

EDGAR WALLACE

mystery magazine

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OCTOBER

**EDGAR
WALLACE**

Bill of
Scotland Yard

**ARTHUR
KENT**

Last Action

BILL KNOX

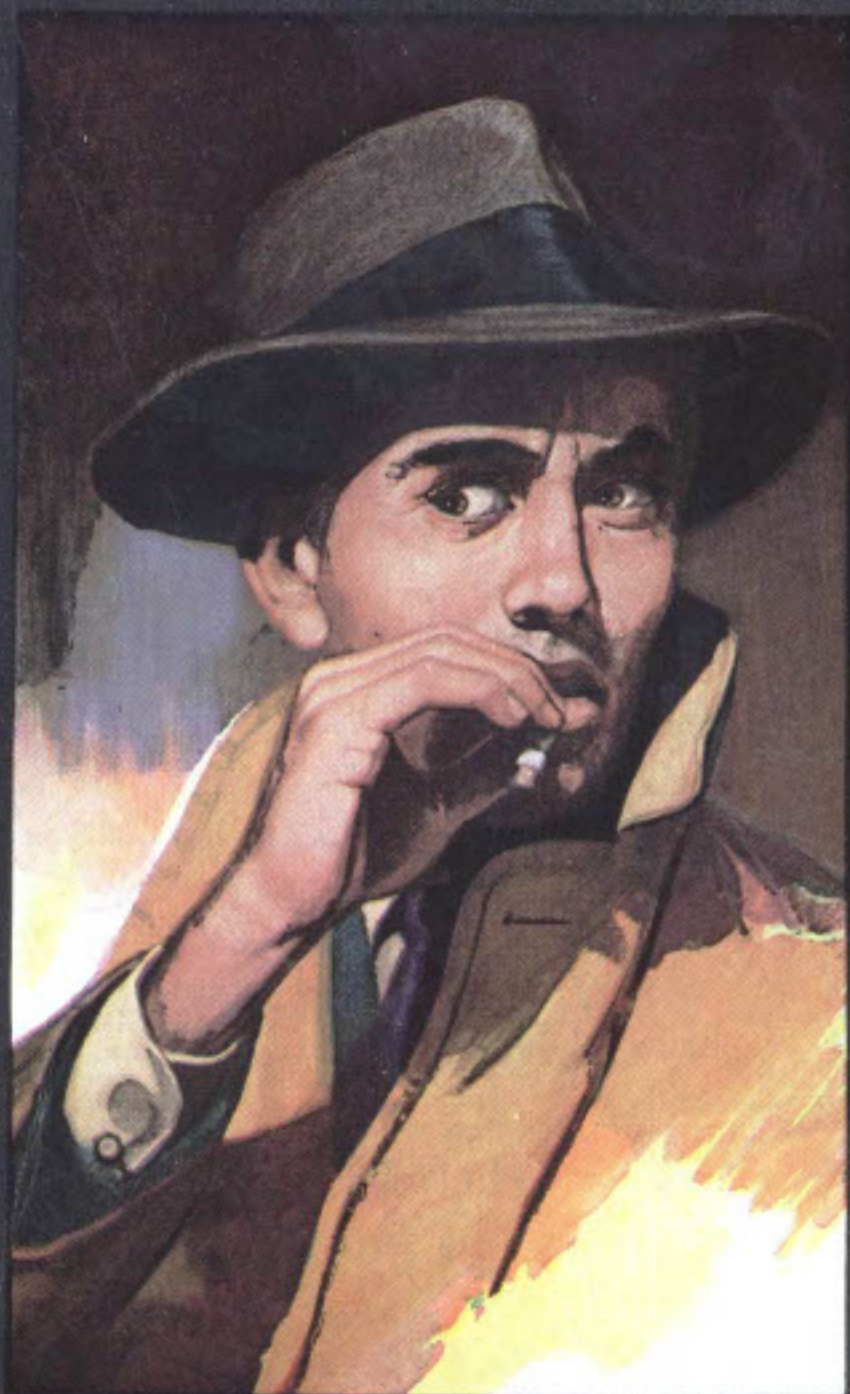
The
Service Flat

**REX
DOLPHIN**

Angel

J. T. LANG

Faithful
Servant





EDGAR WALLACE

Born London, 1875

Died Hollywood, 1932

He knew wealth and poverty, yet had
walked with kings and kept his bearing.

