *piranhas*, and it's a long swim to shore where the alligators lie."

This was bad. Under guard in a stateroom I'd have been safe for the time being. On parole, in my hammock, I'd be visited during the night. The glitter in the eyes surrounding me told me that. I had heard there were no *piranhas* below Santarem, but I doubted if the *piranhas* had ever heard of Santarem. Go into the water bleeding and you were a skeleton before you reached bottom. Any one of the dozen knives I saw in Brazilian belts around me could start the blood before I went "accidentally" overside.

And now, as I studied the faces around me, a new and stunning knowledge came to me. Nobody but myself and the murderer *had* seen Jains' murdered body, there in the hammock. The men had not been there. And the women had rigidly avoided spying on Maria while Jains was about. It was their way of expressing complete disapproval. So these people really *did* believe I had killed Maria! Queiroz, too.

But I had to face it. "I'll give my parole," I said. "I'll not try to escape. But I'll kill anyone who moves in on me in the night—with my bare fists," I added, lest Queiroz think to have me searched for arms and find my Police Positive in its shoulder holster.

There was a stir of protest among the women over sleeping "so close to a murderer." So Queiroz ordered men and women to change places for the night. That would put twenty men with knives close to me. Very nice. Queiroz, by accident or design, was surely paving the way for a third murder—mine!

Maria Terezinha's body was sewn in a hammock and put in her stateroom, the door locked. It could not be kept until the *Rio Tapajos* reached Sao Luiz, seven days hence, and would have to be put overside. It made me a little sick to think of her, so vibrant and beautiful, lying there in the dark stateroom, rolling, a shapeless bundle, with the gentle, snoring

roll of the ship.

Later, I lay in my hammock and waited for trouble, and it came to me that Queiroz was the key to the situation. I had figured him to be in on the murder somehow, an enemy of the company. Now I remembered that in forty years the man had not missed a trip of the *Rio Tapajos*, a fact which, in itself, proved a loyalty far beyond the ordinary. The Amazon cruise was his heart's blood.

There was the further fact that Damon MacLeish trusted Queiroz with all the wealth which the *Rio Tapajos* brought to him out of the jungles each month. It seemed unlikely that he would not likewise have trusted him with knowledge of just what my real job was on the ship. So I came now to the conclusion that the *commandante* knew, but that he had to steer a careful middle course between his loyalty to the company and the uncertain temper of the natives.

In effect he had said to me: "As a Brazilian, loyal to my own kind, I have yet done all I can to cooperate with you. The rest is up to you."

Where, I wondered, was the body of Jimmy Jains. If in hiding, Palos was there, too, with the body, which surely proved him a cold-blooded gent from way back. I believed, though, that Jains was probably overboard, and in the stomachs of the *piranhas* by this time.

Yes, "Palos" was Palos, all right, and I believed that the captain knew the man was aboard. Probably Palos had come down river from Sao Luiz, by launch to Santarem, by sailboat to wherever he had come aboard the ship. He had come to destroy John Jimmy Jains and to sabotage work on the Tapajos River and its tributaries by doing away with the efficient field manager.

BUT now it was nearly midnight, and nothing had yet happened to me. From the swaying hammocks round about came the snoring of many men. If there were any Landry killers among them, they had gone to sleep on the job.

Then I heard a hammock rope squeak, bare heels hit the deck, and someone yawned prodigiously. The fellow hacked and spat. Now he'd waken someone to talk to. Brazilians always did that. There was never such a thing as one lone Brazilian awake.

But this one was different. Feet padded the deck toward me, and I watched

through lowered lids. He didn't attack, though. He turned a flashlight in my face. A hundred times I'd seen night-prowling Brazilians do that. They'd head for the showers, and turn their lights into every face in every hammock, for heaven knows what reason.

I was tense for action, though still pretending sleep. But this fellow was just looking, not on cutting carnival apparently, for he snicked off his light after a while, and returned into the snoring darkness.

I heard a man say, "The American, Ramon. What of him?"

"He sleeps, Pedro. Odd, that he can, with murder on his soul, no?"

"Americans do not mind murder," said Pedro. "Some of the very best people in America murder their closest friends just because they do not like their faces. I have seen it happen in American pictures that move!"

More erstwhile sleepers were awake now, discussing me. They surely took me apart, verbally. If they believed half of what they said about me, they showed great forbearance in letting me live beyond the moment.

"We could easily knife him and toss him overboard," said someone.

"Why should we trouble, when he is going willingly to the police?" said another. "Why should one make unnecessary work for oneself?"

The yawns began again, and the creaking of hammock ropes as men turned over to go back to sleep. I waited for the snores to resume. Then I'd start a hunt in the dark for Palos, who was probably waiting, just as I was, for the boat to quiet down. His wife's stateroom was midway of the garden of hammocks now occupied by the men. He had killed both her and Jains because he loved his wife. He would still love her, and, if I had guessed "Brazilian" correctly, the next move would center about her body.

If I were right, I would not need to find the man's hideaway. Just keep an eye on that stateroom door. I'd have wagered a month's pay that after he killed her he had wept like a baby. He would come to her again.

But against those huge fists I needed another weapon than a pistol. I didn't want to kill the big man. I wanted to humble him, leave him alive to talk. There was a lead pipe thrust into rail brackets, for use when the gangplank

touched this deck. It was two feet long, an inch thick. Just right. I slid silently out of the hammock, got the pipe and eased along the starboard side, crouching under the mass of hammock ropes. I brushed some of the hammocks, but no sleeper stirred.

Opposite the stateroom door, I lay down, turned on my back, and worked my way along under the hammocks with my heels and my shoulder muscles. Close to the door, in deep shadow, I lay on my stomach and waited developments.

I waited an hour before anything happened. I should have seen the man arrive, but I might have dozed a little, been wakened by his silent presence. I didn't see from which direction he came. But it was the man, by his size, who had attacked me earlier.

I held my breath. He didn't see me. I gasped when he opened the stateroom door, for it had been locked when last I had seen it. Queiroz or someone, expecting Palos, had left it open for him, to give the big man a chance to say good-by to his dead wife. Maybe they planned to arrest him after that. Queiroz and the crew would know all possible hideouts on the boat.

Palos entered the cabin, leaving the door open, and I started to edge forward. I'd give him time to commune with his wife, then nail him, knock him cold, capture him. Later he could explain what he was doing aboard the *Rio Tapajos*.

He came out much sooner than I had expected, taking me by surprise in a couple of ways. He turned to his left, so that the port side of the steamer was to his left. He hesitated, and I could hear the big man sob. I almost choked on my own emotions then.

For he held the bundled hammock in his huge arms, cradling it as if it were a baby. He started moving along, bending almost double, bringing his chest close against his wife's body, to ease under the ends of hammocks.

I FOLLOWED him, cold chills crawling along my spine, for I guessed what came next. Oswaldo Palos was going to bury his own dead—in the muddy Amazon! Queiroz had prepared her, knowing Palos would somehow manage it. Nobody else was in on it, or there would have been curious ones awake to watch.

I was on my feet, close behind him, doubting now that he would look back,

sure he would be concentrating on his sad job with all of his mind.

He'd weight her body, and drop her over the rail on the port side, opposite Queiroz' cabin. So I had it figured. I squatted under the cover of a couple of hammocks and waited for him to poise her on the rail, wondered if anyone would be awakened by the splash.

But in the open space Palos did not even pause. He moved straight on, past the *commandante's* cabin, into the area occupied by the helmsman. How he expected to do anything there without attracting the attention of the helmsman I could not imagine, but he moved so purposefully I knew he knew what he was doing. Maybe the helmsman had his instructions for all I knew.

Palos turned right at the cabin's corner, and I lost sight of him. When I rounded the corner, I got the creeps, for Palos, with his burden, was moving up the steps which led through a trapdoor onto the roof, under the night sky. He went up backward in order to be able to handle his burden. The helmsman, whose dark face showed above the binnacle lamp, must surely have been aware of him, but his intent expression did not change. Slowly, laboriously, Palos went up through the trapdoor with his burden.

I wasn't far behind him. The murderer was so deep in his sorrow he didn't see me.

On the roof were ventilators and raised skylights which formed perfect seats; Jains had sat up here with Marie. Lovers came up here and spent hours. Palos must have spent many an hour up here with the wife he had so obviously loved. I felt like a heel, spying on him, but I had a job to do.

Palos sat down on a roofed-over ventilator and held that bundle in his arms. He rocked back and forth with her, crooning to her. He would lift his head and look long at the stars, as he must often have looked at them with Marie, from this same place. I'd been told he'd taken his honeymoon on the *Rio Tapajos*. Now he put his head down, close against his bundle and I managed to get onto the roof myself, behind the end of the skylight. To my right the roof slanted away from the middle for ten feet or so, then dropped off straight, twenty odd feet into the muddy, sullen river. To my left another drop. Palos faced the port side. Far off in that direction there was nothing but river,

the jungles too far away even to see. But in the other direction the jungle-smudge was visible—a hellish long swim for anybody but a fish.

I hung on, waiting. I couldn't have interfered with Palos' private burial if my life had depended on it. I felt ashamed of the lead pipe, but when I jumped this man, crazy with his grief, I'd need two lead pipes.

I thought he'd never get his heart-tearing good-bys said, but he finally did. He rose, a somehow heroic figure in the night, and moved down the cant of the roof to the edge. He straightened, tense. When he dropped her he would turn. I'd give him time to get clear of the drop, so when I brought the pipe down on him, he wouldn't fall overboard himself.

I sure didn't know Brazilians, especially Brazilians in love.

Palos didn't cast his wife's body into the river. He continued to hold it in his arms and simply stepped overside with it. Before I heard the splash I knew what a fool I had been.

Before I had given myself time to realize that what I next did was suicidal, I flung my lead pipe away, raced along the outer edge of the room yelling like a maniac, loud enough to waken everybody on the *Rio Tapajos*:

"Man overboard! Man overboard!"

I saw the swirl in the muddy water where the two had struck. I dived toward the middle of the swirl. I grasped the enormity of what I was doing, even as I fell, but then it was a little late.

The muddy river sucked me in, its hungry appreciation roaring in my ears.

MANY times I'd seen the jagged limbs of hundreds of floating trees in the Amazon. I might have dived into one of them. That I didn't was a tribute to the navigating of Queiroz' helmsman. As I went under I didn't keep my eyes open. In broad daylight even Amazon fish couldn't see two inches before them. I reached for something, anything, that would attach me to Palos. He wanted to die, which balanced the situation in my favor. He'd know, when he felt my hands on him, just what to expect. He'd try to hang onto his wife, go into the darkness with her, and to make sure of that, he'd breathe in—I *hoped*.

I got my hands into something that immediately stiffened and squirmed. I expected Palos to release his bundle, turn

and fight me. Then, the one who could hold breath the longer would survive, if either did. I got my left hand in the collar of Palos' jacket. He could have slipped out of it, but to do that he'd have had to release Maria. I felt his shoulders bunch as he held her even more closely.

He wasn't going to use his hands on me. He was simply going to cling to Maria. I could have socked him, and wasted my strength. I could do just one thing that promised success—hang onto him until he went limp, was unconscious.

Slowly, inexorably, the Amazon played with us, while Palos clung to his burden, and the weights in that hammock carried us all deeper into the blackness and increasing horror of the great river.

It could be a hundred feet, or several hundreds of feet deep here for all I knew. I could only await the river's pleasure. I could release Palos, let him go and come up under a floating island. I could think of a lot of dreadful possibilities in the spot I was in.

Palos' tensed shoulders squirmed and twisted. I sensed that his lungs were fighting the water. Mine were not, for I hadn't taken any water, but there were small balls of light in front of my closed eyes, my chest felt as if I had swallowed a hod of live coals, and bubbles roared past my ears on both sides of my head. I realized that I had been compelled to release ever so little of the precious air I had taken into my lungs while I fell.

Deeper, deeper, pressure making it tougher by the second to take, Palos squirming, hanging on.

The inevitable happened. We moved into a submerged tree. It apparently had anchored itself to the bottom, thrusting up its forest of limbs, empty of leaves. The points were slimy swords. We plowed through the forest of swords. Then I *was* scared, for the limbs had cut through my clothing in a dozen or more places, had ripped my skin, deeply, in as many places more. If what people had told me, and what I had read, were true, my blood would now bring *piranhas* by the thousand. I hoped fervently that report was correct about *piranhas* not ranging below Santarem—knew the idea foolish.

I couldn't hang on much longer. I didn't think to congratulate myself that the tree hadn't held us all three, drowning me along with Palos. Being human, I thought of my wounds, and the converging armies of *piranhas*. But time passed,

seconds that were eternities, and the *piranhas* did not come. The Amazon pushed us into a slow whirlpool, a submerged roil, and turned all three of us over and over. If it could have been filmed it would have looked horrible. We must have looked like a monster of many arms and legs. Only, it all happened in complete darkness.

My nose was burning and I thought of one last chance. Palos' arms were loosening, but not fast enough. For all I knew we might be too deep to reach the surface. I should have thought of it before. I put both hands in Palos' collar, put my legs around his chest, a desperate scissors hold,

almost directly, and every light aboard her was on. The rails were lined with men and women. I wished for just a moment I could hear what they were saying. A small boat was being lowered. I heard the clattering of a winch, knew the line by which live cattle were hoisted aboard for food was being lowered for whoever was overboard. I imagined Queiroz alone would know who he'd see in the water, if anyone survived.

I'd have wagered everybody knew Maria's body had disappeared.

Palos stirred as the TAP swung in, closer and closer, slowing down to keep her waves from swamping us. I



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got my feet against that hammock whose weight was drowning us both, straightened my legs as far as I could, pulled with my arms, with all my waning strength. If a second time had been required, I'd not have made it.

The dead wife slipped away from us and was gone. Palos rolled easily in my hands. I clung to him with my left hand, fought upward with my right and with all the power of leaden legs. Palos was unconscious. If he had fought even a second, we'd both have been done.

I thought I'd black out sure before my head poked above the surface and I gasped for air. Then I gagged, the smell of the river in my nose, the taste of it in my mouth. But I floated. Wavelets lapped against my lips. I turned Palos on his back, held him up, almost dead weight.

The *piranhas* still had not come. I looked through blurred eyes for the *Rio Tapajos*. She was bearing down on us,

hoped Palos wouldn't rouse enough to make me bop him. If he roused at all, he'd probably attack me in a frenzy.

But he didn't. The *canoe* came alongside, hands fastened in my clothing. Other hands took Palos away from me, hoisted him into the *canoe*. Then I was hauled aboard. The Brazilian crew didn't say a word. It was the first time I ever saw one of them—to say nothing of three—absolutely wordless.

They rowed us back to the *Rio Tapajos*, now with engines cut, riding beam-on to the current; not fast, or we'd have been carried under. Hands helped me up the rope. Then a loop went under Palos' arms and he went aboard as the cattle did, except that cattle were lifted by their horns.

Queiroz was the first man I saw, the first time I ever saw him below the top deck. His white hair was all awry in the light of lanterns and candles. Behind him the gloom of the second deck was packed

with people, some of them not clothed enough for inspection.

There was a chorus of remarks when Palos was recognized. They were all I ever got from the Brazilians by way of apology, unless the diffident smiles that came to me at breakfast were apology.

Palos lay supine on the deck, returning to consciousness. Somebody produced a bottle. I pushed it between Palos' teeth, not asking Queiroz' permission. The *commandante* didn't say a thing. There didn't seem anything for anybody to say, except Palos. That came next.

Palos snapped out of it as the liquor bit him. He came up fighting, but Queiroz barked: "Hold it, Palos! Don't make us manhandle you!"

That command saved me from a smashing, double-fisted.

"Now, I'll make you people believe me," I said. "Palos, tell us all what happened, beginning with why and how you came aboard the *Rio Tapajos*."

He stared at me dully, shrugged, not caring.

"Since you insisted on separating me from Maria Terezinha," he said in a dead voice, "I might as well."

I'd guessed right, which I didn't usually do. He'd been hired to mess things up for the company, no instructions as to how or what. He'd dropped down the Tapajos River to Santarem by company launch, come on down to meet the steamer aboard a fishing schooner, "with red sails," he said, as if the color of the sails were pertinent—come aboard while the steamer was loading wood at night, hidden himself in a new boiler that was being installed because the *Rio Tapajos* was converting to oil soon.

He hadn't expected to see Maria aboard. Above all he had not expected to find her, after less than a year of married life, flirting with another man, especially an American.

He'd forgotten his mission, gone a little mad. He'd attracted Maria's attention, when the storm broke, from the shadows at the top of the stairs. She had gone to him, followed him into the hold, where he had snapped her neck.

But she had told him she was to meet Jains in a few minutes, to go on the roof for some excitement in the storm. Palos came back up, not caring now what happened to him. He jumped Jains when Jains came to the hammock to fetch

Maria Terezinha. He'd snapped his neck, too. Fury, jealous despair, somehow connected Jains with Maria's hammock. He'd twisted Jains into it.

Then I had got nosy, found Jains, started hunting, and Palos ambushed me in Maria's cabin. With some idea of framing me for Maria's murder, because I was an American, and probably as bad as Jains about women, he watched his chance to put her in the stateroom with me. He left me alive to take the rap!

But when he realized he had killed the thing he loved most, the heart went out of him.

It confirmed what I had been saying all along. The rest I knew, the rest I told. Palos simply listened, sitting with head in his arms which dangled over his knees.

"You're under arrest, Palos," said Queiroz. "We're all sorry for you, sympathize with you, but there is the law. You're such a powerful man no room we have will hold you. I took Landry's parole, I'll have to take yours, until we reach Arumenduba."

The *Rio Tapajos* was swinging back on her up-river course, picking up speed.

I noted one thing: Queiroz accepted a parole Palos had not given. I thought I knew why, for Queiroz was good on hidden meanings in his speech.

"Better turn in, everybody," said Queiroz, moving away.

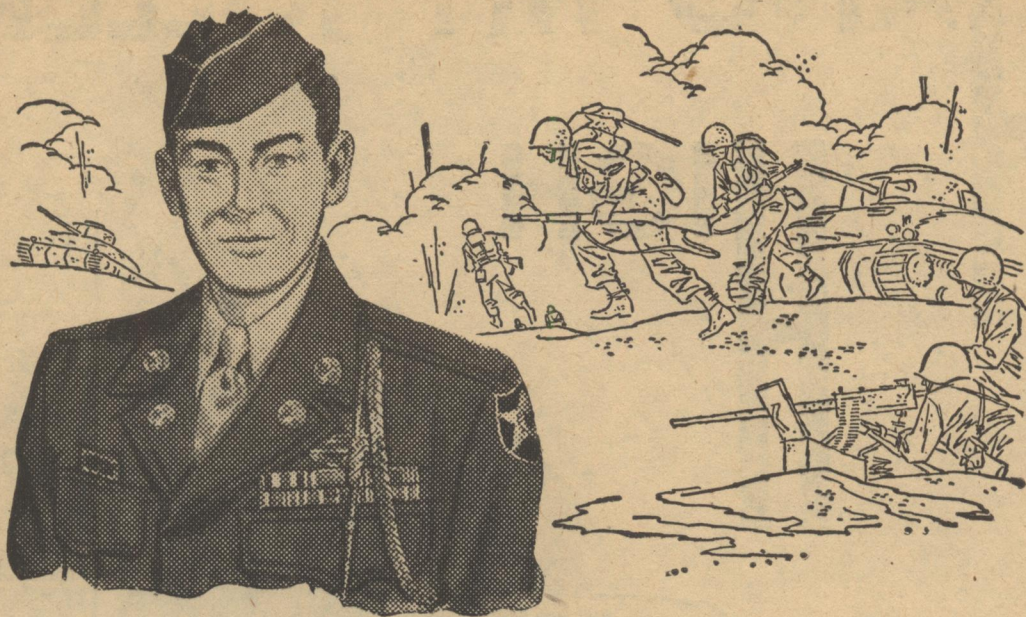
I DIDN'T expect to sleep a wink, but I dropped right off, dreaming no more than half a dozen times of my recent experience in the Amazon.

I didn't see Palos at breakfast. I didn't see him anywhere on the ship. Nobody else did, for he wasn't aboard. Nobody mentioned it. Nobody had to.