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"I don't know whether you have any valuables with you," said Detective Inspector Lander, "but in any case we've told Bill to keep an eye on you."

**Edgar
Wallace**

BILL OF SCOTLAND YARD

This story was originally published under the title "Bill and the Tappers" by George Newnes in 1930. It has not appeared in any other edition since then, and we feel sure that all keen Wallace readers will be glad of the opportunity to add it to their collection.

THERE was a very clever detective at Scotland Yard called Bill. Bill was driving through Berkshire on a wet and rather stormy evening and came to a little house that had been built in the midst of a pine wood. It was one of four houses in the neighbourhood that Bill was anxious to see. In this house there lived a florid man called Mr. Crollin. He sat at the open window of his dressing-room, for it was a warm evening, and from time to time he addressed his pretty wife, who was drinking a cup of tea. "Sooner or later they're pretty sure to get Wisdom and then it's you and me for a nice long world voyage, Lou."

"You and I," she corrected, being something of a purist.

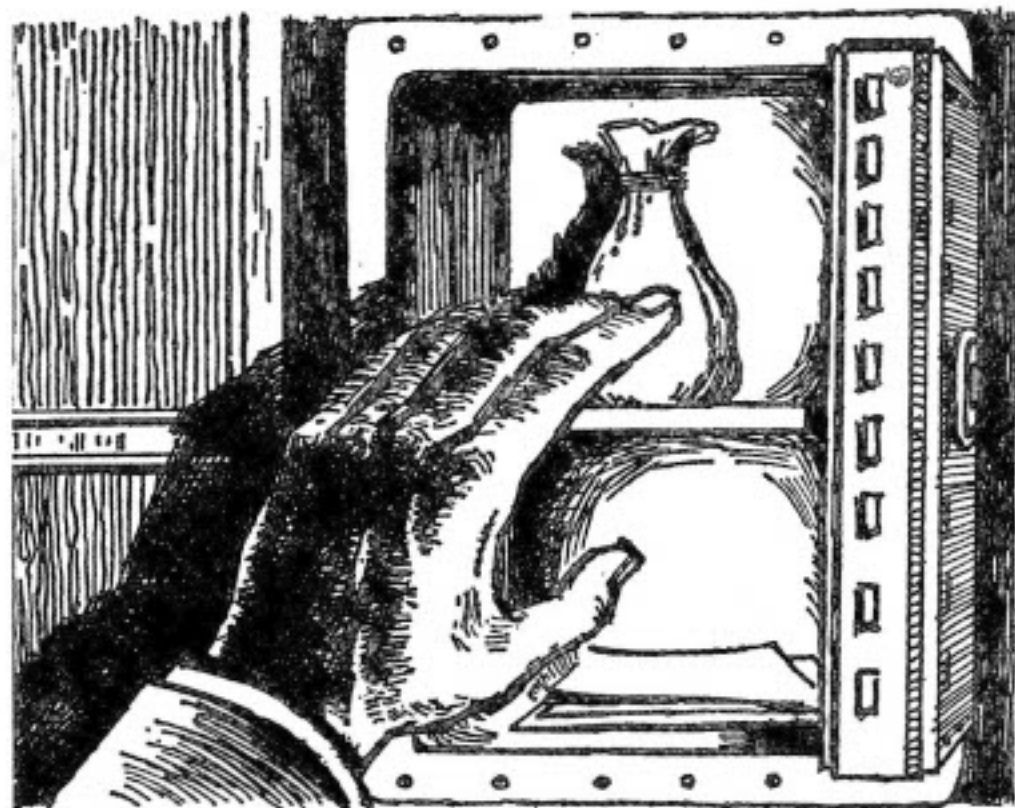
He was absurdly proud of her erudition and purred gratefully. "That's so; you and I *and* me. This Scotland Yard Art isn't all boneheaded. A fellow in town, Joe Price, the con man told me, they've got a whale of a fellow up at the Yard, Bill somethin'. I've heard about this fellow from a boy that's workin' the Paris hotels."