But there was wisdom in those apologetic smiles I mentioned awhile back, and complete understanding of everything in the lined Indian face of loyal Ernesto Queiroz, so we didn't even have to have a conference about it.

Palos' killing of Jains didn't sabotage matters at Sao Luiz as much as it might have. Damon MacLeish, on receipt of my telegram, sent from Monte Alegre, put me in charge at Sao Luiz until he could appoint a new field manager, get him to Sao Luiz.

Then I went back to being a river dick, promising myself to keep my feet out of the Amazon forever thereafter.



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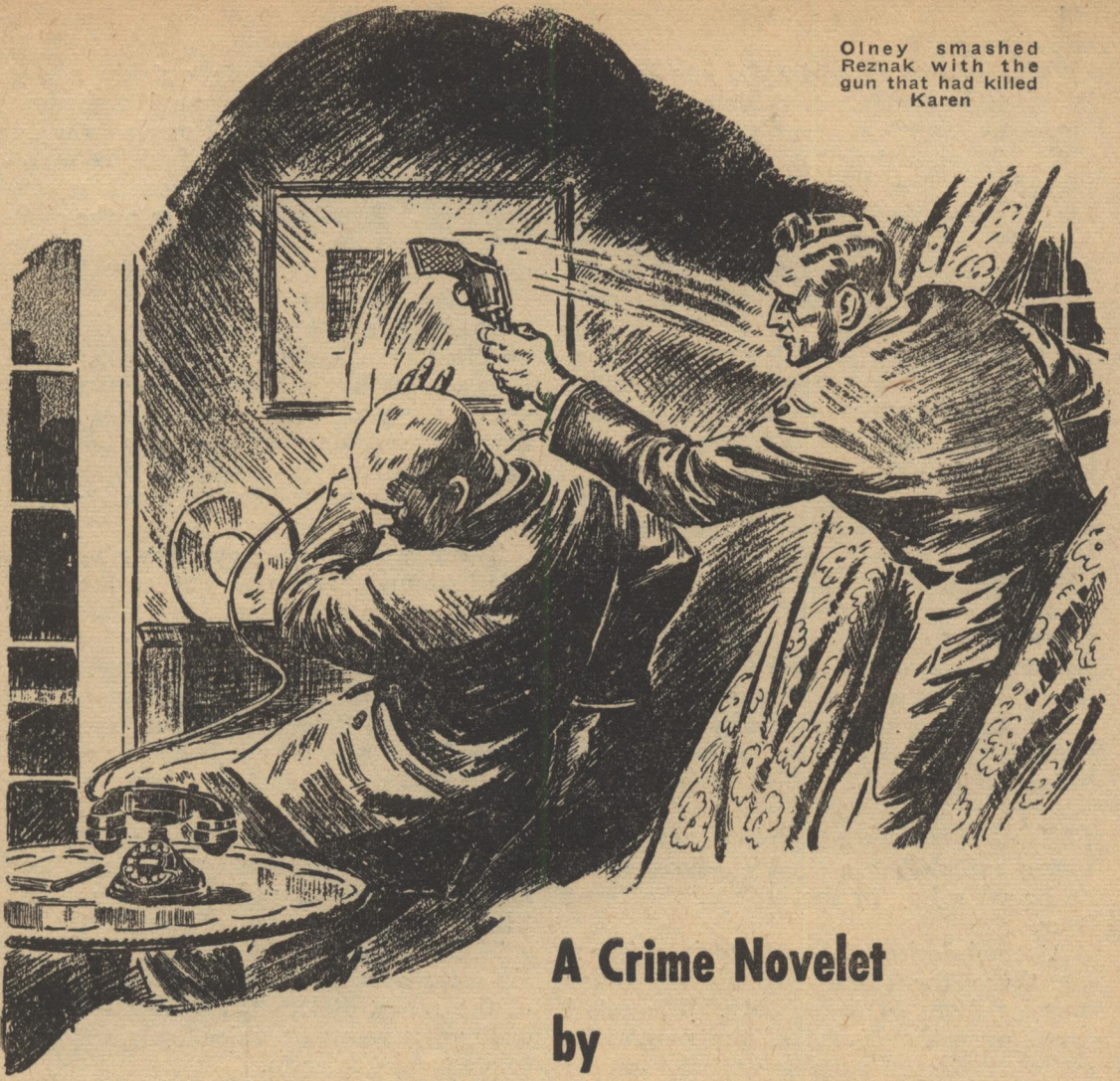
**U. S. Army and
U. S. Air Force**

HANG MY KILLER HIGH



As he stood over the dead body of lovely Karen Bradbury there in her penthouse apartment with the gun in his hand, Michael Olney knew he had to keep a step ahead of the police. . . .

Olney smashed
Reznak with the
gun that had killed
Karen



A Crime Novelet

by

ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM

CHAPTER I

Playing with Fire

THE PENTHOUSE was silent except for Michael Olney's harsh unsteady breathing. Olney stood in the middle of the living room, a tall tawny man too thin for his clothes; a man with a gun in his right hand and a corpse at his feet.

Presently his harsh breathing became whispered words, spoken in the soft glow of the room's single lighted lamp. "Sorry, Karen. You can't know how sorry I am. You'll never know—now." Bending over, he touched the dead girl's forehead;

brushed a stray strand of her glossy black hair away from those open eyes that saw nothing. "I'll try to make it up to you, though."

Even in death, Karen Bradbury was still beautiful. Death hadn't yet altered that beauty—if you overlooked the small neat hole in the soft white flesh over her heart where the bullet had gone in. It was the one flaw in a body otherwise flawless. Her negligee fitted snugly, revealing to Michael Olney the perfection of her curves. She was like an alluring princess turned to ivory by malign witchcraft, a princess whose careless reign over men's hearts had come to a sudden and

permanent end.

"You didn't want to die, did you, baby?" Olney said gently. A curious tightness made his satirical mouth seem almost ugly. "You hated the idea. But you played with fire. You always played with fire. And because of that, I've got to play with fire too. Maybe you're laughing at me. Maybe you're having the last laugh, after all. Is that the way you wanted it, Karen?"

He studied her smooth impassive face for a long moment, almost as if expecting her to answer. Then he straightened up, pushed the gun into his coat pocket and began doing what he had to do.

It was a tedious job, erasing fingerprints. The penthouse had four rooms: a kitchenette, a bath, a boudoir and the living room. Every plane surface had to be gone over, carefully. Every electric switch had to be wiped, every liquor bottle and glass, every table and chair and doorknob. Olney couldn't remember all the things he had touched when he'd been here three hours ago, so he had to make his work thorough. And it took time.

IT TOOK more time than he realized. He was completing a final checkup when he heard a key in the lock of the front door.

A scowl darkened his sharp face, freezing there the same way all his other muscles froze to immobility. His mind raced over the layout of the penthouse as he considered possible exits. First he thought of stepping quietly out through a French window onto the side terrace, but he realized this would be trapping himself, because there would be no way off that terrace except back through the apartment. Unless, of course, he leaped over the coping and hurtled sixteen stories to the street—and he wasn't ready for suicide, yet.

He considered the kitchenette with its back door to a service hallway and freight elevator. This, too, he rejected; he'd have to ring for the apartment building's janitor to bring the cage up to him. That wouldn't do at all. It would mean a witness who could later testify that Olney had been here in the penthouse at this particular hour.

No, he decided, there was no avenue of escape other than the front door and the self-operated passenger elevator beyond it. And that channel was blocked by someone with a key, someone who even

now was pushing the door open.

Sweating, Olney stole quickly across the room, noiseless as a moving shadow, and slid behind a swirl of scarlet window drapes which hung in long folds from valance to floor and afforded precarious concealment. Pressing himself into the shallow embrasure, he silently hoped he didn't bulge the drapery too visibly.

A man came into the room.

Through a slit in the drapes, Olney watched him, and recognized him. Carl Reznak was like a hammered-down giant—squat, powerfully built, broad of shoulder and muscular of body. His face was square and heavy, his head completely bald, and he walked with the rolling gait of a sailor. Or an ape.

There was nothing ape-like about his mind, though. He was one of the most intelligent men Michael Olney had ever known. Also, he was head of the homicide squad, and Olney's sworn enemy.

Reznak took exactly seven steps and then he saw Karen Bradbury's corpse. His exhaled gasp was a sharp hiss and his movement was as fast as a boxer's as he went to his knees by the dead girl. With a practised forefinger he touched her throat, unerringly seeking the spot where the artery would pulsate if she lived. There was no pulsation, of course.

Then Carl Reznak did a very odd thing. He went over to a phone on the far side of the room, dialed it, and disguised his ordinarily resonant voice by pitching it to a squeaky falsetto.

"Police department? I want to speak to Inspector Carl Reznak of Homicide." He waited. "Hello. What? Inspector Reznak isn't there? Well, then, perhaps I'd better report this to someone else. It's a murder. In Penthouse A, the Whitby Manor—that's on Paxton Boulevard. Oh gracious, I can't give you my name. No indeed. I don't wish to be involved." He hung up.

And as he set the instrument in its cradle, Olney surged from behind the window drape and leaped at him, smashed him across the top of his hairless pate with the gun that had killed Karen Bradbury. Reznak grunted like a pig and made an absurd little mincing backward lurch. Then his left leg gave way under him and his head sagged as if in ponderous thought. Very slowly and very heavily he fell on his side.

Olney got out of there—fast. But not quite fast enough—for when he reached

the building's main lobby downstairs he ran into the one guy in the world he didn't want to meet at a time such as this.

SOMEBODY had once maliciously called Wally Kirk "the keyhole that walks like a man." In a sense, this was both untrue and unfair. Kirk, whose gossip-and-comment column appeared in the *Daily Blade* and dozens of other papers throughout the country, was not a keyhole peeper and never had been. But he had an astonishing network of pipelines feeding him information from an unbelievable variety of sources, so that hundreds of his paragraphs today became the front page headlines of tomorrow.

He operated on underworld tips, high society whispers, and news morsels from all strata in between. His diligence in digging up facts had made him more than a reporter; he was practically a seer.

He wore no turban, though, and carried no crystal ball. What he did wear was the latest thing from London's Bond Street, dapper tweeds, a jaunty Homburg, oxblood hand stitched bootmaker shoes, a tan topcoat slung casually over his arm and a mauve silk scarf around his throat and knotted there like a Windsor cravat.

But you didn't notice any of that when you saw him. The first thing that registered was his mustache. It was black and flowing and grotesquely big in the Colonna fashion, so tended and nurtured that it subordinated the rest of his healthily suntanned face. The mustache was his badge, his trademark, the thing that made his thumbnail picture stand out three-dimensionally at the top of his daily column. When you saw him you knew at once that he was Wally Kirk. You couldn't miss.

He waved at Michael Olney as Olney emerged from the automatic elevator. "Hiya, shamus. Been counterpane-crawling?"

"Perish the thought," Olney forced a good-natured smile. That smile cost him a terrific effort. Within himself he was cursing the foul luck that had brought Kirk across his path tonight of all nights. "Just drumming up trade."

The columnist laid a hand on his arm. "Come, come, my lad! You wouldn't try to kid a man, would you?" Then, mockingly: "Or beat a man's time with the capricious Karen?"

"Very funny. I don't get it."

Kirk's white teeth glistened under the

fabulous mustache. "My friend, you wound me severely. Here I am, about to ascend to the penthouse of a veritable goddess for an evening of innocent pleasure, and I find you coming from that same direction. Could it be that you had the same idea ahead of me?"

"Hey, wait," Olney made his tone bantering to match the other man's. "I didn't know you were interested in Karen."

"She's a girl, isn't she?"

"Sure."

"Then I'm interested. By an odd coincidence, I'm a sucker for girls, especially the beautiful kind. And to think that you would have similar notions. For shame!"

Olney's heart was pounding and his palms were moist. "You're crazy. That elevator runs to other floors besides the penthouse. In fact, I never saw a busier elevator. I just told you, I've been drumming up trade. In other words, calling on a prospective client. You know—snooping business."

"I scent news. What gives, pal?"

"Now cut that out. You know a private eye never talks about his cases before they're hatched. Unethical." Olney started to move away, but he did it casually, where in actuality he wanted to cut and run. He wondered if sweat showed on his forehead. He didn't dare take a handkerchief and mop it. That would be a dead giveaway. He mustn't show excitement, he told himself. He mustn't reveal the panic that crawled inside him like worms.

Kirk laughed. "A detective with ethics. A paradox, that's what it is. Frankly, chum, I think you're a liar. I think you've been indulging in romance, Karen by name."

"And I think you have an evil mind," Olney countered lightly. "Come out of the sewer, Wally. Would I be romancing with a quenched memory when I've got a redhead waiting for me outside in my car?"

"Come to think of it, I did notice the gorgeous Norah sitting around the corner in solitary state. Almost stopped and made eyes at her but I didn't want to poach. Okay, I retract my accusations. But don't forget, I get first dibs on any new cases. A deal?"

"A deal," Olney said. "Now go have fun." Fun, he thought. You won't have much fun visiting Karen now, you lip-hairy peacock. I wonder what you'll say

when you find her murdered, and Reznak on the floor by her body? You like news beats, but you won't like that one.

He watched Kirk go into the elevator. Then he turned and hurried out into the night.

CHAPTER II

Plan of Campaign



NORAH VALENTINE was sitting patiently at the wheel of Michael Olney's convertible, parked around the corner from the Whitby Manor. When Olney came loping toward the car she regarded him pertly.

"No lipstick?" she drawled, looking at his thinned mouth. "Don't tell me the wolf is slipping."

"Be cute some other time," he said, and slid in beside her on the green leather seat. "Drive. Hurry."

She touched thumb to the dashboard starter, accelerated the sleek Cad through its hydromatic gears. It rolled as smoothly as a yacht in calm waters, whispering its power through an exhaust that chuckled mirthfully. Soft night breeze toyed with Norah's bright red curls, and she gave Olney a lazy sidewise glance out of the corners of her purple eyes.

"You intrigue me, sir."

"Save the small talk. Drive faster."

"And risk a ticket? My, my! You, of all people. The great Olney, who has such respect for traffic laws that he's forever begging people to do his driving for him—so he won't run afoul of the cops. Olney demanding speed. It's an evening of miracles."

He sank his chin on his chest and huddled down on the leather cushion. "It would be a miracle if you'd shut up."

"Really?" Her drawl became a purr of anger. "Maybe you'd like a new secretary, one who won't mind twiddling her thumbs in the office while you're out pitching curves at brunettes. One who won't object to coming back to work after supper to take dictation. Only instead of dictating letters, you have the gall to ask me to chauffeur you to an old flame and wait at the curb while you go up and make passes—"

"I made no passes at Karen Bradbury

tonight, Norah."

"Why? Were you ill?"

"In a way," he answered quietly. "I found her dead."

The Cad swerved slightly. "Dead?" Norah said in a small, choked voice.

"Murdered." He showed her the little gun. "With this."

A long block flowed past. Then: "Poor Michael. You loved her very much, didn't you?"

"Once I thought I did. She was very beautiful," he added, as if to himself.

"And greedy and selfish and cruel. She wouldn't marry a decent guy like you, a private detective with no money and no prospects. She didn't know you'd be lucky and climb up to the Cadillac class in a year. She had to pick somebody with a bankroll she could see—Tony Bradbury of the drinking Bradburys." Norah touched his hand. "Poor Michael," she repeated gently.

HE HAD a harsh impulse to tell her he didn't want sympathy. Instead, he said: "Let's not rehash what's past and done. It's murder I'm thinking about, now. You say you sat around the office this afternoon while I was out pitching curves at brunettes. You're wrong."

"Wasn't Karen a brunette?"

"All right. But it was a professional visit. She begged me to come see her. She and Bradbury separated last month. He asked her to give him a divorce so he could marry somebody else. She refused. She told me he'd threatened her and she wanted protection."

"Oh."

"I didn't believe her. I thought she was making a play for me because I was in the chips. Michael Olney, egotist. I had a couple of drinks with her to string her along, then I gave her the horse laugh and walked out. Michael Olney, heel."

"Stop saying things like that!" Norah said sharply.

"You know the rest of it," he went on. "I asked you back for some dictation at the office this evening, and Karen phoned me again. She said she was afraid Tony was coming to kill her. She really sounded frightened, so I got you to drive me to the Whitby Manor. Only I was too late. The penthouse was open and she was dead."

Norah swung the convertible into a dark side street and parked it. "Michael, this is serious. You've got a—a vindictive

reputation. A reputation for getting even with people that cross you. And Karen crossed you when she married Tony Bradbury. To the law, that's a possible murder motive."

"I've thought of that."

"Have you thought of the fingerprints you may have left up in the penthouse when you were there the first time? What if the police find them and identify them as yours?"

"They won't. I wiped everything I remembered touching. Plus a lot of things I don't remember having touched, just to be safe."

"Are you sure? You know how you stand with that fat buzzard Reznak of Homicide. He hates you. He'd love to pin a murder on you."

"Reznak's fangs are pulled."

"In what way?"

"He walked in while I was there and almost caught me, but I ducked behind a drape. Funny thing about that, Norah. I'd closed and locked the door, but Reznak had a key."

Her purple eyes grew thoughtful. "Does that mean what I think it means, or am I just a cat?"

"I don't know. I can't quite picture Karen going for anybody like Reznak. He's too old, for one thing. And homicide inspectors don't draw big wages."

"Yet you say he came in with a key."

Olney nodded. "And knew his way around. Found the phone right away, without even looking for it. He'd been there before, often. What's the answer?"

"This, Michael. Karen was a flirt and Reznak a conquest. I wonder if he's got more money than we give him credit for? Graft fattens a wallet. And Karen worshipped fat wallets."

"Reznak is no grafter. I've never understood his dislike for me. It's so intense and so groundless it's almost psychopathic. I have to defend his honesty, though. He never took a crooked penny in his life. I know, I've investigated him, tried to get something on him to pay him for the way he's pushed me around this last year. He's square, Norah. And as poor as a square cop always is."

"Then what did Karen see in him?"

"I won't even try to guess. All I know is, when he came in and found her dead, he was in a jackpot. Duty made him report the kill to Headquarters, but self protection made him disguise his voice when he phoned in. He even asked for himself,

which was clever. I trumped that one."

"How?"

"I knocked him unconscious. He'll have a tough time explaining how it happened. If he lies out of it without involving himself, he's good."

"Michael! Did he see you?"

"No, I slugged him from behind." Olney's grin was ironic. "I'm no hero."

"At least you're not a fool," Norah sounded relieved. She almost sounded possessive. "And stop disparaging yourself. You took the only possible way out."

"But only a temporary way."

SHE squirmed around, faced him. "Temporary? Now look, Michael Olney. Up to now, you've played it smart. There's nothing to link you with Karen's murder. Stay smart—keep it like that." Her eyes searched his. "You're not listening to me."

"No."

"You want to meddle in something that's none of your business. You're asking for trouble."

"She was frightened," he said softly. "She wanted my help and I thought it was an act. She needed me and I let her down, let her die. I remember the last thing she said—Mike, if Tony kills me, see that he's punished. Hang him for me, Michael, hang him high! And I laughed in her teeth. I brushed her off and walked out. Now I owe a debt to the dead."

"Punishing her murderer is a police job."

"Ordinarily, yes. But remember, to save my own neck I cleaned that place of fingerprints. Not only mine, but others—including the killer's. I wiped away any trail he may have left. That makes me an accessory."

"Technically, maybe, but not actually. You're letting sentiment distort your sense of values."

He frowned. "It's not sentiment. I destroyed clues. Now I have to do something about it."

"Such as what? You don't even know for sure that Bradbury killed her. Just because she told you he threatened her, that doesn't prove anything."

"Now you're splitting hairs, Norah."

"Am I? Well, I still say you don't have to do anything except keep quiet and stay in the clear."

"And let her murderer go unchanged?"

"You and your sense of duty! All right,

Sir Galahad, just how do you intend to hang Tony Bradbury? With your own hands?"

He patted her hand. "You needn't worry. I'm not that crazy."

"Then what *will* you do? Find him and turn him over to the law? That's a routine job the police can take care of without any help from you. Any time a married woman is murdered, they always bring her husband in for questioning. You know that."