"Oh, Bill," she wailed wearily. "There's always a Bill somewhere. There was a Bill at the O. and E. so darned clever he couldn't find his latchkey." There was an esoteric jest here. Mr. Crollin laughed heartily. This Lou of his had been an

operator on the Oriental and European Telegraph Company when he first met her and introduced her to a wider and more expensive life. She had left ten minutes ahead of the City detective who came to arrest her for utilizing information that came across the wire for her own private enrichment.

She saw Crollin crane his head out of the window. "Saw a car pass the drive," he explained, "then the engine stopped. Hello!"

Bill was walking carelessly up the gravel drive with an empty



petrol can. Lou at her husband's side saw the intruder. "You'd better go down and see what's happened."

Mr. Crollin obeyed. He came back in ten minutes. "Just run out of petrol, that's all," he explained, "and -"

Lou had a small instrument at her car and now raised a warning finger. "D.H.97 coming through," she said. "Now for three hours' hell's dullness."

They forgot all about Bill, for at 11.47 that night Mr. John Mortimer confided his secret to the air.

Scotland Yard had not been concerned when Senator Granite sailed from New York to France, taking with him eighty thousand dollars in negotiable stock. And the European press hardly commented on the circumstances under which he was relieved of his wealth, although it was particularly interesting to the student of criminology. Nobody knew that the Senator carried this money except the Bank of France and Mr. Granite himself. Yet within an hour of his arrival in Paris the money was taken.

When Sir Hubert Loam reached his house in Berkeley Square after a profitable stay in New York, he found a young man waiting to receive a cheque on account of a further deal he had concluded on board the *Queen Elizabeth*. The cheque was an open one and he handed it without hesitation to the representative of the North and South Land Syndicate. It was presented at the bank and paid. But the money never went to the Land Syndicate, nor had the suave clerk waiting in Sir Hubert's drawing-room the slightest association with known syndicates of any kind. That was when the English police began to take notice.

There followed almost at once the case of Mrs. Johnson Jones of Pittsburg. She lost exactly ten thousand pounds worth of jewels which she had brought to England to be re-set.

"The whole thing is quite extraordinary," said Inspector Lander, chief of the Confidence Branch at Scotland Yard. "All these people travelled by sea, but in different ships and by different lines. None of them is talkative, they made no friends on the voyage. Yet in some way the gang that worked the swindles knew everything about them that was worth money. This is a job for Bill."

* * *

Two months later came John Mortimer, by the s.s. *America*. The ship was delayed by fog and he arrived on Saturday afternoon. But life was so good and London so homey that business hours did not worry him.

A new passenger had joined the ship at Cherbourg. John noticed him casually at lunch, a grey-haired man with a dark saturnine face; and later when he was finishing his packing the stranger appeared.

"I'm sorry to bother you, Mr. Mortimer. . . ." He handed the confident young passenger a card. "Detective Inspector Lander," read John. "I joined the boat at Cherbourg,"

explained the detective apologetically. "I don't know whether you have any valuables aboard. . . ." (He gave John Mortimer the impression that he knew very well.) "Well, in any case . . . we've told Bill to keep an eye on you."

"Thank you." Mr. Mortimer's tone was sardonic. He was of the age when taking a dispassionate view of humanity he could find none more efficient than himself.

A few hours later John stood on the stone balcony of his bedroom at the Admiralty Hotel, looking out over the London he had not seen these eight years. Before him lay the broad stretch of the Embankment and beyond that the pageantry of the Thames. The wintry sunset was all rose and russet and the river stared up at him with a reflection of a paling sky. Two tugs abreast swept downstream, their port lights greening the water. A police launch stole from the shadows of moored barges on the farther shore and swung in a wide circle towards its neat pier by Scotland Yard. The buildings were already glittering with lights and against the western sky the clock tower of Parliament was sharply defined.