"Bradbury probably knows it, too," Olney said. "He'll have a nice glib story to tell them, maybe even a rigged alibi. But I'm not going to let him get away with it."

Norah Valentine made a thoughtful mouth. "Well, then, handle it this way: Wait until the news breaks about the murder. Wait until it's in the headlines and on the radio."

"And then?"

"Then go to Headquarters. Tell them how Karen phoned you this afternoon and you went to see her. Tell them what she said about Bradbury's threats. That will put him in it all the way up to his neck. But don't mention anything about going back to the penthouse a second time and finding Karen's body and slugging Reznak when he walked in. Keep that to yourself and you won't be implicated."

He considered this. "It sounds reasonable, except for one little flaw. You know Wally Kirk?"

"I read his column. I've met him. What's he got to do with it, Michael?"

"I ran into him in the lobby as I was coming out."

She gasped: "Michael, you didn't!"

"He was going up to see Karen. The way he talked, it would appear he's been on the make for her. He accused me of having just come down from the penthouse, and asked me if I was trying to beat his time."

Norah gnawed nervously at a knuckle. "You—you didn't tell him anything, did you?"

"No. Fortunately, I still had some of my wits with me. I lied. I said I hadn't been anywhere near Karen. I said I'd been calling on a prospective client."

"But you can't make that stick when the chips are down," she said in a worried voice. "You can't name any prospective clients in the Whitby Manor because you have none there. If you're questioned—"

"Questions be blowed," he said irritably. "A private detective has one thing in com-

mon with attorneys. Information concerning clients can be considered privileged, which is legalistic doubletalk meaning you don't have to answer. Let them ask me the name of the party I was calling on. I'll tell them to go jump in a lake." He grinned sardonically. "And I'll make them like it."

"All the same, Wally Kirk can testify you were in the building tonight. That's grounds for suspicion, Michael. I can't even see why you wanted to drive away in such a rush, as long as he'd seen you there."

"I wanted to be long gone when he found Reznak and the body. I wanted a chance to think—to lay my plans. The more I mull over it, though, the more I believe you're right. I'll lay low until the news breaks. Then I'll speak my piece. If I watch my step, I probably won't have any trouble."

It was an optimistic hope. But of course he didn't yet know about the black-mailer.

CHAPTER III

Donald, the Leech



A SLACK-CHINNED youth with impudent voice and pimply complexion came out of the shadows on Michael Olney's front porch.

"Just a minute, bud," he said. "I got something I want to show you."

Olney had taken Norah Valentine home and then had driven directly to his own unpretentious bungalow in the Congress Heights district. For the sake of expediency he had left the Cadillac parked out front instead of running it into the garage behind the house. He would be using the car again pretty soon for his trip downtown to Police Headquarters. It was just a matter of going indoors, turning on the radio, listening until he heard a report of Karen's murder. He would then go to the homicide bureau and tell what he knew, or at least enough of the story to get Tony Bradbury started on his way to the hangman.

Except that it wasn't quite working out that way, because here was this unpleasant young man on Olney's porch with some sort of thick envelope or packet in

his hand, waving it under Olney's nose.

"This, pal, you got to see," the youth was saying.

In the thin reflection from a street lamp a short distance away, Olney peered at the youth and did not like what he looked at. There was something furtive, something repulsive about the man. It wasn't just his lack of chin, his bad complexion, his evasive eyes or his impudence, but a combination of all those things—and more. It was a feeling you had, a vague disgust, the way you'd feel if you accidentally brushed against something filthy.

"I'm busy now," Olney said.

"But not too busy to talk to me and see what I got to show. I'm sure you ain't that busy, Mr. Michael Olney."

"So you know my name." Olney gestured toward the porch steps. "So lots of people know my name. Beat it."

"I know more than your name, bud. Open the door and let's talk inside. Let's talk private."

"About what?"

"Oh, about dead dames, for instance."

Olney stiffened imperceptibly. "I don't get that."

"Okay, then. Not just dead dames. One particular dead dame. In a penthouse. A dead dame with black hair and a figure. A dead dame in a frilly kimono or something, and not much on underneath. She was very nice, you understand, but dead on account of somebody shooting her. Now do you get it, palsy walsy?"

"Come in," Olney said, and thrust a key into lock. He walked in ahead of his visitor, and made light in the living room. It was a surprising room, compared to the bungalow's modest exterior. Much money had been spent here, and with taste.

It was a man's living room, a bachelor's room, leathery but colorful—and above all else, comfortable. A room to live in, for a man who could afford what he wanted, yet you noticed a certain austerity, the lack of a woman's touch.

Once Michael Olney had daydreamed of a place like this, and of the woman who should have shared it. Well, the room and the cottage had come true for him, but not the woman. That part of the dream would never come true now, for the woman lay dead in an uptown penthouse with a bullet through her heart.

He looked at the pimply youth, who didn't seem quite so youthful in the light. He was about twenty-five or so, give or

take a couple of years, young enough to look half-baked and adolescent, but old enough to have eyes that comprehended vice. There was a word for him, Olney thought. Vicious.

Aloud, he said: "Well, say what you've got to say."

"I got lots of time. Take it easy."

Olney's tawny eyebrows drew together. "Listen, punk—"

"Don't be formal. Call me Donald. Yeah, Donald's good enough. It ain't my name, of course, but so what? And let's not rush this little transaction. We got lots to talk about."

"Have we?"

"And how." Donald showed badly spaced teeth that needed cleaning. "I work in a hotel. I hop bells."

"So you hop bells."

"I got a friend. He's the hotel electrician."

OLNEY snapped his fingers. "Come on, come on, get to the punch line."

"I like to string it out," Donald said. "This electrician, he works in a shack on the hotel roof. You wouldn't call it no penthouse—just a work shack. He gives me the run of the roof when I'm off duty."

"And?"

"I got a hobby in my spare time. Two hobbies, in fact. Want to hear about 'em?"

"No," Olney said.

"I'll tell you anyhow. One of my hobbies is a candid camera—the kind with a telephoto lens. The other is field glasses. You'd be surprised the things you can see looking down a hotel roof. Especially when there's a lot of apartments around that ain't as high as the hotel. Brother, could I write a book."

"I doubt it," Olney said. "I doubt you can write your own name, but let it go."

Donald uncovered his bad teeth again. "Let me show you some of my telephoto snaps." He opened the envelope packet, fanned out an assortment of minicam prints. "How could you go for this babe?" he shoved a glossy picture at Olney.

It was a snapshot of a lush blonde taking a roof-top sun bath. Olney said: "So you're a Peeping Tom."

"Yeah," Donald answered without shame. "I got a lot of pix of her." He leered. "But she ain't the only one. I could show you dozens. This brunette, for instance."

Michael Olney glanced at the second print, and drew in his breath so sharply

that it pinched his nostrils to narrow slits. He was seeing Karen Bradbury on her penthouse terrace, relaxed, unaware she was a camera's target as she sunned herself. . . .

"That's just to prove I could see down in her direction too. You know," Donald added meaningly. "The Whitby Manor."

Olney knew what was coming. "All right. What of it?"

"Oh, nothing much. I just happened to be looking her way this evening through the glasses. Know what I seen?"

"You tell me."

"This black-haired doll here, the one in the terrace picture, she was laying on the floor of her front room. She sure had a nifty shape, didn't she, chum? Not that it meant much, with a bullet in her. Then a guy leaned over her—"

"Who?"

"Well, come to think of it, he was about as tall and skinny as you. Dark yellow hair like yours, too." Donald's tone lost its bantering quality. "In fact, pal, the guy was you."

"Was it?"

"You ought to know. You went in all the other rooms, and then you come back and wiped some things and then ducked behind a drape. Another guy barged in, a short little tubby guy, and seen the dead jane and touched her and then went to the phone, and then you come at him and slugged him with a gun and scrambled."

Olney was sweating. "Go on."

"Well, I thought maybe I could catch a gander at you when you went out of the building, so I looked down through the glasses and sure enough I seen you. You got into a Cad convertible with a red-headed babe and she drove you away. I tabbed the license plates, and it's easy to trace a number if you got a pipeline to the Motor Vehicle Bureau. Imagine my surprise when you turned out to be Michael Olney, the famous private flatfoot. I done a little quiet asking around and found out you got a redheaded secretary, name of Norah Valentine, which I wouldn't be astonished if she was the wren that was driving your Cad. I'm a pretty good snoop myself, eh? So I come right over to talk with you, natch."

"Why?"

Donald giggled. "Don't be dumb. I want to make a deal." He rubbed the ball of his thumb over the tips of his fingers. "Moolah," he said.

"Spelled blackmail," Olney amended.

"That's one name for it, I guess. Of course, if you'd just as lief have me go to the cops and tell them what I seen, okay."

"You didn't see me kill her, I know that much. Because I didn't do it."

DONALD giggled again. "Well, no, I didn't see *you* kill her. I watched you wiping things, though, and I seen you slug that tubby guy. I could put you in mighty bad with the bulls."

"Perhaps you could, at that," Olney admitted. Then, in sudden reaction to the peculiar emphasis Donald had put on one word, he said: "Wait a minute. You say you didn't see *me* kill her. Did you mean you saw somebody else do it before I got there? The real murderer?"

"Wouldn't you like to know!"

"I've got to know," Michael Olney said harshly. "If you actually witnessed it, your testimony can send the killer to the gallows."

The younger man took a backward step. "I ain't talking. Not as long as I figure I can make more money clamming up."

Olney understood. "So that's how it is. You'd like to shake me down because you saw me in that penthouse after the murder was committed. And you hope to blackmail the person you saw there ahead of me, the one who fired the shot. If you can collect enough hush money you're willing to let a murderer go free."

"Sure. What's wrong with that?"

"Everything's wrong. You can't do it."

"For dough I can do anything, buster."

"That's an idea," Olney said. "For dough you can do anything. All right, what's your price for testifying to the police that you witnessed the shooting? I'll pay you for naming the killer."

"You'll pay me how much?"

"Set your own figure."

"A grand?"

"Okay. A grand."

Donald grinned. "Maybe I can get more from the other party by keeping quiet."

"I see. You'd like to proposition the murderer and get him to bid against me. No dice, sonny. I won't let you."

"You can't stop me," Donald said. "Remember I got *you* over a barrel, too. I can dump you in the grease any time I want to. You ain't giving no orders, shamus. You're just going to slip me some long green to keep your name out of the mess."

Olney said quietly: "No. I'm going to give you to the cops and let them sweat

you." He lunged forward.

The younger man side-stepped, and there was suddenly a knife in his hand. It was a spring-latch knife whose long slender blade snapped out with a click of a button, a six inch blade honed to the sharpness of a surgeon's lancet. Donald made a whining noise, high in the back of his throat, and then slashed at Olney with an accurate series of rapid criss-cross movements almost too fast for the eye to follow; too fast, at least, for Olney to get away from.

The hand that held the knife was deft and sure and calculating. It had done this trick many times before, to many another victim. It knew exactly how to cut without inflicting serious injury. It was a practised savagery, bullying, deliberately ruinous to a man's clothing and a measured menace to a man's life. Olney felt sharpened metal slicing the front of his coat, his shirt. He felt the blade's bite as it gashed shallow skin-deep furrows in his unprotected flesh. Criss-cross and criss-cross again, slashing, cutting, slashing, cutting—

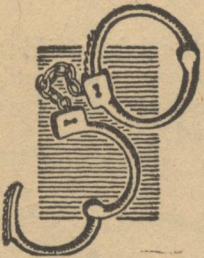
Olney's fist bashed at the blackmailer's face. The impact was brutally explosive. Donald went back, eyes glazing, spine arched, body stiff. Olney struck again, and the younger man fell like an axed tree. Olney kicked him three times, twice in the ribs, once on the side of the head. Then he leaned down, picked up the knife. Its point was red and wet.

"If I didn't need the evidence you can give, I'd open your throat," he panted.

Donald didn't answer. He was unconscious.

CHAPTER IV

Slip of the Tongue



SLOWLY, very slowly, the rage drained out of Michael Olney, a rage that had momentarily made him crazy. And as sanity came back, he tossed the knife aside. He knew what he had to do.

He must take the blackmailer down to headquarters, turn him in. Also he must confess everything that he, Olney, had done at Karen Bradbury's penthouse. He would tell the whole story and take his medicine. He

would admit destroying fingerprints and knocking Inspector Reznak senseless. It would probably cost him his license to operate a private investigation agency, he realized, and it might even land him behind bars. But it was the only way he could force the police to go to work on Donald. It was the only way he could make the thing valid.

By sacrificing himself, by admitting what had happened, he'd be able to show why Donald had tried to blackmail him. Once this was established, the men of Homicide would start pounding away at the pimply-faced youth. They would make Donald tell everything he had seen through his field glasses. The murder. A description of the murderer—Tony Bradbury. Whatever the police might do to Michael Olney after that, he would be satisfied. He would have kept a plea that Karen had made: Hang him for me, Michael, hang him high!

So that was how it would be, that was how it had to be. Olney walked to his bathroom, holding the ripped ribbons of his clothes. In the bathroom he stripped, poured mercurchrome liberally into the criss-crossed knife slashes oozing blood on his stomach, his lower chest. Then he made narrow gauze pads, applied them to the gashes, affixed them with lengths of adhesive tape. He put on a fresh shirt and a different coat. He wasn't badly hurt; he felt fine. He went back to the living room.

Donald wasn't there. Donald had recovered consciousness, had sneaked away.

In a sort of blind fury, Olney lurched toward the front door; flung it open and started to launch himself out into the night. A man came up the walkway from a parked police car, a squat, hammered-down giant of a man in shabby serge, a man who moved with the rolling gait of a sailor—or an ape.

Inspector Carl Reznak said: "What's your hurry, Olney?"

Michael Olney's mouth was dry; when he used his voice it came out rasping, almost shrill. "Reznak, did you see a man, a young-looking guy—did you see anybody coming out of here and running, getting away?"

"I saw nobody," the homicide detective rumbled. "What's the matter with you?"

Olney shoved him. "He can't be far. He's got to be around. He can't escape. I mustn't let him!" He started for the street, sprinting, his feet hitting the walkway

hard.

"Hey!" Reznak said, and raced after him. "Where do you think you're going? Come back here. I want to see you. Come back!"

Olney had already gained the sidewalk. Now he halted, peered up and down the street. There was no sign of Donald. And then Reznak's hand was heavily on his shoulder, spinning him around.

"Didn't you hear me say I want to see you, Olney?"

"I heard you, yes. But I—"

"But you what?"

Olney was silent, debating with himself, trying to decide how much to say. With Donald gone, the entire picture was changed. It would no longer do any good to tell the things he had intended to tell. He'd planned to use his own confession as a lever, a weapon the police could turn against Donald to make him testify. But the slack-chinned youth had escaped and without him any such sacrifice on Olney's part would be pointless.

For the present, he concluded, he had better keep a guard on his tongue—at least until he found out why Reznak was here, what he wanted, how much he knew or suspected. Tracing and nabbing Donald could come later; it shouldn't be too hard, Olney told himself. In the immediate neighborhood of the Whitby Manor, where Karen had died, there was only one commercial hotel of any consequence, only one that stood several stories taller than the surrounding apartment buildings. That would be where the blackmailer worked as bellhop—where he could be caught. All Olney needed was time, a chance to move around.

HE LOOKED steadily at Reznak. "All right, you want to see me." He went up onto his porch, stood by the open front door. "Come in. What's on your mind?"

Reznak said: "Murder," and followed Olney into the masculine, leathery living room. Reznak looked old. Deep lines were etched on his face, shadows were under his eyes. "A woman was shot tonight, killed in her apartment. I found your phone number on the top leaf of her scratch pad, in her handwriting, as if she'd jotted it down recently, as if she may have called you."

My phone number, Olney thought. My phone number on a sheet of scratch paper and I overlooked it! But Reznak never

overlooks anything. He's too careful, too smart.

Aloud, he said: "I get lots of phone calls. Who was this murdered woman?"

"An old flame of yours. Karen Bradbury."

Olney pretended just the right measure of shock. "Karen!" he said. "So her husband carried out his threat after all. The drunken swine!"

"Threat?" Reznak rasped. "Tony Bradbury threatened her?"

"Yes."

"How do you know that?"

"Karen phoned me. I went to see her this afternoon. She wanted protection. She was frightened. Bradbury had asked her for a divorce, and she refused. She told me he said if he couldn't have his freedom any other way, he would kill her."

Olney felt safe in revealing this much of the truth, now.

He was pointing suspicion straight at Tony Bradbury, where it belonged. At the same time he was keeping himself in the clear, not mentioning his second visit to the penthouse. With luck, that might give him a chance to go after the black-mailing Donald, later. And Donald's testimony would finish wrapping a noose around Bradbury's neck.

Reznak said slowly: "So you went to see her this afternoon." His face was expressionless. "And again tonight." He was not too good an actor. He spoke the words off-handedly, but his very indifference betrayed the thought he was obviously trying to mask. He was like some crafty elephant getting ready to charge.

"Tonight?" Olney met guile with guile. He summoned up a look of puzzlement and then of sudden comprehension. "Oh-oh. You've been talking to Wallace Kirk of the *Daily Blade*."

"I have. He says he saw you at the Whitby Manor."

"Sure, he saw me. In the lobby. He told me he was on his way up to call on Karen." Olney widened his eyes. "Was it Wally who found her dead?"

"Never mind that. I'm asking you if you were in that penthouse tonight."

"I was not," Olney lied evenly. "Kirk asked me the same thing. As I told him at the time, I hadn't been visiting Karen. I'd been to see a prospective client in another apartment."

"So he said," Reznak rumbled. "Pretty odd coincidence, wasn't it, you calling on somebody else in that building around the

time Karen was being murdered?"

Michael Olney made an indignant gesture. "Now wait a minute. I don't know just what you're getting at, but if you think you can hook me into this kill, think again. I know you dislike me, but don't let it go to your head. I'm shooting straight with you, Reznak. Don't try to put the screws on me—I won't have it. After all, I've given you the angle you need. I've handed you information that will break your case wide open."

"Lying comes easy when you're under pressure."

"Pressure! I'd have brought you the story voluntarily, as soon as I heard about the murder. Can I help it that you came to me with the news instead of my hearing it on the radio or reading it in the papers? Quit being so suspicious. Bradbury is the guy you want. He's the one that threatened her."

"You say."

"I'm telling you what Karen told me. You take it from there. You've got the authority and the goldfish room and the length of rubber hose. Sweat the truth out of Bradbury. Make him confess."

"Don't worry, I'll do exactly that," Reznak said darkly. "As soon as I lay my hands on him."

"You mean you haven't picked him up yet for routine questioning?"

THE big policeman nodded reluctantly.

"The order's out. We'll get him. No matter how long it takes, we'll get him." The homicide man started toward the door, and Olney suppressed a weary breath of relief, of relaxed tension. He'd put it over, he had convinced Reznak. It had been tough, but he had made the grade. He heard Reznak muttering, as if to himself: "Her own husband. She didn't want to give him a divorce, so he killed her." Then: "Funny. She wanted protection, and she turned to you for it. Not to me, but to you."

"Why should she turn to you?" Olney said. Here was his chance to find out something he'd been wanting to know. "What were you to Karen?"

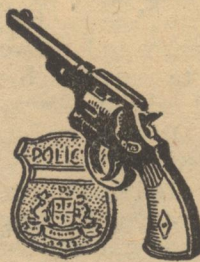
"I was her father," Reznak said.

Michael Olney blurted: "Good God! So that's why you had a key to her penthouse!"

Then, after the words were uttered, when it was too late to recall them, he realized what he had done—realized he had given himself away.

CHAPTER V

Spare Gun



IN A sort of numbed helplessness, Olney saw Reznak whirl and stalk toward him. There was sudden hate scrawled across the homicide detective's face, and his deep voice was as cold as a polar storm.

"You know I had a

key."

Olney said: "I can explain that."

"You slippery eel, there's only one way you could know that. You were there, hiding, when I walked in. You're the rat who slugged me."

"Now wait!"

"And if that's true, all this other stuff you've been telling me are lies. You've been trying to frame Tony Bradbury. You wanted him to take the fall for you."

"No. Reznak, listen—"

Reznak lunged. "You murdered Karen. Blast your cowardly soul, you killed my daughter!"