The telephone rang sharply and regretfully he left the balcony to answer it. "A young lady to see you sir," said the voice at the other end. "Miss Monica Bradley, from a Mr. Stanford."

Of course, he had forgotten his secretary. "Ask her to come up to the sitting-room, please," he said.

He went to the wall safe near the head of the bed. It was hidden behind a sliding oak panel. All the big suites at the Admiralty Hotel had their private safes. That fact was widely advertised and had determined the hotel for many a traveller in John Mortimer's position. Nine little keyholes ran down one edge of the steel door, but only two locks operated and Mortimer had the two keys in his pocket. With every new guest the combination was changed by one official at the hotel. It seemed an ingenious idea to John Mortimer, who had reason for desiring security. He checked that the bedroom door was securely fastened on the inside and then went into the sitting-room.

Almost immediately there was a knock on the door and he opened it to let in the girl. She was a head shorter than he, and he was pleasantly surprised to discover that she was very pretty. Two grave grey eyes met his.

"So you're from Mr. Stanford?" he smiled. "It's very kind of you, Miss Bradley, to come on Saturday afternoon. I thought English people didn't work after one o'clock?"

She smiled. "This English person works seven days a week," she said. She put her handbag on the table and took off her gloves. She was very self-possessed, capable, he imagined, and better dressed than he might have expected.

"I must admit," he said, "that I had quite forgotten that I had cabled Mr. Stanford for a secretary." He was very bland, very much the business man. She had met his type before but never observed such obvious qualities. Tall, good looking, immensely confident. She liked him.

He looked at his watch, and she anticipated his question when she said, "I was expecting that you'd wish me to work late, Mr. Mortimer." She took out a notebook and pencil. "The typewriter will come up later," she said, and looked at him expectantly.

There was a lot to be done: letters to the Rajah's representative in Paris, cables which he should have sent an hour ago to announce his safe arrival. Yet he was rather too full of his present emotions to settle down to work. "Mr. Stanford is our agent," he said. There was a hint of patronage in his tone that went well with his youthfulness. "I haven't told Mr. Stanford what has brought me to Europe but it's rather an important matter."

She nodded. "I know. You're bringing some emeralds for the Rajah of Rajpuna."

He stared at her open-mouthed. He was indeed exporting emeralds from New York which might have sounded strange to Hatton Garden. But John Mortimer and his partner had been making this collection for fifteen years, at least his senior partner had, for he was a member of one of the most famous firms of jewellers in New York. Some of the stones had been in the possession of old Colonial families for a hundred years.

"How on earth did you know that?" he asked in dismay.

She smiled again, and she really had a lovely smile. "Probably your partner cabled Mr. Stanford," she said, and then almost carelessly, "I suppose you have put the stones in a safe place? Eight hundred thousand dollars worth of emeralds are rather a responsibility, aren't they?"

He looked at her suspiciously. "They are in a *very* safe place," he said.

She nodded. "Naturally," she said. There was something in her tone that was faintly irritating. Before he could properly analyse that particular inflection she went on, "You're expecting to meet the Rajah's agent in London, Mr. Konig, aren't you?"

He was ruffled, some of his pleasant mystery had been dissipated.

"I wrote to him in London and in Paris," he said shortly, "but I guess he must be in Paris, for I haven't heard from him."

"You will," she said, her thoughtful eyes fixed on his.

He stared at her. "Of course I shall," he said with a touch of asperity in his voice.

"Then that's all right." Her smile was altogether disarming. She smoothed her notebook flat and looked at him enquiringly, but he was still not in a mood to work. "You rather took my breath away. Then London does that," he said. "It's like coming back to a strange world. What a law-abiding little place this is! It may make you happy to know that Bill is looking after me. I presume Bill is a detective, so if he comes while I'm out you might order some beer for him - if he drinks beer."