With an upflung arm, Olney parried the punch Reznak threw at him. "You fool, don't! Give me a chance to explain."

"A chance to tell more lies, you mean." The chunky man slammed a fist into Olney's ribs. "I'm going to kill you. I'm going to tear you apart with my hands."

In desperation, Olney countered with a driving smash to his attacker's middle. "You've got to listen. You've got to hear me." He struck again.

Reznak doubled over, staggered backward. He hit against a coffee table, overturned it with a splintering crash. Then he came upright and went for his gun.

"A bullet's too good for you. Too quick. Too painless." He moved at Olney. "But if that's how I have to do it, all right." He aimed.

Diving sidewise to get out of range, Olney stumbled over a red leather footstool and fell heavily. Impact with the floor jarred him, shook him to his bones. Somehow his feet flew up and accidentally kicked the gun out of Reznak's grasp. The weapon went skittering across the room to land in a far corner. Reznak tried to hurl himself after it, recover it. Olney, squirming, grappled him around the ankles and brought him down.

• The two men locked, then, in a writh-

ing tangle of arms and legs. Reznak, hard as granite under his deceptive layer of fat, strained to wrap his thick muscular fingers around Olney's throat.

"For a year I've hated you!" he panted. "Ever since you jilted Karen and broke her heart!" Fury seemed to redouble his immense strength as he slowly and inexorably closed down on Olney's gullet. "And now that you've killed her."

Olney clawed at those closing fingers. He was fighting for existence, fighting to live. "So that was why—you started—pushing me around." His breath was labored, wheezing; sweat ran into his eyes, smarting, stinging. "That was why—you made—it so tough for me—in this town. You thought—I jilted her!" He tugged at Reznak's hairy wrists. "But if she—told you that, she lied!" Then he used a knee, knowing it was foul but knowing too that you didn't stick to the rule book when somebody was trying to throttle you.

The knee sank home and he felt the older man's muscles twitch in agony, felt the pressure on him relaxing. He thrust violently upward, dislodged Reznak and rolled over on him. They hit against a chair and it toppled, taking a pedestal lamp with it. The lamp struck a bookcase, shattered its glass front in a sudden explosive burst of tinkling fragments. Olney pinned the homicide man to the floor. "Now, you'll have to listen."

Reznak bucked. "I don't listen to murderers!" He freed a hand, groped with it, picked up a shard of broken glass and jabbed with it blindly, seeking Olney's eyes. Pure reflex made Olney dodge and draw back. He lost his advantage, and Reznak started crawling toward the corner where his gun was.

Olney shouted hoarsely: "No you don't!" and propelled himself headlong over an impeding davenport. The davenport spilled like a ship on a reef, dumped its cushions in helter-skelter tumble. Olney crashed beyond them, landed against the wall with a bruising jolt that drove the last ounce of air from his lungs and left him stunned, motionless. Through a misty blur he saw Reznak's gun. He also saw Reznak's hairy hand reaching for it.

FLAILING out, Olney got it first. Then he propped himself in the corner, lifted the weapon. It seemed to weigh tons. He drew a wavering bead on the homicide man. "I've got—just enough left—to pull

the trigger," he said painfully. "Don't make me."

"You wouldn't dare," Reznak said. But he stopped crawling.

Olney grinned. "Try me."

"Now listen, you dog. Listen, Olney—"

"No. You listen," Olney said. "You're going to hear what I've got to tell you, understand? There's a lot of it, so pay attention. It goes back a year. It goes back when Karen gave me the gate because I was poor, because she wanted to marry somebody with money. Maybe she told you I jilted her and she married Tony Bradbury on the rebound, but that's not true. She lied. Karen was born to lie. She was beautiful, but she didn't know the meaning of truth. And she liked to make trouble. She liked to hurt people, especially people who loved her."

Reznak looked dully at the room's wreckage, then at the gun Olney pointed at him. He seemed beaten, apathetic. "You shouldn't talk like that about the dead," he said wearily.

"I'm showing you what she was. Look at the way she treated you. She never acknowledged you as her father. She didn't live in your house. She—"

The older man made a defensive gesture. "She was ambitious. A name like Reznak wasn't glamorous enough. And she thought it would stand in her way if folks knew she was a cop's kid. I'll admit she liked to make people uncomfortable, like giving me a key so I could drop in now and then, and then telling me she was going to get the lock changed. She had a warped sense of humor. Maybe that was why you killed her. You got tired of taking a beating."

"I didn't kill her," Olney said patiently. "It was Tony Bradbury who got tired of taking the beating. He wanted free and she had him on the hook, wouldn't let go. That's the point I'm making. Karen was selfish, twisted, capricious. It makes you understand Bradbury's murder motive."

"So you're still trying to pin it on him."

Olney stood up. "Not trying. I can get proof." Then, tersely, he told of his second trip to the penthouse, his discovery of the body. "She'd just been shot, maybe during the few minutes I had waited in the downstairs lobby for somebody to get through using the automatic elevator. I was rattled—I don't deny it. I did some stupid things. For instance, taking the murder gun for evidence—and cleaning the place of fingerprints so you couldn't

railroad me on a bum rap. Then you came in and I had to slug you."

"I got out of it," Reznak's voice was remote. "Wally Kirk's a heel in some respects, but he knows when to do a favor. I persuaded him to say he and I walked into the penthouse together and found Karen's body."

Olney made a cynical mouth. "That will cost you plenty. You'll be giving him important news breaks ahead of the other reporters from now on."

"But it got me out of a jam you put me in. And now you're in a worse one. You've admitted enough to hang you."

"I think you'll change your mind about that when I bring you the eye-witness who saw Karen killed."

Reznak pushed himself off the floor. "What?"

"A Peeping Tom. A hotel bellhop who watched the murder through binoculars. He's the one I was chasing when you showed up here a while ago. He tried to blackmail me and I nailed him, but not hard enough. He got away."

"Who is he? Tell me where to find him."

"No. He's mine. It's a personal thing. You can have him after I'm through with him, but I'm going to take him first."

Reznak palmed sweat off his face, then reached for a handkerchief. "I don't trust you, Olney. Maybe you've been feeding me a pack of lies. Maybe you're going to take a runout and forget to come back."

"If I wanted to do that I wouldn't have to feed you anything—except a bullet. I've got your gun."

Reznak's hand moved. "You've got one of my guns. I always pack a spare." Instead of a handkerchief he brought out a stubby little Banker's Special. "Drop it, Olney. You're under arrest."

quarters man. No matter which way it ended, he couldn't win. If Reznak shot him, he was done for. And if he shot Reznak he would have the whole police force after him, for nobody shoots a cop and gets away with it.

Reznak's finger tightened on the trigger of the Banker's Special. "Drop it, Olney. I mean what I say."

"All right." Olney threw Reznak's other gun on the floor. "So I'm a coward."

Reznak's eyes fleetingly followed the weapon as it landed. It was the merest flick of inattention, and it was Michael Olney's last slim shred of hope. There was a window directly behind him, and he went backward with all the spring he had in his legs. The pane erupted outward into the night and Olney tumbled over the sill with a vaulting reverse somersault. Reznak's oath and the simultaneous bark of his gun blended into a single sound. Olney felt the bullet score across his right ankle, like the kiss of red-hot wire. Then he landed on spongy earth.

Crawling, he hugged the bungalow's rough stucco so that Reznak would have an awkward angle to fire if he leaned out the window to shoot again. There was no second shot. Instead, Olney heard the front door being smashed open violently, heard Reznak's heavy running footfalls hitting hollowly on the porch.

But Olney wasn't going in that direction. He had no intention of trying to get to his Cadillac at the curb. He had gambled on heading for the back yard, and the gamble was paying off. He'd out-guessed the homicide official. Now he came upright, sprinted headlong through the darkness. He hurdled a privet hedge, angled across a neighboring garden and pelted along somebody's driveway to the next street over.

After that, the next few minutes consisted of a dark panoramic blur, a seemingly endless succession of sidewalks, intersections, sidewalks again. He heard a siren, saw the red stab of a spotlight and ducked behind a clump of bushes as a police car came screaming around the corner ahead. That was Reznak, quartering the neighborhood, driving in a widening circle, a concentric search of the blocks immediately surrounding Olney's house. Reznak must have realized how he'd been tricked, and now, single-handed, he was giving chase.

Olney waited until the car roared by, then ran again. He ran until exhaustion

CHAPTER VI

Narrow Escape



FOLLOWING a night of blunders, Michael Olney realized he had made his most serious mistake in thinking Reznak harmless. Reznak was never harmless. He was tricky, crafty, dangerous as a cobra. And yet, though

the odds were even, Olney knew he couldn't risk a gun duel with the Head-

pounded at his leg muscles like the blows of unseen sledgehammers, when he would slow to a drunken, shuffling walk until cramped flesh relaxed to let him run once more. He was like an automaton, a robot with a mechanically fixed destination and a machine-like inflexibility of course. Again he had to lunge for cover as Reznak's car thundered along this new street, again he managed to avoid being impaled by the stabbing beam of Reznak's seeking red spotlight. And finally after the danger had passed, Olney resumed his running, not noticing another car drifting up behind him until a voice called: "Want a lift, shamus?"

As if drenched with a sudden deluge of ice water, Olney stopped in his tracks. Eyes blurred, he stared at the coupe moving in toward the curb.

"Wally Kirk!" he panted.

The columnist's teeth showed white under that tremendous mustache. "Hop in, pal. Tell papa about it. What cooks?"

"You—you—what are you doing here?"

"Come on, get in. We can talk in motion, can't we? And you look like a guy that needs some rest."

"Kirk, if you think you can win a feather in your cap by handing me over to the law, you're wrong."

"Now cut that out, Olney. Don't be childish. I'm a newspaperman, not a fly cop. I'll grant I sicked Reznak onto you, but only after he found your phone number on Karen's scratch pad. That's why I'm in this district now. I knew he was coming to see you, and I followed as soon as I could. I wanted the story for tomorrow's column. I still want it. By the time I got to your house, Reznak was tearing away like somebody had prodded him with a hot bodkin. He yelled that you'd escaped and he was going after you, so I did some around-the-mulberry-bush driving myself. And hit the jackpot." Kirk beckoned with a crooking finger. "Get in and tell all."

MICHAEL OLNEY hesitated. Then it occurred to him that he might be able to use Kirk, not only for transportation but for information. He crawled laboriously into the coupe and subsided, fighting for breath.

"Okay," he said presently. "But don't try anything. I haven't got a gun on me, but I'm big enough to take you if you do any double-crossing."

Kirk geared into high. "Relax, relax.

I'm no double-crosser and you know it. Unless you really did kill Karen. If so, all bets are off. I don't play ball with murderers."

"I didn't kill her."

"Do you know who did?"

"I'm going to find out. And maybe you can help me."

"Whistle the tune to me, Michael."

Olney drew cool night air into his lungs and started talking. He told of his fight with Reznak, and what had led up to it. He explained his second visit to the penthouse, his discovery of Karen's corpse and the things that had happened afterward. He told of the blackmailing bellhop who had actually witnessed the murder.

"He's the guy I'm after now, Kirk. He's the key to the riddle. I have to find him—fast."

"I can see that," the columnist agreed. "And you think he works at the Hotel Emperor?"

"He's got to work there. It's the only hotel higher than the Whitby Manor in that neighborhood. That's where you come in. Maybe you can find a way to pinpoint him for me."

Kirk nodded. "Could be. I've got a grapevine into the Emperor. Several, in fact. A clerk, a waiter, and oddly enough a couple of bellhops. Describe this lad for me."

Olney complied. Then he gave Kirk the address of Norah Valentine's house. "Take me there and leave me. I'll wait while you do your legwork. If you get a line on Donald, phone me and I'll handle the rest of it. But remember, lay off him. He's mine. I owe him something that nobody else can pay."

"Suits me, as long as I have first crack at the story."

"You've already got it." Olney scowled. "And Kirk, if you tip the cops they can find me at Norah's, so help me I'll fix you if it's the last thing I ever do."

Kirk laughed. "Remind me to remind you of those unkind words when this mess is over. You'll have to mollify me with a case of champagne at the very least." Then, seriously: "Here's the street. I've got work to do. Is Norah's phone listed?"

"Yes." Olney alighted from the coupe.

"Good. You'll be hearing from me."

Kirk drove off and Olney walked the last block, and finally reached Norah Valentine's bungalow.

Norah herself stood framed in her front

doorway as he lurched up the two flat steps to the tiny wooden porch. Soft light from behind her put reflected glints of fire in her wavy red hair and silhouetted the feminine curves of her lovely figure. Her dress was not the one she had worn earlier in the evening. It was a severely simple frock of some caressing silky material, purple to match her eyes.

Olney said: "Going somewhere, Norah?"

The girl stared at him and grew pale when she saw his bruised face, his rumpled clothing. "Michael! You—you're hurt!"

"I'll be all right. I need a drink, is all. And a car, and you to drive it. Sorry to be such a nuisance, Norah." He went into the house with her, his arm around her waist. He was not quite leaning his weight on her—it was more the gesture of a man seeking reassurance and comfort

at the corner, and the time Norah had spent doctoring and bandaging his nicked ankle, about fifteen minutes had passed since he'd left the columnist. If Kirk had learned anything he should have phoned by now, he thought. Then he reflected that he shouldn't expect miracles, even from Kirk.

For that matter, why should he depend upon Kirk at all when he might be able to find out for himself the things he wanted to know? He limped to Norah's telephone on the opposite side of the room and began riffling the pages of the phone book.

Norah followed him. "Why should you and Reznak tangle? You're in the clear."

"Not entirely. Remember, I was seen in the lobby of the Whitby. And anyhow, Reznak didn't seem inclined to buy the notion of Tony Bradbury's guilt. He'd rather hang it on me."

MAN WITH THE PAINTED HEAD, a book-length mystery by HELEN REILLY, in the 196-page Spring issue of our companion publication DETECTIVE NOVEL MAGAZINE—20c per copy!

after too many disillusionments. In the front room, he pulled free, dropped into an easy chair. His eyes were deep-sunken and ineffably tired.

"I'll be all right," he repeated, as if to convince himself.

"But Michael, what happened? Those marks on your face—your clothes all torn—and your ankle! It's bleeding!"

"I was in a fight. A bullet nicked my shin."

SHE knelt down, looked at the wound and then pattered out of the room, returning soon with iodine and gauze, and adhesive. Olney winced at the burn of the disinfectant, and when the bandage was on, he grinned the characteristically satirical grin that made his mouth sometimes seem almost ugly.

"Funny how much pain a man can take when he has to."

"Michael, tell me what happened!" She was pouring him a stiff drink of bourbon, now, and handing it to him. She stood over him as he tossed it down. "Tell me!"

"I tangled with Carl Reznak. It's a long story, and let's skip it. I'm waiting for a call." Even as he said this, he looked at his strap watch and came out of the chair impatiently. Counting the time it had taken him to walk from Wally Kirk's car

She frowned. "But I just heard a flash on the radio a moment before you got here that they had found Bradbury and taken him in for questioning."

"Good. Maybe things are shaping up." Olney found the listing he wanted. "Hotel Emperor, Paxton Boulevard at Pine," he read aloud. Then he dialed.

Norah said sharply: "Michael, what are you up to? What about the Hotel Emperor?"

"I'm hunting a blackmailer. Shh-h-h. . . Hello. Manager's office, please." Olney waited briefly. "This is Michael Olney calling. I'm trying to locate one of your bellhops—tall, thin, pimply complexion, receding chin, badly spaced teeth. Makes a hobby of photography. I think his name might be Donald, or . . . Oh, I see. MacDonald. James MacDonald. Yes, that's probably the one. Off duty tonight, I believe . . . Right. Could you give me his home address? It's quite important . . . No, I don't mind waiting." Olney covered the mouthpiece. "Pencil and paper, Norah."

She got them for him. He listened, wrote something, mumbled a "Thank you" into the phone and hung up, turned. "Let's get your car, Norah. We've got a visit to make and it's got to be right now. I think this is the last mile."

CHAPTER VII

Killer's Mistake



LATER, as she was driving him in her little coupe, he told her about the slack-chinned blackmailer. "He saw Karen murdered. If I can make him talk, his testimony will convict the killer and get me out from under." Olney

looked at the slip of paper in his hand. "We're almost there."

She shivered. "Yes, I know." Then, presently, she stopped the coupe in front of a seedy-looking U-shaped bungalow court. There were six tiny boxlike houses on either side, a larger one toward the back. The narrow center courtyard had a cement walk bordered by unkempt and scabrous patches of grass, and the clapboard cottages were shabby from long need of paint. Olney and Norah Valentine went to the third bungalow on the right. Olney rang the bell and heard its tinny jangle inside.

Nobody answered.

He rang again, waited, then tested the doorknob. It turned to his hand. He pushed the door open and looked into darkness. Feeling along the inside wall, he found a switch. It brought a sickly flood of dull orange-colored light from ornamental wall fixtures spaced around the four sides of the room. Norah whispered:

"Look! Michael, there on the floor!"

Olney had already seen the body. He stooped over the pimply-faced blackmailer. "Nice shooting. Straight through the heart. He didn't live long enough to know what hit him."

"Bradbury!" There was shock and panic in Norah's voice. "Tony Bradbury! He must have done it before the police picked him up for questioning. This Donald person probably tried to blackmail him because he had seen him killing Karen."

Olney looked around the room, at the shoddy furniture and the draped windows and the wisp of gunsmoke still drifting in the air. Then he smiled bleakly at the girl.

"You've got it right, Norah, except for one important detail. It wasn't Bradbury who was the murderer. It was you."

Every vestige of color fled from her cheeks. "Wh-what?"

"A while ago I put my arm around you. I felt strips of gauze and adhesive tape under the front of your dress, the same kind of gauze and tape you put on my nicked shin. The same kind of gauze and tape I'm wearing on my chest and belly."

"Michael, are you insane? I haven't any tape or gauze—"

"Don't lie to me, Norah. There's only one reason you'd be all taped like that. Only one reason you'd have changed your dress. Somebody scratched you up with a knife. Somebody who knew exactly how to slash the cloth without cutting your flesh too deep."

"You're out of your mind, Michael!"

"And the only person capable of savagery like that was Donald, here. I know, because he did it to me too. He tried to shake me down and I fought with him, and that's how he drove me off. It's obvious, Norah. After he got away from my place he must've gone to you and demanded hush money. Maybe you tried to give him a battle, so he cut you. He left his trademark on you, his personal brand, to let you know he wasn't fooling."

"You don't know what you're saying!" she whispered. "Nobody cut me."

"Yes, baby, I do know what I'm saying. And I hate every word of it, every foul rotten syllable. Why did Donald blackmail you? Not just because he'd seen you driving me away from the Whitby Manor in my Cadillac. He wouldn't try to shake you down on anything as weak as that. And you wouldn't fight him if that was all he had on you. But suppose he knew you were Karen's murderer, the one he watched shooting her as he looked through his binoculars from the Emperor Hotel roof? That would make it plausible."

"Michael, please," she whispered.

OLNEY made a bitter grimace. "So he slashed you to demonstrate how dangerous he was. Maybe he got some cash from you, or some jewelry. Whatever you had available, you gave him as the price of his silence. But you knew he would want more, that he would always want more, so you traced him by phoning the Hotel Emperor, the same as I did."

"Don't," she said desperately. "Don't do this to me, Michael. Call the police and we'll wait right here for them, but

don't say things like that to me."

"I've got to, because it's part of the design. You came here and shot Donald through the heart, then you went home. You must have just arrived when I showed up. I remember I asked you if you were coming in or going out. You were coming in, Norah. Returning from a murder trip. Your second murder tonight, to cover the first one, to cover the fact that you killed Karen."

"Michael, you're wrong. Horribly wrong, hideously wrong. Let me say something to you, Michael."

"Not until I'm finished." He pressed his palms to his temples. "It never dawned on me that you could have shot her. You were sitting in my Cad when I went into the apartment building. How could you have got to the penthouse ahead of me? It's so remote I never even considered it. And yet it was so easy, so simple. Someone was using the automatic elevator between various floors."