"Bill drinks nothing else," she said. He was graciously amused.

"I can tell you I shouldn't have been walking through New York with all those infernal emeralds except I had a Burns man walking on either side of me and another behind. By the way," he said, "do you know whether Stanford heard from Konig?"

She shook her head. "I'm pretty sure he hasn't," she said. "He doesn't even know that there is such a man."

Whether it was the exhilaration of finding himself in his native city or from the sheer joy of finding somebody with whom he could talk and who shared his secret, or whether it was for some reason which he could not understand, he babbled on.

"We didn't tell Stanford; you see, this was rather a big deal and the fewer people who knew about it the better." And then suddenly his face went blank again. "But how did you know - about the emeralds, I mean? Renstein couldn't have been so foolish -"

"All men are foolish," she said quietly.

He felt that if he spoke he would only say something extraordinarily inane.

"You didn't bring your own secretary, Mr. Mortimer?"

"That seems fairly obvious," said John as coldly as he could. "I don't have a woman secretary."

She was staring through the open French windows on to the murky skyline. "Women are not so efficient, I suppose?" she asked.

"Women talk," said John crushingly. "When they should be working they - er - are chattering."

To his surprise she nodded her agreement. "About men," she said. "That's strange, isn't it? Men only talk about themselves."

He might have said something very sharp if he could have thought of anything to say. Instead he compromised by dictating three cables, two of which were absolutely unnecessary, and two rather dignified letters which contained nothing of what he wanted to say.

He cleared his throat. "I think that will be all," he said. She put down her pencil and looked up at him.

"I'm afraid I have annoyed you," she said, "and secretaries who annoy principals come to a very sticky end. You see, I'm not used -" she stopped suddenly.

"You are not used - ?" he suggested, and his suspicions grew when he saw how confused she was. Fortunately, the typewriter arrived at that moment and he left her to her work.

She was half way through when the telephone rang in the sitting-room. It was Mr. Konig.

"Yes, I've just arrived, Mr. Konig. You got my cable?"

"Coming right along," said a thick and hearty voice.

"Good. I'm in five-oh-seven," said John, and replaced the receiver.

"Do you know Mr. Konig?" asked Monica Bradley. Now it is very difficult for a pretty girl to be wholly impertinent. John Mortimer's intelligence told him that this was a question he might well have answered more or less offensively. The sentimentalist in him produced a fairly coherent reply.

"No, he has never been to America, and I have not met him," he said a little stiffly. He was a most easy-going young man but he objected to being laughed at, and that this very pretty and capable girl was laughing at him was most obvious to John Mortimer. He wished Stanford had shown a little more discrimination in his choice. An older woman would surely have been more suitable. John Mortimer was in favour of youth, but he was also a man who for seven days had allowed his self-importance to grow in proportion to his responsibility, and this chance-found girl had made him feel most astonishingly small. He was a little alarmed, too. This was not a moment when he required the association of unusual people.

"I suppose you are Mr. Stanford's confidential secretary?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No, he has never confided anything to

me, not even his love affairs," she said, with such calmness that he almost forgot to be shocked by this outrageous disclaimer.

"I thought Mr. Stanford was an elderly man?" he began.

She had a most exasperating trick of interrupting him.

"Eighty, or possibly ninety. But even quite ancient men have love affairs." And she returned to her typing before he could think of a suitable admonition.

He retired to the bedroom and closed the door, and he was not in a pleasant mood to receive the lady whom Monica brightly announced by tapping on the door.

"A lady? Who is it?"

"Miss Konig."

John Mortimer was a little staggered. He had not endowed the Rajah's agent with a family, and certainly not with as attractive a family as the slim, rather pale, sad-faced girl who greeted him when he came out.

"My father is not here yet." She spoke with a slightly foreign accent. "He told me he would be here, that I must call at six." She looked at the jewelled watch on her wrist and was apparently embarrassed. Mortimer noticed that she glanced from time to time at his temporary secretary. Miss Monica Bradley was annoyingly interested in the personality of the visitor and it appeared that the interest was mutual.