"I had to wait several minutes in the downstairs lobby before my button-pushing brought the thing down to ground level. That was when you made the play, Norah. You must have gone in the service entrance and sneaked to the freight elevator in the rear. You must have taken yourself up in that freight elevator without arousing the janitor. So you reached the penthouse before I did." He looked at her. "And after you killed Karen you left the same way. You left her body for me to find."

"Michael!"

"There's only one thing I want to know. Why? Why?" He took a step toward her. "Are you the girl Tony Bradbury wanted to marry? And when Karen refused to divorce him, is that the way you decided to set him free of her?"

Tears glistened in Norah Valentine's purple eyes, streaked in little mascara-muddy rivulets down her pale cheeks. "That's rotten of you, Michael. You fool—you poor blind fool! So smart, and yet so stupid. I've never even met Tony Bradbury. The only man I ever wanted to marry was—you, Michael. God help me, I'm in love with you. I've been in love with you since the day I first went to work in your office. But you never seemed to see, never seemed to understand." Her lips quivered in a wry smile. "Now you've made me cry. I'll bet my nose is red. I look awful when I cry. So what does that mean to you? Nothing.

You think I'm a m-murderess."

"You are. Why did you shoot Karen?"

"I didn't. I swear I didn't!"

"Maybe we can make it easy for you, Norah. Let's say you were afraid she was going on the make for me again. You thought she'd get me back. She had jilted me for Bradbury, but you figured I'd go back to her if she beckoned. And she was beckoning. She was frightened, wanted protection. But you thought that was just a trick I was falling for. So you sneaked up to tell her so. Maybe you pulled a gun to intimidate her, and there was a struggle, and it went off. Maybe you didn't intend to kill her. Maybe it was an accident. Was that the way of it, baby?"

"No. No, Michael."

He reached out, grabbed her handbag. "The police may believe you. I don't. Do you still carry a spare gun?" He opened the bag. "Yes, you do." He hefted the little automatic. "Let's go, Norah." He prodded her toward the front door.

Then he did a crazy thing. He struck her on the shoulder with his open left hand, knocked her staggering. And with the same motion he pivoted, raised the gun he had taken from her purse, and fired point-blank at one of the window drapes.

The man hiding behind those drapes screamed weirdly, pitched headlong from his concealment. He, too, had a gun; and as he fell, he fired. But his bullet went harmlessly into the floor, and then he toppled down over the scar it made.

"Got you, killer," Michael Olney said. "Got you, Wally Kirk."

NORAH VALENTINE put the back of a hand to her mouth and whimpered. Her eyes bulged as she stared at the fallen columnist. "Kirk—Kirk?"

"I knew he was there, Norah. It's all right now, baby. Take it easy." Olney took her hand, squeezed it. "I saw his shoes when we first walked into the room. Ox-blood hand stitched bootmaker shoes. I noticed them right after I looked at Donald's body. And I saw the bulge of the drapes. I'd be likely to notice a thing like that. I've used drapes, myself, to hide behind."

"Michael, you are clever."

"I saw another bulge, too. A different kind of bulge, the kind a gun makes when it pokes against cloth. I knew we were covered. We'd been covered from the instant we walked through the doorway.

We had come in before the killer could make a getaway. And if we made one wrong move, he'd have plugged us. Both of us."

"Oh, Michael!"

"I knew it was Kirk. I recognized the shoes. And if I'd done what you asked me to do—if I'd gone toward the phone to call the cops—he would have blasted his way out. That's why I accused you, Norah. That's why I built up that long crazy story. I was sparring for time, constructing a climax so it would seem logical for me to grab your handbag and shove you to the door. I prayed to God you'd have a gun in the bag. And thank God, you had."

"Mike, he's moving!"

Olney leaped. The columnist was crawling snakelike from where he had fallen toward his dropped gun. Olney jumped, and both feet landed on Kirk's outstretched hand. The wrist bones made an unpleasant crunching sound, and Kirk yelled in agony.

"I guess I didn't plug you dead center or you wouldn't have that much breath left," Olney said. He rolled the man over, looked down into the pain-whitened face, the mouth that twisted under its fantastic mustache. "Hm-m-m. Just through the shoulder. So you'll live for the hangman, after all."

"I should have shot you," Kirk said. "I blundered."

Michael Olney nodded. "Very likely. But you'll go to the death chamber. That's one satisfaction." He paused, thoughtfully. "Incidentally, a lot of the things I said to Norah actually applied to you. You're the one who used the Whitby's freight elevator to go up to the penthouse. You're the one Donald saw shooting Karen. You didn't know there had been an eye-witness until I myself told you, in your car, when you picked me up and gave me a lift. That scared you, didn't it?"

"I was afraid of you, Olney. You're too slick."

"And when I described the bellhop, you must have known at once who he was. You mentioned having grapevines into the Emperor Hotel. Maybe he was one of those grapevines, one of the very bellhops you spoke about. And when I spilled my story to you about how he'd tried to blackmail me, you realized the spot you were in. If he hadn't already

shaken you down, he soon would. And so, knowing where he lived, you came here to shut him up—permanently. Perhaps you talked to him a while first, to find out if he really did know you were the killer. Then, finally, you let him have it in the heart. And we showed up before you could leave."

"I'm not admitting a thing."

"Bah, we got you dead to rights. Get a new tune. Such as telling me why you murdered Karen. Did she have you on the string, Kirk? Were you in love with her, and you found out she was just playing you for a sucker the way she did everybody? Was it jealousy and frustration and all the other things Karen always did to a man?"

Kirk didn't answer. He only closed his eyes and turned his head, but that was as good as a spoken "yes." It was good enough for Michael Olney, and it would be good enough for Inspector Carl Reznak until Reznak could beat a more complete confession from the newspaperman.

Olney said:

"Call Headquarters, Norah. It's over and done."

"Is—is he dead?"

"Oh, no. He'll live to stand trial. I've kept my promise to Karen. I'm free of her now, Norah. I'm free at last."

She went to the phone, then, made her call. And later, after the Homicide Squad had come and gone and taken the bellhop away in a wicker basket, and taken Wally Kirk away in handcuffs, Michael Olney looked down into the red-haired girl's violet eyes.

"I'm sorry for the things I had to say, baby."

"It's all right, Michael. I understand."

"You realize that I knew you weren't knifed? It was all play-acting, to save both of us?"

"Yes, Michael. There's nothing to be sorry about now."

His mouth quirked in the old, satirical smile. "There's one thing you said, Norah. I wonder if you're sorry you said it? When you told me you loved me."

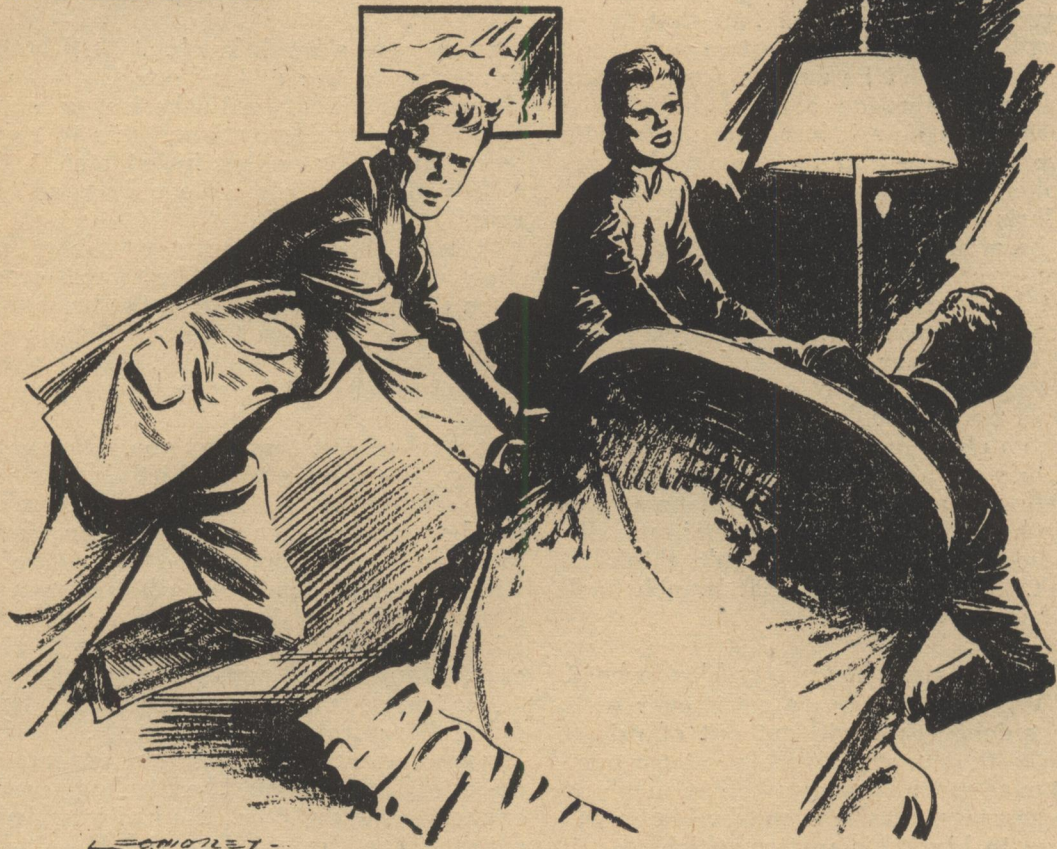
"I'm not sorry for that, either," she whispered.

He put his arms around her and kissed her. Then he took her out into the night, to her waiting coupe. And this time he made a big concession. He did the driving.

The Phantom scores again in THE DIAMOND KILLERS, a full-length novel by Robert Wallace in the May issue of THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE—only 15c!

TARGET for MURDER

By **NORMAN
A. DANIELS**



Chris overturned the chair, sending Lieutenant Glynn to the floor

It's a race against death for Chris Allen, who is wanted by the police — while he's next on the list of a killer!

IT WAS a preposterous suggestion, not to be considered for a moment.

Chris Allen said, "No, I won't do it. Do you think I'm crazy?"

His brown eyes flicked from the set face of Eric Shaw to the worried and tearful one of Peggy Wilson. He was softening and he knew it. Any woman's tears would have got him, but Peggy's were especially effective. It hadn't been very long ago when he'd expected to marry Peggy. Then he'd made the mistake of introducing her to Eric Shaw and lost her to Eric.

She was petite, pretty and the cuddly kind. She knew how to wear clothes and was nobody's fool. Eric, on the other hand, was a slow, deliberate type.

Peggy said, "Chris, I knew Eric shouldn't have asked you. It's too much to ask of any friend."

Chris Allen leaned forward. "Now look," he said. "Eric swiped six grand from the bank where he works as a teller. He says he borrowed it, but a bank teller can't borrow a dime. He steals and is a thief. Okay—so there's six grand missing and Eric finds he has to go

to the hospital. During his absence the shortage will be discovered. Now you two want me to take his place at the bank. Sure, it could be engineered, I suppose. I worked there for five years and I've substituted for sick and vacationing tellers before."

Eric shook his big head solemnly. "Let's forget the whole thing, Chris. That is, forget it all except the fact that I can pay this six grand back in two weeks and the books won't be audited for a month. I showed you the stock I bought. I showed you how it has gone up and I'll have the money in two weeks, but my swollen appendix won't wait two weeks."

Chris sighed deeply. "It's still no go. I'd be aiding and abetting a crook. Oh, sure—you can replace the dough. That isn't like most crooked bank tellers and I don't think you ever were really a crook, but I can't cover for you and I won't."

Peggy arose abruptly. "Eric, let's get out of here. We'll go to Mr. Bigley and make a clean breast of things."

Chris gave that one a raucous laugh. "Bigley is a stuffed shirt and he'll have Eric heaved into the can ten minutes after he confesses. And don't think he can't. As manager of that branch bank he has the authority."

PEGGY tossed her pretty blonde head. "Then the sooner we get it over with, the quicker Eric will get out of prison. Maybe they'll only give him a suspended sentence when he shows he can make up the shortage. Maybe even Mr. Bigley will listen to him. No matter which way it turns out, I'll be waiting. And Eric, if it will give you more courage to face this ordeal, we'll be married at once."

"Oh, look," Chris said. "He may get three to five or something like that. There have been an unholy lot of thieving bank tellers lately and they've been handed progressively severe sentences. Eric may get the limit and that's a long time. Let me sleep on this, will you?"

Eric jumped up. "Chris, do you mean—"

"I don't mean a thing—except to try and figure a way out. I can't see Peggy marrying you and then waiting for maybe years before you get out of prison. If it was any other girl, I wouldn't care, but I once hoped to marry Peggy myself."

She stepped closer to him and he smelled the perfume of her. She said, "Chris, if you help Eric, I'll marry you.

I've got nothing else to offer."

Chris waved her back. "I guess you really mean it, too. No, on the proposal. Yes, on helping Eric. Now give me the dope. When do you have to enter the hospital?"

"Tomorrow," Eric uttered a groan. "My side hurts all the time lately. It can't be put off. Gosh, Chris, I'll never forget this."

Chris gave a harsh laugh. "We'll both remember to the rest of our days if it doesn't work, because I'll be in the soup too. You've made arrangements to collect your profits on that investment?"

"It's all set, Chris. We only have to wait."

"Good. Then tomorrow morning I'll show up at the bank. They know you were slated for a check-in at the hospital. This is also vacation time and there are bound to be tellers off duty. Bigley will be glad to let me take over. I'll say you asked me to."

It worked out that way too. Howard Bigley, the slim, stuffy, thirty-five year old manager of the Security National's number six branch was more than glad to learn Chris would take over Eric's window. The routine of arranging Chris' bond was simple. An hour and a half after opening time, he was in Eric's cage, taking in and paying out crisp bills.

For two days he went on like that. He didn't hear from Eric or Peggy. Eric, by now, must have had his appendix removed and would be feeling well enough to see a visitor. He had intended entering the James Memorial Hospital, so Chris went there early in the evening.

There was no Eric Shaw registered. Chris pondered that one and then phoned Peggy. There was no answer to his call. He spent a dollar and a half phoning other hospitals without result and no matter how he tried, he couldn't recall the name of Eric's doctor.

He did know where Eric lived though and went there. It was a moderately priced apartment house. Nobody responded to his knocking on the door so Chris put a shoulder to it. At that moment he wasn't thinking about consequences.

It happened that the lock had been carelessly installed and the socket broke out of its moorings very easily and without much noise. Chris went inside, turned on the lights and with his breath held, looked in the bedroom. It was logical to

assume that Chris' appendix had really gone to town and he might have become too weak to even reach the phone. He might even be dead.

But if he was, he hadn't died in his apartment. There were no signs of him. Chris slowly sat down on the edge of the bed and tried to figure it out. There simply didn't seem to be an answer. If he could reach Peggy, he might learn something but she seemed to have disappeared too.

Chris started a search of the premises. The main thing he found was the fact that Eric deliberately seemed to have packed his suitcases for a hasty trip. Chris phoned the garage and learned that Eric had driven his cheap coupe out two nights ago and hadn't returned it as yet. He'd carried a small suitcase at the time and he'd been alone.

NOW Chris started tearing the apartment to pieces. It looked as if Eric had run out on him and left a nice big bag for him to hold. The secretarial desk in one corner of the living room showed that he'd worked there with a red pencil that was fairly well worn down. Chris examined all the papers. He found a highway road map with a red pencil line drawn to a point ending at Lake Mitchell about a hundred miles upstate.

Chris recalled that Eric's uncle had owned a cottage at that lake. Maybe he'd gone there, but with an inflamed and dangerous appendix that would have been the most foolish thing in the world for him to do.

Chris gave up, finally. He screwed back the dislodged lock socket, closed the door and went home. He found Peggy Wilson pacing the corridor near his hotel room. Peggy was red-nosed from crying. The instant Chris stepped from the elevator she rushed up to him.

"Chris—oh, Chris, what's happened to Eric? Where is he?"

Chris exhaled sharply. "You mean that you don't know where he is either?"

"Chris," she sobbed against his shoulder, "he was going into the hospital night before last. He asked me not to come with him nor visit him until today. I did as he asked, but Eric wasn't at the hospital."

"I know," Chris said softly. "I found that out too. Come on in and we'll see if we can think of anything to do."

An hour later they hadn't. Eric had simply disappeared and with him went that stock with which he had hoped to pull himself out of the hole at the bank. Chris began smoking cigarettes chain fashion.

"Look, Peggy," he said. "If Eric got scared and flew the coop, I'm in for it. The way he rigged the bank accounts, I could have swiped that six thousand. And yet, I can't feature Eric leaving me to take a rap. But unless he's found, I'm in the soup."

Peggy started sobbing all over again until Chris put a comforting arm around her and spoke softly in her ear. Finally she raised her head from his shoulder.

"Chris, whatever happens, I won't let you take the blame for something Eric did. I backed him up. I'll go to Mr. Bigley and tell him the truth. I'll swear Eric asked you to help him."

"It won't work," Chris said. "In the first place I'm as guilty as Eric, even if we prove I never got a dime out of it. I'm covering for him and that's a felony, too. What we've got to do is find Eric, get those doggone stocks cashed in and make up the deficit before it's discovered."

"But where are we going to find him?" Peggy wailed.

"I don't know—for sure. But I have half a hunch and I'm going to follow it up tomorrow as soon as the bank closes. I don't dare take a day off because someone else might get at Eric's books. Expect to hear from me early in the morning day after tomorrow. Now go home and get some sleep."

He almost kissed her at the door, but she was still Eric's girl. Chris watched her walk slowly down the corridor and felt sorrier for her than for Eric or himself. She'd put a lot of faith in that un-gainly boob of an Eric.

In the morning, Chris went to the bank early. Before many of the others had arrived, he was delving into Eric's accounts and by the time the bank was ready to open, Chris was sure of one thing. Eric hadn't filched six grand. He'd taken sixty grand—or better.

That placed a different complexion on things and for a moment Chris was tempted to scream the truth. Only thoughts of Peggy stopped him, but he promised himself the pleasure of poking in Eric's face if he ever found him.

When the bank closed at three, Chris did his best to get away as quickly as

possible but Bigley called him to his office. Bigley was in no hurry and Chris wasn't expected to be.

Bigley said, "Chris, I think you ought to give up your studying law and come back to the bank. You're a decided asset and I think I could see to it that your pay was substantially increased."

"But I'm working for Eric now," Chris explained.

"Of course, but when Eric returns you could take over the head teller's cage, Chris. Incidentally, how is Eric coming along?"

Chris gulped. "Oh—fine. He'll be back in ten days or so. You know Eric—strong as a steer."

Bigley offered his hand. "Think over what I said about coming back to work, Chris. Give it serious thought."

CHRIS got out of there as fast as he could. If Bigley started asking more questions about Eric, particularly about the hospital where he was supposed to be, the whole game might be up. At six o'clock, Chris was making excellent time toward Lake Mitchell. His old tub could still knock off the miles.

By seven he was at the lake and in the general store. There wasn't much doing here at this late season and most of the cottages were boarded up. The storekeeper hadn't seen Eric and doubted anyone lived at the cottage owned by Eric's uncle. He did locate it nicely for Chris though.

Chris parked the car, studied the one-story four-room summer cottage on the lake front and then banged on the door. The place was in total darkness and it looked much like another false lead. He knocked again and then, thinking once more of Eric's appendix, he decided to break in.

Here it wasn't a matter of shouldering in a door. This door was heavy and resisted his efforts. He went to a window, tried it and found it locked. So were all the others. Chris finally picked up a stone, wrapped it inside his hat and smashed a window overlooking the porch. He turned back the latch by reaching through the jagged hole, raised the window frame and crawled through.

The electricity was turned on so he began flooding the place with light. He found Eric. He was lying in one of the beds, fully clothed—dead. His body was growing cold, but hadn't assumed that

clammy chill of the long dead. There wasn't a mark on him, but his face bore unmistakable signs of his having been in great pain.

Chris also noticed that Eric's lips seemed to glisten unnaturally. He touched a finger to them and found it coated with a greasy substance. He tasted of it gingerly, wondering if it could be poison. He knew what it was instantly. He'd taken enough when he was a kid. Eric had been imbibing castor oil.

Chris gasped in sudden alarm. For a man with an active case of appendicitis, castor oil was as deadly as cyanide. Chris rushed into the bathroom. There it was—a bottle of the stuff and a tablespoon with it.

"How could Eric have been such an idiot?" Chris groaned. "Coming to this isolated place, sick as he was. Then actually taking castor oil. He must have been crazy—or he was murdered."

The thought of murder made Chris shudder, but he resolutely went about looking for clues. He was no detective, but if anything apparent was there, he'd find it. And he did. Around Eric's ankles and wrists were faint, marked depressions. He'd been tied down to that bed.

Chris found nothing else. He walked slowly back to his car. Now he was really up against it. The moment Eric was found to be dead, his accounts would be gone over. Chris could already hear cell doors clanging shut on him.

He smoked innumerable cigarettes without realizing it until his pack was empty. Then he did some clear thinking. The police would check when Eric was found dead. They'd find the marks on his wrists and ankles too. They'd soon learn that Chris had been at the cottage. Under ordinary conditions it would have been best to call them right now, but the conditions were anything but usual.

If Eric wasn't found for a day or two, Chris might be able to do something about the bank shortage. He had to take the risk, being in the mess far over his head already. He drove back to town, pondered the idea of telling Peggy what had happened and gave up the idea. He didn't feel like being cried on tonight.

But Peggy was mixed up in this. Perhaps unwittingly, but she was involved. It had been Peggy's special kind of pleading which had made Chris enter the whole

thing. There were sixty thousand dollars missing, not six thousand. If Eric hadn't taken it, someone at the bank had. The whole affair began to smack of a gigantic conspiracy. Chris bought more cigarettes and burned them fast.

AT TWO in the morning, his mind was made up. He drove to Peggy's apartment and phoned her from the lobby. There wasn't any answer, but he learned from the elevator operator that she'd gone out around midnight. At least he could be certain she wasn't dead too.

He decided to go home and try to sleep on the question, though he already knew he'd have to tell Bigley in the morning. There simply wasn't any sense to keeping it secret any longer. Chris put the car away, walked to his hotel and in crossing the lobby was brought to a stop by a sibilant hiss.

The night desk clerk was signalling frantically from the little room where the phone switchboard was located. Chris hurried there. The clerk closed the door.

"What have you been up to, Chris?" he asked. "Honest, if I didn't know for sure you were a really right guy, I'd never do this. But there's six feet of law waiting in your room."

Chris gasped. "The police?"

"Guy named Lieutenant Glynn and he said he was from the Homicide Squad. Gosh, Chris, you didn't knock anybody off?"

"No, I didn't. But there is some trouble and I can't be caught just yet. Thanks for the tip. I'll never mention it even if I am grabbed. But I can't stay here. Look, I'll try another hotel and maybe—"

"Rooms are hard to get, Chris. I could arrange it though. We night clerks work together pretty much. Listen, you go downtown to the Eleventh Street Hotel. Use the name of—of Murphy. I'll phone ahead."

"Good," Chris said. "That's great and I won't forget it. But I'm expecting Peggy to call. You can tell her where I am and warn her about the law. She's the one and only person I trust."

"Okay. Now beat it before that big guy comes downstairs and catches you here."

Chris took a taxi downtown and changed below Fortieth Street. He walked a few blocks to be absolutely certain he wasn't being trailed. Then he

taxied the rest of the way and found that things had been made easy for him. A room on the fifth floor was already engaged in his assumed name. He went there and wondered what sort of shape he'd be in when the bank opened for business.

He took off his coat, tie and shoes. Then he stretched on the bed and fought sleep. There had to be an answer to all this somewhere, but he wasn't enough of a detective to ferret it out. Maybe, he thought, he should have told this Lieutenant Glynn the whole truth. He gave a wry smile. If he had, he'd be locked up right now.

He began dozing and was in a thorough fog when he heard the light tapping on his door. He swung legs off the bed, memory came back with a rush and he broke out in a cold sweat. Then he realized whoever was at the door must be friendly. He'd covered his tracks too well.

He padded across the floor. "Who is it?" he asked hoarsely.

"Clerk," the same sort of a whisper came back. "Got a message for you. I'll slide it under the door. Read it right away and give me your answer."

"Okay," Chris said. "Let's have it."

A white envelope came sliding beneath the door. Chris bent to pick it up. His ear was very close to the door as he did so and he distinctly heard the faint metallic click. Chris knew what guns sounded like. He took one long step which carried him past the door. Then he lay flat against the wall, stretched one hand out and wiggled the envelope.

Three fast shots smashed through the door, exactly where he'd have been stooped over if he hadn't heard the click. Chris didn't hesitate one instant. Shots would awaken half the floor and meant the police would come and demand explanations. At the moment Chris couldn't offer any. He grabbed his hat, coat and shoes. Without stopping to put them on, he unlocked the door, opened it and moved fast down the hall.

HE HEARD other latches being turned and dived into the fire stairway. A floor below he rang for the elevator and put on his shoes while waiting for it. Apparently no alarm had reached the lobby yet for the elevator came directly to his floor and the sleepy operator didn't even glance at him.

Two minutes later Chris was on the street and moving very fast. There was a small public park not far away and he sought its sheltering darkness, found a bench and sat down.

That, he knew, had been a distinct attempt on his life. He wondered why it had been tried, by whom, and how on earth anybody had discovered where he'd been hiding. The desk clerk at his own hotel would never have sold him out. He was certain he couldn't have been followed. The furrows across his forehead grew deeper.

Finally he realized something had to be done. He left the park, found an all-night beanery and ordered pie and coffee. After finishing this he entered the phone booth and called Peggy's hotel. She answered in a sleep-laden voice.

Chris said, "A lot has happened. I have to see you right away."

"Is it about Eric?" She was wide awake in an instant. "Tell me, Chris."

"Yes—about Eric. But not over the phone, Peggy. I'll be there in ten or fifteen minutes."

He used a taxi again, but decided to risk stopping off at his own hotel. The same desk clerk was on duty and they used the same cubbyhole of a switchboard room to talk in.

The clerk said, "What the heck is going on, Chris? Ten minutes after you left, this detective called Police Headquarters. I listened in. He asked for a man from the police labs to come with a complete poison testing kit. He also requested an assistant medical examiner sent and a fingerprint expert. They all trooped in a short time ago. They're in your room right now."

"A police lab technician, an assistant medical examiner and a fingerprint man? Holy smokes, I can't figure it out. He couldn't have found a corpse in my room. Now look—you didn't tell anybody about where I'd gone?"

"Only Peggy. She phoned and you said it was okay to tell her."

"That's fine," Chris said. "Thanks again and wish me luck. I stuck my neck out not long ago, nearly got it shot off and now I'm sticking it out again—further."

He continued the trip to Peggy's hotel suite and she was waiting with the door open. Chris told her what had happened in as few words as possible. He couldn't be gentle about it because vio-

lent death can never be described gently.

"I think he was murdered," Chris went on. "I also think the set-up was there waiting for me to break into. Somebody knew I went there and told the local cops. I was identified through my marker plates, probably, and city cops are after me. I hid out, but someone found where I was and tried to kill me."

"Kill you, Chris?" Peggy murmured. "What for?"

"You got me there—unless I'm slated to take the rap for the whole sixty grand that's missing. Yes, Peggy, it's sixty thousand, not six, that Eric took. Or someone else took it. I'm not sure now, whether or not Eric was involved as deeply as sixty grand."

"But Chris, what's it all about?"

"Look, Peggy, when I got to the lake cottage, Eric wasn't dead. I didn't mean to tell you this, but I must. He certainly looked dead enough and he was cold as a corpse, but—not quite dead. He recognized me and tried to talk. He said he'd been kidnaped and brought to the cottage. He'd been tied down and fed castor oil. With an appendix ready to burst, naturally the castor oil fixed him. He was dying of peritonitis when I got there."

Peggy began to sob. "Kidnaped and murdered? Chris, who did it?"

"I'm not sure. Not yet. You see, Eric tried to tell me. He did manage to say that he'd been murdered and the murderer really thought he was dead. He told me other things, in a half delirium, but they didn't make sense. I have to write them all down, assemble the words somehow and study them."

"And then—then you'll know?"

"I'll know more than I do now. But I need time, Peggy. When I don't show up at the bank in the morning, Bigley will let it pass for a few hours. Then he'll look me up and when I'm not to be found, he'll do what every bank official thinks of first. He'll check the accounts."

"But what can we do, Chris?" Her eyes were appealingly wide and puzzled.

"I don't know. Things are worse than you think. The cops are on my trail, time is running out and someone is trying to kill me. That makes my position a bit uncomfortable."

PEGGY'S tears flowed again. Chris took her tenderly in his arms. She sobbed, "Oh Chris, this is awful. I was afraid something had happened. I called your

hotel and the clerk told me you had checked in somewhere else. He said the police were after you. I didn't dare call your new hotel. All I could do was sit here and worry."

"Well, you've got to stop that," Chris told her. "We haven't time to waste on weeping. I need your help, need it badly. There are things to be done and I can't operate openly while you can. Will you help me, Peggy?"

"Of course I will, Chris. Whatever you say."

"That's the spirit. Maybe we can lick this yet, though I'm getting my doubts. I want to know what's happened at my hotel. Make certain the police want me for questioning about Eric's death, and not the trouble at the bank. Will you go there and find out for me?"

She got up quickly, disappeared in her bedroom and came out again in two minutes with fresh rouge, lipstick and powder. She jammed on a perky little hat, attempted a smile and then kissed Chris full on the lips. She hurried out of the apartment and Chris gave her exactly a two minute start.

Then he fixed the door latch so it could be opened without a key, raced down the fire stairway, taking each turn like a meteor on a rampage. He was in the lobby in time to see Peggy step from a phone booth and head for the street door.

He followed her very carefully. She was looking around intently and then she spotted a cab. She hailed it. Chris frantically looked for another, in vain. He raced to the nearest subway entrance and, for the first time since all this started, a certain portion of luck turned up. A downtown train was just pulling in.

He got off half a dozen stops on, flew up the stairs and this time found a cab. He guessed he'd beaten Peggy downtown. A subway, especially in the dawning hours, is always much faster than a taxi. He paid off his driver after a five-minute ride, looked for a place to hide and found a doorway deep enough so shadows still existed there despite the mounting daylight.

Peggy's cab rolled up and she got out. She went to the corner and stood there, impatiently, until a man hurried up to her. Chris knew him and he wasn't especially surprised. It was Howard Bigley, manager of the branch bank.

They talked for a few seconds. Peggy opened her purse and reached into it with

nervous fingers, much too nervous because the bag dropped and its contents spilled out onto the edge of the sidewalk.

He heard Bigley growl something uncomplimentary and bend down to help pick the things up. This done, he saw Peggy hand Bigley a key. It had a hotel tag attached to it. Bigley stowed this away, whispered some more and patted his hip pocket significantly. Then they parted and in a moment the block was clear.

Chris felt a little loose inside. To have Peggy turn into a rat was bad enough, but to go for a clinker like Bigley was even worse. He crossed the street and picked up an object his eyes had been riveted upon ever since Peggy's purse spilled. It was a bit of paper that she and Bigley had overlooked.

He unfolded it and discovered it was a hotel bill. For the rent of a transient room on the ninth floor of the same hotel where Peggy lived. Her room was also on that same floor and apparently the key she'd given Bigley was for that newly hired room. It meant something, but Chris couldn't figure it out right away.

He realized he had to get back before Peggy appeared so he used the subway again. He reached the hotel and its ninth floor, let himself into Peggy's suite and locked the door. Then he sat down to think. If Bigley was involved, then it had been Bigley who tried to kill him once already.

A SLOW, burning rage began to fill Chris' heart. Peggy was in it too, of course. He should have known that. She'd been his girl until he decided to give up his job, economize to the last possible degree and enter law school. That was when she discovered Eric, a soft slob who had a job and didn't mind spending money. So—she became Eric's girl.

Now it appeared she was also Bigley's flame. It was surprising, in a way, for Bigley didn't seem the type, but Chris knew human nature sufficiently to realize that types mean very little. Of course Peggy had somehow induced Eric to borrow money from the bank. Six thousand dollars. She'd probably furnished the tip but, perhaps surprisingly enough, the tip turned out to be good and Eric would be able to pay back the stolen money.

Meantime, of course, Bigley must have looted the bank's funds. If Eric couldn't make good, the rest would have been

easy. Peggy could wind him around her finger. She could have persuaded him to make a clean breast of it and who'd have believed him when sixty thousand was found missing instead of only six thousand to which theft he had confessed. The set-up was perfect.

But Eric's investment paid off. If he returned the six thousand, Bigley would be holding the same nice gaping sack. So Eric had to die and his unruly appendix provided the solution. It was all clear now. Eric meant to enter the hospital. Even if he'd been crookeder than a Scotchman's cane, he'd scarcely have gambled with his own life by holing up at the lake cottage.

So Peggy must have lured him somewhere so Bigley could nail him. He'd been brought to the cottage, filled with castor oil and tied up until he died. That wouldn't have taken very long. Trips could have been made by Peggy and Bigley at alternate times.

Now the glamorous and money-hungry Peggy was setting another trap. He had to know what it was. Chris looked at that hotel receipt again. Then he had an idea. He went to the living room window and raised the curtain. There was a court. The whole hotel was built around it and the opposite windows were no more than twenty feet away. It was more of an air shaft, he decided.

Chris went to the phone and called Room Number 809. That should be directly below 909 which Peggy had rented. He could hear the phone ringing across the court and then lights went on in the apartment below 909. Chris hung up. Now he did know. Room 909 was directly opposite Peggy's living room. The trap would be sprung from there.

Chris picked up the phone again. He'd been wondering what that Detective Lieutenant Glynn wanted with those assorted professions in his room. A lab technician, a medical examiner and a fingerprint expert. He meant to find out.

For Chris realized one significant thing. That while he suspected Peggy and Bigley, he had no proof. None whatsoever. As things stood now, he could be roped in on the bank shortage and maybe even for the murder of Eric. All Bigley had to do was deny everything.

The desk clerk at Chris' hotel answered the call. Chris finally persuaded him he wasn't drunk or crazy, and to connect him with the detective still waiting.

Lieutenant Glynn had a slow, easy sort of voice. Chris said, "I'm a friend of the law. The man you want is holed up at his girl's apartment. That's in the Hotel Hayes. Room Nine Thirty-three. Better stake out a few men around that floor before you go in. He's armed and dangerous."

Chris hung up quickly. If Lieutenant Glynn tried to trace the call, the desk clerk would ball him up. Chris had an idea that Glynn wouldn't even stop long enough to check.

Then Peggy came back. She was amazingly calm. She told Chris she'd found out that the police were still in his room and meant to stay there. That an alarm had been broadcast for him.

Chris said, "Gosh, I don't know what to do, Peggy. I'm in an awful fix."

SHE removed her hat, fluffed out her honey colored locks and then idly sauntered over to the window overlooking the court. She pulled the shade all the way down. Then she turned on a table lamp and pushed a large chair between the lamp and the window. Whoever occupied that chair would throw a beautiful shadow on the curtain. Be as starkly outlined as a perfect silhouette.

Peggy said, "Chris, the only thing you can do is stay here. There must be an answer and we'll find it. You can sleep in this chair. It's very comfortable. I've often slept in it when my relatives visited me and used the bedroom."

"Sure, Peggy," Chris said. "In a minute or two. I'm dead tired. But first tell me all about how Eric swiped that dough. Did anybody else know he took it?"

Peggy didn't have time to answer. There was a thunderous knocking on the door. Chris looked properly crestfallen, admitted Lieutenant Glynn who turned out to be even bigger than the desk clerk had described him.

Glynn said, "Hello, Chris. My name is Glynn, Homicide Squad. I've been waiting around your hotel."

"What for?" Chris asked. "What am I supposed to have done?"

"Well for one thing you either killed a man or you discovered his body and didn't report it. The upstate police would like a chat with you about that. And while we're at it, stretch your arms way up for a frisk."

Glynn didn't find anything. Chris said, "Okay, I found the body. It was a pal of

mine. I got so scared I forgot about reporting it."

Glynn watched Chris walk idly toward the window and followed him. They both stood close to the big chair.

Chris said, "Sit down, Lieutenant, and I'll tell you all about it."

Peggy turned deathly pale, but stood riveted to the spot. Glynn sat down slowly. He said, "You got any enemies, Chris?"

"Some," Chris admitted. "But I didn't kill Eric. I can prove that. Gosh, it's pretty awful to know you're suspected of murder. All I'm glad about is that you don't think I killed a cop. Cop killers—and even those remotely connected with such a kill—always get the chair. Don't they, Lieutenant? Even women—young and pretty ones. They haven't a chance if a cop happens to get killed."

Then Peggy screamed. She leaped toward the chair, but Chris was faster. He bowled it over, sending Lieutenant Glynn flying out of it into a heap on the floor.

Glynn scrambled to his feet, a gun in his hand now. Chris talked fast. "That was a hot seat, Lieutenant. There's a killer and bank looter in Room Nine-o-nine waiting to shoot me when I sat in that chair. Peggy here, arranged it. She's in with him and she was afraid he'd kill you by mistake."

Glynn made a dive for the door, opened it and yelled orders. Men went pounding along the corridor toward Room 909. They returned in a moment, with Howard Bigley between them, and one detective held a long barreled target pistol.

"We found this bird kneeling beside the open window and watching the shadows on that curtain, Lieutenant. He was getting set to shoot. And brother, he wouldn't have missed with this gat."

Peggy began talking. The words became screams, but it didn't matter for Bigley was talking too and the more he yapped, the louder Peggy screamed, for he was throwing all the blame on her. It wasn't a nice story, but it backed up all of Chris' reasoning.

When they were taken away, he sat down opposite Lieutenant Glynn and explained his side of it.

"I suspected Peggy when Bigley tried to shoot me through the door of that downtown hotel," Chris said. "Only Peggy knew I was there so she had to be in on it. That's why I cooked up a fantastic tale about Eric being alive when I

reached him and how he told me a lot of stuff I'd make sense of when I had time to think it over.

"Peggy got scared and when I gave her a chance to go to whoever was in with her in this business, she took it. She went to Bigley, as I guessed she would. It had to be Bigley because nobody else could have rigged this deal at the bank. But I still didn't have much evidence. Then I realized she was going to park me as a target for murder."

GLYNN wasn't too pleasant. "So you put me in that hot seat instead. What if he'd started shooting?"

Chris grinned. "I cut a little hole in the side of the curtain so I could see out. If I spotted Bigley aiming, I would have gone into action."

Glynn said, "It was a rotten way to get your proof, but it worked and no harm done so I'll forget it. Listen, do you make a habit of drinking poison with your glass of milk before going to bed nights?"

"Poison?" Chris asked in awe.

"I got thirsty waiting around your room so I opened the refrigerator. I poured myself a glass of milk, but it tasted funny. I examined the bottle and found a white sediment at the bottom, so I sent for some men to analyze the stuff. There was enough poison in it to kill fifteen guys like you."

Chris felt weak. "Lieutenant, that was another trick of Peggy's. She knew I made a habit of taking a glass of milk before going to bed. They'd have arranged it to look like suicide and put the blame for the whole theft on me and Eric. Peggy would have sworn we worked together."

Glynn wagged his head. "You know, Chris, girls like Peggy are hard to figure out. She's got youth, looks and plenty of appeal. She could have had you, or this man Eric and yet—she went to a guy like Bigley. For his money, I suppose. I imagine you were in love with her once. Am I right?"

"I was," Chris admitted. "But I guess I'm darn lucky."

"To miss a dish like her?"

Chris managed a grin. "Think what would have happened if I married her, Lieutenant? Brother, would she have gone for that insurance racket. I'd be dead six months after we were married. I'm ready now, if you are. I know it means I'm pinched, but I don't mind. Not after what I just got out of."



Holly pulled trigger, but too late; the bullet hit the floor at Sergeant Kimball's feet

MURDER BOUND

By WAYLAND RICE

Old books and bullets make a dangerous combination when Sergeant Kimball sifts the evidence in a case of suicide!

WALLY MONROE had always exerted himself not to inconvenience others. He had been a great respecter of his fellow citizens' rights, but this morning he was delaying several thousand impatient people, jammed in subway cars, at the peak of the rush hour.

It wasn't exactly Wally Monroe's fault. He wouldn't have had this happen for the world, but it did take twenty-six minutes to jack up the second car of a Seventh Avenue

Express so that his body could be untangled from the wheels of the undercarriage.

Sergeant Dick Kimball, Homicide Detail, stood to one side while workmen applied their tools. He waited until the limp, battered corpse had been placed on a stretcher. Then he joined the Deputy Medical Examiner and they searched the dead man's pockets. They found identification which Sergeant Kimball retained. The Medical Examiner also found a small screw-topped glass

vial. He uncorked it and sniffed of the contents.

"Whew!" he grimaced. "Some compound of cyanide. This guy apparently meant business. If the train didn't do a good job, I suppose he meant to take the poison."

Kimball sighed and nodded. It was just one of those cases. A man in trouble, ill or despondent, had thrown himself in front of a train. He'd seen quite a lot of these things, and he liked to recall none of them. Kimball got back onto the platform and walked over to where a patrolman herded three people in a little group.

Kimball took a lanky, dour looking man aside. "You saw him jump?" he asked.

"Jump? Well—no. Not exactly. I was standing at the far end of the platform where the trains come in. I noticed this little chap. He seemed to be very nervous. Then I heard a scream. When I saw him, the train . . . ugh . . ."

"Was anyone close to him before he fell or jumped?"

"Plenty of people. The whole platform was jammed."

A STENOGRAPHER excitedly chewing a wad of gum, told Kimball that she also had noticed the little man had been very nervous. But she hadn't seen him jump, either. The last witness was a buxom housewife, very worried that she'd be late for a department store sale.

"I was in back of him when he entered the station," she explained. "Ordinarily I don't pay much attention to folks on a subway platform, but this man had some trouble at the turnstile. He dropped two books he'd been carrying under his arm and bumped his head when he straightened up after recovering them."

"Two books?" Kimball's nose twitched. He was scenting complications. "Are you certain? There were no books on the tracks and none on the platform."

"Certainly I'm certain. I had to laugh at him, bumping his head and all. And say, for a cop, you're pretty dumb. You act like a cop in some hick town. Look, Mister, if the little guy had two books and he dropped them before he jumped—they wouldn't be on the platform. Somebody would have swiped 'em if they were the two worst books ever printed."

"You didn't see the books fall?"

"No, sir. I was standing maybe fifteen feet away when it happened. I didn't see nobody pick up any books either, but if they ain't there, they were picked up all right."

Kimball noted down the names and addresses of the three witnesses and dismissed them. He waited until the morgue boys arrived, and then he phoned Headquarters to make a brief report.

The name in the victim's old wallet had read 'Walter Monroe', and the address was close by the subway station. Kimball walked the half dozen blocks to a cross street of brownstone fronts. Some were boarding houses, some private dwellings. The number he wanted looked neat and tidy and he decided it was not a boarding house.

A young man of about twenty-four let him in. He was pleasant looking, well dressed and rather startled at the sight of Kimball's badge. Kimball handed him the wallet and explained what had happened.

The young man said, "My name is Perry. Gerald Perry. Wally Monroe was my uncle. Just a nice, quiet and harmless man. He lived here with us—my wife and my mother. I simply can't believe he—killed himself."

"Maybe he didn't," Kimball said. "He could have been pushed."

Perry gave a curt laugh. "Uncle Wally murdered? Oh no! Why he didn't have an enemy in the world. He owned nothing anybody could possibly want. All that he lived for was the store and his books and bindings."

Kimball said, "Books, eh? Did you see him leave the house this morning?"

"Why, yes. We all had breakfast together. In fact, I left the house half a minute after Wally to get some cigarettes at the corner."

"Did he carry any books?"

"Yes, two of them. He was always bringing books home from the store and examining their bindings. He always said you could fake the printing of a book and make it look valuable, but you couldn't kid a man who knew old bindings."

"I'd like to see his quarters," Kimball said. "You see, he still had the two books when he entered the subway station, but after his death the books were nowhere to be found. Could they have been valuable?"

"Possibly. The store where he works specializes in foreign language antique volumes. Wally has worked there for more than thirty years. When new owners took over the store, they kept Wally on because he was so familiar with the line and he knew so many customers. I'll take you upstairs where he has two rooms. Then I'd better tell my mother."

KIMBALL stepped into a two room suite that was as tidy as a laboratory. There

was a bedroom, comfortably equipped. On a bed table was an alarm clock ticking loudly, a paper covered book in French and a leather key case. In the other room which seemed to be a combination room and workshop, was a small bench with a wooden press on it. There were several kinds of glue, a few knives that looked like scalpels, a couple of cheap notebooks and some small glass-stoppered bottles of what seemed to be dye solutions.

Kimball sniffed of the contents of these bottles, but none smelled like the stuff in that vial Wally Monroe carried. Kimball opened a clothes closet and looked around without any luck. He examined bureau and desk drawers, but found only that Wally Monroe had a satisfactory bank balance and was one of the most meticulous men he'd ever encountered. Every scrap of paper was carefully filed and listed.

Perry returned and Kimball said, "Your uncle was killed at 9:50. Apparently he was about to board the subway on his way to work. Isn't that a bit late?"

"He left the house at eight o'clock," Perry frowned. "As a rule he went straight to the subway station because he had to be at the store before 8:30. That's when he was supposed to open up. I don't know what he was doing in the subway station at that late hour."

Kimball stroked his chin, and had a feeling he was getting nowhere. He wondered why he went through all this when the death was so patently a suicide. He decided it was that pair of missing books that intrigued him.

He asked, "Did your uncle seem quite normal this morning—and last night? He wasn't bothered?"

"Come to think of it, Sergeant, I doubt he slept much last night. My rooms are just down the hall, and I heard him fooling around after two in the morning. That's unusual, but whenever it happened, Uncle Wally had, as a rule, discovered something very important about some books. He used to take them apart to examine the bindings, and then glue and press them back."

Kimball got the address of the store, murmured a few words of condolence to Perry's white-haired mother and his somewhat flamboyant looking young wife. The feeling that he was wasting tax-payers' money by spending time on this case, was still with him, but he determined to see the thing through anyhow. So far he hadn't discovered a single reason why Wally Monroe should have taken his own life.

On Fifty-ninth street, where book shops

of all types flourish, Kimball readily found the store where Wally Monroe had worked for thirty some years. It was an ordinary cellar store, but quite large. The two display windows carried only half a dozen volumes, tastefully arranged to show printing and bindings. A small sign was painted on each window which read: LIVRES de FRANCE. Apparently nothing but French books were on sale here.

THERE were five steps leading down to the door. A bell tinkled as Kimball pushed the door open. A gawky man was at work removing books from a packing case and distributing them on the many shelves. He looked up, dusted his hands on a towel and approached Kimball.

"Yes, sir, what can I do for you?"

"I'm looking for Walter Monroe," Kimball said carefully.

The man blinked a couple of times. He had very deep-set eyes, but they showed neither consternation nor fear. He said, "I am sorry. Mr. Monroe has stepped out. Perhaps he will return soon, though I cannot be certain. Perhaps I—"

Kimball produced his badge. "Who owns the place?"

"A policeman?" the clerk gasped. "Looking for Wally—oh, excuse me. It's none of my business, I suppose. Come this way. Mr. Cranford, the owner, arrived only a few moments ago."

The bookstore office was paneled, decorously furnished and looked much like a small library. The man behind the desk was gross. He seemed to fill the chair and then overflow it. He had three chins and jowls that hung way down. His cheeks were very pink, as if he suffered from high blood pressure, and his naked scalp glistened as if it had been recently polished. He gave Kimball a flabby hand.

"What in the world can the police want with Wally Monroe?" he chuckled. It was like a low rumble of thunder deep within his chest. "I can't imagine—"

"Suppose I tell you, after you answer a couple of questions," Kimball said. "When did you see Monroe last?"

"Yesterday, just before we closed up. George, the gentleman who showed you in here, saw Wally this morning. Come to think of it, Wally did an odd thing. He left the store without telling anyone why. Odd, because Wally was so insufferably conscientious."

"He opened up this morning?" Kimball asked softly.

"Naturally. That was part of his job. Come, come, Sergeant, what's this all about?"

"Could Wally have stolen any very valuable books, Mr. Cranford? Books which he might sell somewhere else at a considerable profit?"

Cranford began to look worried. "Why—why that's incredible. Wally has my utmost faith. He has worked in this store for more than thirty years. He is like—like one of the fixtures. We do have valuable books, of course. Many of them. Some worth thousands."

Kimball leaned back and lit a cigarette. "Mr. Cranford, I'd have your valuable books checked. Wally Monroe is dead. He fell, or jumped, beneath the wheels of a subway train a short time ago."

Cranford's three chins quivered. "Wally—dead? It must have been an accident. Accidents do happen at crowded subway stations. Why do you think he may have stolen some of our books?"

"He had two books when he entered the station. They have not been found. Suppose you check and I'll come back this afternoon. There is nothing else you want to tell me? Any reason why Wally might have taken his own life?"

"No, of course not. Wally—a suicide? Incredible! Unless . . . unless that nephew of his was getting out of hand again. This nephew served a prison term for theft or burglary or something. Wally worried about him a great deal."

Kimball got up. That, at least, was both interesting and concrete. He shook hands with Cranford again and went out. The gawky man held the door open for him. Kimball took a couple of steps up the stairs and then turned quickly. The gawky man had a supercilious smile on his face that faded quickly to become oily.

Back at his office, Kimball did some checking. He called the Customs Authorities and learned that Cranford's firm imported a large number of second-hand books from France—mostly first editions and they bought them from well-known and accredited French firms. All duty was promptly paid, and there had never been the slightest trouble with the store, either before Cranford bought it—or since.

GERALD PERRY, the dead man's nephew, was something else again. He had accumulated a neat police record with two terms at the workhouse and the latest escapade had resulted in a two years' Sing-Sing sentence. Kimball pondered these de-

tails, always with the same feeling that he was wasting his time.

His phone rang. "This is Gerald Perry," the voice on the other end said. "You remember—Wally Monroe's nephew. Look, Sergeant, I want more information on his death. We're not at all satisfied. Will you be at your office half an hour from now?"

Kimball pushed the phone harder against his ear. He could hear a background of intense jive, apparently from a radio turned down rather low but close enough to Perry's phone so that the sound came over.

"If you want to make that a date, I'll be here," Kimball agreed.

"Fine. My mother, my wife and I are at the morgue to identify Uncle Wally. From there we'll go to the undertaker's and make the necessary arrangements. Maybe it will take a little longer than half an hour. I won't be home, so don't look for me there."

"Yes—of course," Kimball said. "I'll be right here. Things to do—"

He hung up for a moment. That radio was a dead giveaway. There are no radios at the city morgue. Kimball called there and was told that Perry's wife and mother had just come in, but Perry wasn't with them.

Kimball picked up his hat, ordered a car brought around and drove rapidly toward the brownstone where Wally Monroe had lived with Gerald Perry. To Kimball, that phone call sounded like one made to insure the fact that he was at Headquarters and would stay there for a certain length of time. Perry had something to do and didn't want to risk having Kimball suddenly appear at the house. He'd been a shade too emphatic about not being at home.

Kimball parked half a block away, hurried down the street, and remembered that he had Wally Monroe's key case in his pocket. He took it out, unzipped it and started climbing the stairs to the front door. He glanced at the lock, at the keys, and selected what he thought was the proper one.

Someone said, "Copper! Hey—copper!"

Kimball looked around. There was a grinning man at the bottom of the steps, leaning idly against the railing. He had a topcoat slung over his arm and it partially covered the gun he held. Only the deadly snout of it protruded.

Kimball didn't go for his gun. He was too well covered. The man didn't move, but someone opened the door. "Come on in, flat-foot," a voice snarled. "And keep your hands just like they are."

Kimball turned again. He was facing a man of medium size with an incredibly pale

skin, very bright eyes and lips that were as pale as those of a corpse. Kimball recognized the symptoms. This man was coked to the ears. He walked in slowly.

A third man appeared, holding another gun. They herded Kimball into the living room. The third man seemed to be in command. He was a wide-faced thug type.

"Okay. So he's a smart copper and he came anyway," he said. "Over and face the wall, Sergeant. Put the hands way up."

Kimball felt his gun taken away from him, followed by the blackjack, his handcuffs and his badge case. The small man slapped the back of his head with a gun barrel. It cracked the scalp and he felt blood seeping out.

The bigger man said, "Keep an eye on him, Holly, until we finish our business here."

"Keep an eye on him, nothing," the pale-skinned man growled. "I'm going to knock him off. I hate cops, all kinds of cops. I'm knocking him off."

THE bigger man must have left the room quickly and he returned in a moment. With him came the plant who'd been waiting outside. The big man said, "Watch the cop. Holly gets funny ideas. He wants to bump the flatfoot, but there won't be any of that unless he gets gay. Holly, you come with me and work off some of that junk by a little manual labor."

Two of them left. Kimball turned around, still keeping his hands in the air. The stake-out man sat in a chair, with a gun on his lap. He gestured toward another chair.

"Make yourself to home, Sarge. We got a little job to take care of and then we'll blow. You be sensible and all you'll get is a conk on the knob. Otherwise, we turn Holly loose on you."

Kimball sat down, careful to place both hands on his knees. "Thanks. Without a gun in my fist I'm not anxious to tangle with a hopped-up guy like Holly. You're playing with T.N.T. having someone like him along. Where's Perry?"

The man grinned. "Don't ask questions, Sarge. Just be grateful we keep Holly off your neck. Ever since he got thrown in the sneezer last year, up at some hick town, he's hated cops. He was coked up then and when it wore off, the hick turnkey just figured Holly was plain nuts. He nearly went crazy too, until they called in a doctor the next morning. Holly swears he's going to kill a cop for that. Any cop."

"I see," Kimball said tightly. "Thanks again for keeping him off me."

Kimball could hear the sound of something

scraping across the upstairs floor and then a heavy object thudded down each step. At the bottom he heard two men grunt and Holly curse as he helped lift the object. They passed by the open door, lugging between them a large wooden packing case with something in French painted on its side.

"Going to do some reading?" Kimball asked his guard pleasantly.

"Sure. Passes the time away."

Holly, a crafty look on his face, came into the room. He motioned to the man guarding Kimball. "I ain't so strong and that box is plenty heavy. Joey needs you to help him get it into the car. I'll watch the flatfoot."

The guard nodded, went to a window and looked out on the street. He stuffed his gun into his pocket. "Okay, Holly. Remember now, you lay off the Sarge. You bump him, and they'll probably find you lying on the floor beside him."

The guard went out. Holly smirked and kicked the door shut. There was a gun in his hand and a malicious grin on his pale face. He took a couple of steps toward Kimball and the detective arose warily, keeping his hands slightly raised.

Holly said, "You're going to get it, copper. You're going to pay for what a lot of other cops did to me."

Kimball stiffened, biting his lower lip. Holly kept moving closer. Kimball knew he intended to shove the gun against him so the sound of the explosion would be muffled. Kimball extended the fingers of his left hand until the whole arm was rigid. Holly was no more than three steps away, gun steady, eyes like little black beads. His hoarse breathing sounded like a wheezy old pump.

Kimball realized what his chances were, but he brought down that stiff left hand anyway. It moved very fast, and Holly had his eyes riveted on the detective's face, trying to catch a satisfying look of terror. The side of Kimball's hand hit the gun muzzle. Holly pulled trigger, but too late. The bullet hit the floor at Kimball's feet.

Holly hit the floor, too, some distance away and with a jaw that would never close accurately again. Those beady black eyes were filmed over with a veil of unconsciousness now.

Kimball moved fast. He scooped up the crook's gun, ran lightly toward the door, and realized he was too late. The shot had drawn the other pair back. He lined himself up against the wall beside the door. To get him, they'd have to enter the room, and he had all the advantages against a move like that.

They didn't enter the room. One of the

pair whispered something and the other man hurried out of the house. Kimball heard the car starter whine. The room door was shoved open. Then there were two fast shots, well-aimed shots—aimed at Holly who lay sprawled on the floor.

Kimball leaped toward the door. He had a glimpse of the burly thug going down the front stairs. By the time he reached the stairs, the car was pulling away. Kimball fired at it with Holly's gun, but the bullets took no effect. The car disappeared around a corner.

A patrolman was running down the street. Kimball hailed him, ordered him to phone a description of the car and the killers to the radio room and then get help. Kimball knelt beside Holly. Both slugs had hit him in the head.

"Poor, hopped-up fool," Kimball grunted as he searched the body. He found four packets of heroin, wet a finger and pressed a tiny portion of the powder to the skin. He tasted of it and grimaced. This was pure stuff, not the cut-down mixture sold to the trade. It was no wonder Holly possessed such a crazy desire to kill a policeman. He took his own service pistol out of the dead man's pocket and also retrieved his other possessions.

Gerald Perry's wife and mother returned half an hour later. Neither knew what had happened to Perry. He'd started out for the morgue with them, said he'd catch up and went into a tobacco store. They swore they had no idea where he was.

BACK at Headquarters Lieutenant Johnson, Kimball's immediate superior, listened to the whole story. Kimball explained "It begins to look as if Wally Monroe really was murdered—by his nephew, or crooks working with the nephew. Apparently they were stealing books and Wally discovered it. They had a whole crate of them hidden in the house. Perry wanted to be sure those men were unmolested while they got them out, so he phoned to be certain I wouldn't pop in on them. He told me he was calling from the morgue, but I could hear radio music and figured he was lying. So I came down and ran into a trap. Somehow I think I was actually lured down there."

Lieutenant Johnson nodded. "Funny they had that stake-out by the front steps all set for trouble if they figured you'd never show up. Maybe they were just careful. Well, there's an alarm out for Perry. You'd better check with that book store again and get a line on just what is missing."

Kimball allowed the Medical Examiner to cleanse and plaster the scalp wound at the back of his head. Then he went out to where his car was parked, got in and drove further downtown to an address he'd found in Holly's pockets.

It turned out to be a cheap hotel where Holly rented a low-priced room on a monthly basis. On the strength of his badge, Kimball was taken to the room. He closed the door in the disappointed desk clerk's face and searched the premises.

An addict like Holly would keep his cache of dope well concealed, and it took Kimball over an hour to find it. The wooden sticks, around which the bottoms of the window shades were sewed, had been carefully hollowed out and both sticks were packed with the powder.

There was something else too, a pair of small diamonds. These interested Kimball more than the presence of the drugs, though he suspected the two items bore a certain relationship to one another. An addict like Holly would steal anything he could get his fingers on, and all this dope indicated he'd been doing quite a bit of pilfering. It appeared that he was turning diamonds into dope, but where was he getting the gems? Was all this the main reason for Holly's murder?

Kimball sat down at the edge of the creaky bed, lit himself a cigarette and began thinking. He wasn't satisfied with things. In the first place Perry should have been with those men at the house. Either that, or in the process of arranging a solid alibi for himself. Kimball began to be very certain that he'd actually been invited to the house where he might witness the removal of the case of books.

And he recalled how stern the other two men had been about Holly committing no murder. Then the leader hadn't even made a try for the detective he knew was in the room. He'd deliberately shot Holly to death and there could be only one reason for that. Holly, deprived of his drugs, was bound to talk, and what he knew would be dangerous for someone.

The two books which Wally Monroe had been carrying worried Kimball too. Had he been murdered because of those books? Were they part of the loot contained in the packing case? Kimball doubted that because he'd had a good look at the case and it had been nailed shut with steel strips sealing it effectively for the ocean voyage. That case hadn't been opened at all. Were those two books then especially valuable, and had Ger-

ald Perry stolen them directly from the store?

Kimball considered all phases of the case over again, and still he was far from satisfied. He reached into his pocket and took out the vial of poison which had been found on Wally Monroe. Then he took out the dead man's leather key case.

Kimball left Holly's hotel, drove uptown to Fifty-ninth Street, passed Cranford's book store, and found a parking place. He walked back, started down the steps to the book store door and peered through the window. If anyone was in the store proper, he was well hidden. Kimball took out Wally Monroe's key case and slid one of its keys into the door. It turned the bolt nicely. He unlocked the door, put the key case away and walked into the store. The bell tinkled again and the same gawky man came from a back room.

"Oh," he said, "it's the detective. Mr. Cranford was just about to phone and ask that you come here. This way, please."

KIMBALL was led to the same office. Cranford, looking as if he'd added a little more weight since Kimball last saw him, motioned a fat hand in the direction of a chair facing the desk. The detective pulled the chair closer before he sat down and as he did so, he slid the service pistol out of its holster and laid it on his lap, out of sight below the edge of the desk.

Cranford said, "We checked, as you suggested. We discovered a whole case of books is missing. Not stolen from the store, mind you, but someone obtained possession of customs clearance papers and went down to the ship where the case of books was claimed."

"I know," Kimball nodded. "I know all about those books and we'll get them back for you. Now how about the two books Monroe was known to be carrying and which disappeared?"

Cranford wagged his big head, all chins in full sail. "Mind you, officer, it is my belief that all this went on without Wally knowing a thing about it. When he did learn the truth, he meant to take action, but that unsavory nephew of his got to him first. Do you agree?"

"I might. There are complications. Those two books are valuable?"

"Worth about ten thousand dollars each. Original Maupassant writings. The missing case of books was not of the same high value. I paid five thousand for them all."

"Still worth stealing," Kimball commented. "When Wally Monroe came to work this

morning, you did not see him?"

"No, I arrived later. However, my employees did. Wally was here when they arrived."

"How many employees do you have?" Kimball took a firmer grip on his gun.

"Three, besides Wally. I shall have one of them give you a detailed list of the missing books and we'll help in any way possible. I'm sure you will get them back for us."

"You already have them," Kimball said quietly.

Cranford's massive head came up and quivered. "I believe I misunderstood you, Sergeant."

"You heard me. The crate of books was never stolen, merely taken from the store, brought to Perry's house and left there until I arrived so they could be dragged out in front of my nose and I'd get the impression that those gorillas were working with Perry."

Cranford blinked those tiny fat sunken eyes of his. "I'm very sorry, Sergeant. I do not understand."

"And the two books which Wally carried this morning were not stolen either, but borrowed by Wally so he could inspect them in the privacy of his own home, where he often inspected valuable bindings. He didn't mean to return those books, however. He was going to take them to the police."

Cranford leaned back and his chair squealed. He said, "Are you by any chance accusing me of being implicated in some silly business?"

"Somebody killed Wally Monroe."

Cranford sighed. "Very well, I'll tell you the truth. Because I liked Wally and because of his long record of employment here I did not wish to do this. But I demanded an explanation of him this morning and he wrote out a full confession. It was in my desk drawer."

Cranford slid a middle drawer back, reached into it and Kimball started to raise the gun. But Cranford grunted, pushed his chair back and bent down to peer into the drawer. He looked up.

"Odd," he said with a frown. "Very odd. I put the confession there this morning."

Kimball had heard a buzzer sound in some back room as Cranford opened the desk drawer. He brought his hand and the gun into full view.

"Put your elbows on the desk, Cranford," he said crisply.

CRANFORD obeyed at once and all his chins were quivering violently now. Directly behind him was a door leading into

the back room where that buzzer had sounded. The door opened and three men came in. One of them was the gawky clerk, the other pair were complete strangers. Cranford's bulk blocked any view of Kimball's gun.

All three started around the desk, two of them taking one side, the third the other. Kimball kicked back his chair and stood up.

"Freeze!" he rapped out. All three came to a halt and three pair of arms started to lift slowly.

Kimball said, "Hold them just like that. Cranford, with your right hand reach for the phone on your desk, dial the operator and tell her you want a policeman fast."

Cranford didn't stir. "Indeed, I will do nothing of the kind. Look here, Sergeant, disregarding all other phases of this business, you believe you hold us quite at bay, don't you?"

"There are four of you and I've got six slugs in this gun. One and a half bullets each. That ought to do it."

"But a revolver, while it is a very good [Turn page]

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weapon, is still a mechanism that can do so much and no more. It shoots—yes—but it can't shoot in four directions at once. As matters stand now, each of us has one chance in four of reaching you. Yes, one of us will die."

"That baby will be you," Kimball said slowly.

"So be it, then." Cranford shrugged. "Even so, I'm well upholstered. With an even chance your bullet will slash through some fatty part of my anatomy. I promise this. You will fire no more than once, Sergeant."

Kimball allowed himself a meager smile. "You're getting frantic, Cranford. Desperate men take desperate chances when they are defending something very big. Something like a clever, carefully planned scheme for smuggling diamonds into this country. Pick up the phone."

Cranford's flabby lips parted and he exhaled sharply. "I thought you were onto us. Pick up the phone yourself."

Kimball watched the other three. They were tense and ready to leap. He knew he could kill Cranford and perhaps get one of the others, but then he'd be attacked and unable to shoot. They'd kill him because they'd have to, now that he'd revealed his full knowledge of their crimes.

Cranford was right too. Kimball began feeling beads of sweat break out on his forehead. He sensed that the front door was locked and no help could be expected from that quarter. He gestured with his gun at the three men on either side of the desk.

"You three, line up against the wall."

None of them moved. Kimball slowly reached for his pocket. "We'll sweat it out then. Cranford, you gave the whole show away when you told me Wally Monroe had been at the store this morning and opened it up. I knew if you lied about that you must be hiding something. Are you interested in finding out how I knew you lied?"

Cranford smiled. "Your nerves, my boy, are gradually breaking. You know you can't kill all of us. But, if you like, I'll admit I'm interested. How did you know I lied?"

"Wally didn't take his keys. They were on the table beside his bed because he never intended to come here at all. He found diamonds imbedded beneath the thick bindings of those two books. Maybe he suspected; maybe he just took the books home to inspect them for his own pleasure. But he

found the stuff. You bought out an established and well-known book firm for the express purpose of using its name and reputation to get books through without their being carefully examined. Books, beneath the bindings of which were hidden small gems. Perhaps stolen or merely smuggled into the country."

"Your gun hand is trembling slightly," Cranford said in an oily voice.

"Pray it doesn't shake too much or I might pull the trigger," Kimball said. "Your man Holly was a heroin addict. He stole some of the gems and supplied himself with drugs he'd never have been able to afford unless he had access to something very valuable and easily disposable. He was shot so there would be no chance of his breaking down and talking. Wally Monroe found the gems and became worried. He walked around after leaving his home and finally decided to go to the police about the matter. But you discovered the books were missing, knew Wally had them and you sent part of your mob to waylay him, pitch him in front of a train, drop a bottle of poison into his pocket to make it look more like suicide, and—get those two books."

Cranford had fine lines beginning to furrow his face. His three men were tense, waiting for something to break and send them hurtling at this detective who had spoiled their profitable game.

Kimball went on. "Gerald Perry had nothing to do with this. You banked on his unsavory record to put at least some of the blame on him. One of your men phoned me, pretending to be Perry, and baited a trap for me. You wanted me to believe that Perry was up to something and come to his house. There your men were ready with a case of books to be hauled out and lend the illusion that Perry was getting rid of them. They even insinuated that Perry was behind their activities. But you had snatched or killed Perry. How am I doing, Cranford?"

The enormous man behind the desk said nothing but there was bitterness and worry in his eyes.

Kimball took a long breath. He was playing for time, hoping someone might come or Cranford and his three men would start wondering which of them would die before they got this detective.

"You were prepared to back up Perry's guilt by claiming he had stolen the necessary papers with which he claimed the case of books at the docks. That, if believed, would

have tied him in firmly and prevented any suspicion from being pointed your way. I asked you if I was doing well, Cranford."

"Your story is excellent," Cranford admitted. "Perry is alive. We're holding him because he might be useful. But you, my boy, your nerves are shot. How long do you think you can keep this up?"

"Long enough," Kimball said. He withdrew Wally's keys. "These are what put me on your trail, Cranford."

Kimball suddenly hurled the keys at Cranford's face. The big man was totally unprepared and went backwards, chair and all, just as Kimball had hoped and prayed.

The other three came to life. Any kind of spark would have put them into action. Kimball shot one of them in a vital spot. He dived across the big desk, landed beside Cranford who was struggling to untangle his fat arms and legs.

Kimball grabbed the phone wire and pulled the instrument down. He dialed, heard the dialing mechanism click back and he waited a fraction of a second. Then he fired upwards, at one of the men bending over the desk.

The gun muzzle was half an inch away from the telephone mouthpiece. The operator would hear the shot and send help.

Cranford tried to get one arm around the detective. Kimball smacked him with the gun muzzle, jumped up and felt a white hot burn through his side. He fired pointblank at one man, saw him fold and swiveled toward the other and the last of the quartette.

The man hastily threw his gun away and raised his hands.

Cranford got up slowly. He was slightly green in color.

"A clever lad," he said faintly. "You have nerves of steel. Of hardened steel, my boy. They never cracked and I've seen strong men break under a threat like the one I described. Shall I phone for the police now?"

"They'll be here." Kimball pressed a hand against his side. "What's the matter, fatty, are you in a hurry to die?"

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THE LINE-UP

(Continued from page 8)

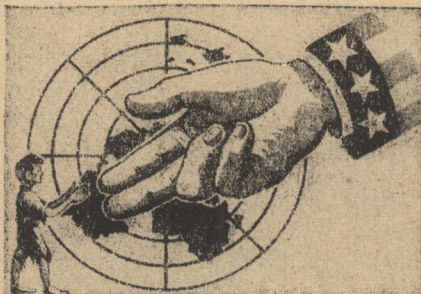
the family background as Sir John did, told a startling story.

He insisted that Sir John was a Rumanian-English boy whom he had met on the *Titanic*. His mother had been a snake dancer in a traveling circus and she was sending the boy to friends in America who also worked for a circus. According to Gore, the boys discussed switching identities, for the idea of circus life appealed to him.

When the *Titanic* struck the iceberg the Rumanian boy informed Gore that Murray had gone overboard and was dead. Then, with the ship sinking, they decided to chance clothes and identities. Gore then charged that the other boy tried to kill him with a mallet before he made for the lifeboats.

In any event, he, Gore, joined the circus in America and lived out his youth under an assumed name. But now he was back to claim what was rightfully his.

He even had the temerity to ask Sir John questions about their boyhood. Sir John was able to answer them. But Gore's trump card



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was to announce that Kennet Murray would prove Sir John an impostor by comparing their fingerprints with prints taken many years ago in a crude Thumbograph.

Oddly enough, Sir John leaped at the chance to make the test. His obvious eagerness startled Gore and brought complete confusion to the rest of the gathering, already befuddled by the convincing claims brought forth by each contestant.

Evidence of the Thumbograph

Murray quickly took the prints of Sir John and Patrick Gore, then stated that he would require about twenty minutes to compare them with the originals taken many years ago by the Thumbograph. He asked to be left alone, so the others retired from the room.

But before they all left Gore, sensing what Page and Burrows had already realized—that Murray's knowledge could be a dangerous thing because it made him a logical candidate for murder—gave the ex-tutor an ominous warning.

"I smell blood," he said. "You will have to be murdered."

It was a shocking prediction to make. Yet, not fifteen minutes later, death struck in the garden of the Farnleigh estate. And the victim was *not* Murray.

That was the signal for Dr. Gideon Fell to put in his appearance. Yet, even he did not realize at the time, that this was only the beginning of a macabre mystery in which black magic, an "impossible killing" and witchcraft were to be skilfully blended.

And Dr. Fell's problem was immediately complicated by the disappearance of the Thumbograph before it could be established who was the real Sir John. On top of that, Dr. Fell learned of a strange manuscript called "The Red Book of Appin" which contained information about weird black magic rites and which was also supposed to hold the

[Turn page]

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secret of imparting life to inanimate objects.

It was then that he decided to invade the attic of Farnleigh Close to see the mechanical automaton, The Golden Hag, of which he had already heard. The attic was isolated from the rest of the house and supposedly had not been entered for years. Yet, near the door he found a comparatively fresh half-eaten apple. He also came upon the strange crooked hinge on the attic door. And up in the attic was The Golden Hag, silently sinister now, but with a hideous secret inside her—a secret that was to bring the brilliant and intrepid Dr. Fell to the threshold of death.

"The Crooked Hinge," by John Dickson Carr, has drama, action, excitement, an unusual murder puzzle and a smooth, effortless style that makes it easy to read. Look forward to it in the next issue of DETECTIVE MYSTERY NOVEL MAGAZINE. And when you read it be sure you have plenty of lights on in the room and that all your doors and windows are locked. It's that kind of book. And along with it, you can expect a fine assortment of short stories and features.

FROM THE REVIEWS

IT IS seldom that a mystery novel receives the number of accolades that came from newspaper and magazine critics after the publication of "The Crooked Hinge." All over the country the book was hailed as an outstanding achievement. Out of the galaxy of favorable reviews we have selected just a brief cross-section.

New York Times: "John Dickson Carr is an unexcelled master in this field of creepy erudition, swift-moving excitement and suspense through atmosphere; and this book is a masterpiece of eerie skill."

Cleveland Press: "The Crooked Hinge" is the tightest puzzle that Dr. Fell thus far has unlocked; and he does it in the most goose-fleshing atmosphere that John Dickson Carr has thus far provided for him."

Saturday Review of Literature: "Witchcraft, a malevolent automaton, and an inexplicable killing seen by several at close range keep brain buzzing and hackles rising. Dash out and get it."

New Yorker: "All's fair and square."

Galveston Tribune: "A mystery story which is calculated to baffle the most canny reader."

New York Post: "Mr. Carr keeps things moving at a rapid pace. Good, scary reading for a dark stormy night."

Time: "Extremely neat puzzle involving mixed identity, murder and witchcraft in an English

village. Dr. Fell provides a surprising, ultra-tricky solution."

There is your evidence, fans, and we're sure when you finish reading "The Crooked Hinge" in our next issue you'll agree one hundred per cent with the reviewers we have quoted!

FROM OUR READERS

THE mailman has been bringing us very pleasant letters and, after spending many hours going through all of them carefully, we have finally selected two for quotation in this column. More will follow in coming issues.

Mrs. Muriel Eddy of Providence, Rhode Island, is one of our regular fans and she has taken time to pen a very interesting missive. She writes as follows:

Dear Editor: May I put in my two cents worth of comment on your Summer issue of **DETECTIVE MYSTERY NOVEL MAGAZINE**? I read all the stories it contained while swinging in a hammock on good old Cape Cod. No wonder I can hardly wait for the next issue containing my favorite fictional detective, Asey Mayo, the Codfish Sherlock, in "The Criminal C.O.D." I love all of Phoebe Atwood Taylor's novels about Asey Mayo.

John Dickson Carr's full-length novel, "To Wake the Dead" in your Summer issue had such a surprising twist at the end that I almost fell out of my hammock! I'd imagined everything about that mysterious "black stone" except the truth. It was one swell yarn!

"Moon over Murder," "Illegal Eagle" and "Don't Omit Flowers" were all fine, full of sur-
[Turn page]

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prise twists. I enjoyed the illustrations, too, because they didn't give away the plot of the stories, as some illustrations do.

I think this department for readers to have a word with you is an excellent idea. Both my husband and I are avid readers and writers, but we've yet to pen that earth-shaking story! Bye now.

Please accept our very sincere thanks, Mrs. Eddy, for your letter. Your "two cents worth" is worth much more than that. Your good will and the good will of all our readers is of prime importance at all times to us. One warm, friendly letter such as yours is more valuable than a pot of gold or a new 1948 automobile. We're glad you liked "To Wake the Dead" by Carr. Great as that story was, you're in for another real surprise in "The Crooked Hinge," an almost unbelievably good yarn. Just wait and see.

Now here's another very interesting letter from Eugene Calewaert of Detroit, Michigan:

Dear Editor: Just a few words of praise on the Fall issue of DETECTIVE MYSTERY NOVEL MAGAZINE. The book-length novel "The Criminal

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C.O.D." by Phoebe Atwood Taylor was really an interesting and well written story, packed with suspense from the beginning to its conclusion. I read it in its entirety in one evening, together with the short stories which were also very interesting.

I also like the previews of future novels which appear in "The Line-Up." This in itself makes an interesting bit of reading before starting the magazine's contents. Am looking forward to reading other novels under somewhat the same line as the plot which was the basis of "The Criminal C.O.D."

As for "Folio on Florence White" which was previewed in the Fall issue, it looks like it is going to be a very interesting novel. Best wishes for your continued success.

Thank you, Eugene, for your comments about our magazine. We're happy to number you among our select group of fans and also pleased to learn that you enjoyed the Asey Mayo story. By the time you see this column you will have read "Folio on Florence White" and we're betting you found it one of the most arresting stories you've come across, both in point of story value and the unique way we had our printer set it up in our magazine.

It's time to close up shop until we convene in the next issue. So we'll say good-bye for just a little while and hope that all of our readers will feel free to write whenever they have the urge to do so. All letters are welcome. Send them to: The Editor, DETECTIVE MYSTERY NOVEL MAGAZINE, Best Publications, Inc., 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. Thanks, everybody!

—THE EDITOR

NEXT ISSUE'S NOVEL



THE CROOKED HINGE

A Dr. Gideon Fell Mystery

By JOHN DICKSON CARR



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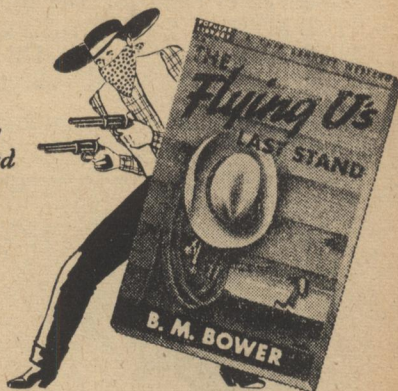


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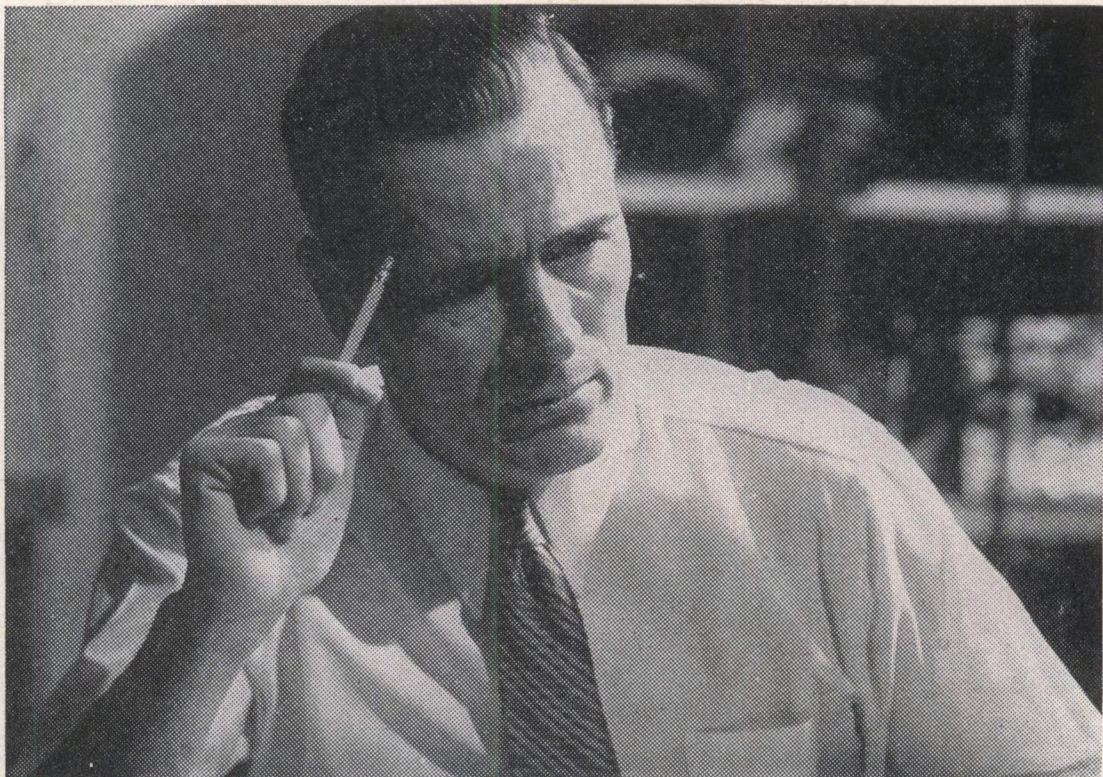
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