"This is my - um - secretary," introduced John awkwardly.

Miss Konig inclined her head slightly and took a longer look at the girl, who sat with folded hands before her typewriter. And in that glance Mortimer could have sworn he saw half recognition.

"Indeed," said Miss Konig politely, and then, "Have I not seen you at some time? Did you not call at my house?"

Monica shook her head.

"Somewhere . . . a house we had in the country . . . I was at the window when you came. My brother saw you."

Monica shook her head again. "You are mistaken," she said coolly, and John Mortimer knew that she was lying. He saw the visitor give the typist a searching scrutiny and saw the suspicion that lived and died in her eyes and the slight shrug of her shapely shoulders. And then, before John could speak, there came a rap at the door and he opened it to find the bluff and hearty Mr. Konig.

He was a little man, rather stout and bald. Two humorous blue eyes shone behind the thick lenses of his horn-rimmed spectacles.

"A-a-h! My frent Mr. Mortimer," he boomed, gripping John heartily by the hand. And then he grinned round at his daughter. "This is the good fellow, eh? He comes to rob your poor father. Worse than the fellows who steal the money from the poor silly peoples who travel on ships." He drew up a chair with a thump, sat down on it, drew out a big notecase which he slammed on the table. It was, John saw, packed tightly with notes.

"The Rajah comes tonight, by plane from Paris," he explained. He spoke rapidly. "You understant. I must have my business before he comes or I make no profit. The sum is a hundred and seventy-three thousand, which I pay - " And then his eyes fell upon the girl typist watching him curiously and John saw his brows meet. "Why, young lady, I think I have met you? Ha!"

"So your aunt was saying," said Monica genially.

"My aunt - ?"

"Your daughter - I'm sorry." She was very apologetic.

"Did you not call at my house once - for - petrol?" He was going to say something else but checked himself.

"Miss Bradley works for Mr. Stanford, our London agent."

Konig's face cleared. "Ah yes, Stanford." And then quickly, "He is here?"

"He left for Australia last night," said the girl gravely, and Konig's jaw dropped.

"Australia?" incredulously. "My dear young lady - " and then he laughed. "You confuse me and make me feel a fool," he chuckled. He took a gold cigarette case from his pocket. "Indeed you are a remarkable young lady." He pushed the case towards John, who took a cigarette, and then to the girl who shook her head.

"I never smoke in business hours. Poor Senator Granite had one of your cigarettes and what happened to him? Don't light that, Mr. Mortimer," she said sharply, as John was in the act of striking a match.

Konig glared at her for a second and then, turning, ran to the door and flung it open. The two Scotland Yard men who were waiting found him rather a difficult handful, but Miss Konig went quietly in the hands of Monica Bradley. . . .

* * *

"Yes, I am Bill," said Monica demurely, when she saw her employer later that evening. "I suppose you'd call me a detective,

but really I only work out odd problems. The oddest problem of all was to discover how this little crowd cleaned up so easily.

"It was really very simple. They have a very powerful radio receiver at a house in Sunningdale, and Lou, alias Miss Konig and many other names, tuned in to the homeward bound trans-Atlantic liners and took down the private messages that were coming through to London. Sometimes she heard and wrote down hundreds without getting any profitable information, but occasionally she and her husband learned secrets which indiscreet people had confided to the ship's radio. It is a very simple matter to pick up any liner, did you know that? Once you have their code number the rest is simple.

"They got to know Granite was bringing money; they knew Loam was expecting a man to call for a cheque and that a rather wealthy and foolish old lady had radioed to a jeweller in London saying that she wanted her diamonds re-set. It was easy to intercept the message, and, in your case, a simple matter to get the genuine agent out of the way. For instance, Mr. Stanford is now in Paris with the real Mr. Konig, awaiting your arrival. After we, or rather I, located the receiving set at Sunningdale, we arranged to get duplicates of all the messages that were coming through. Naturally we had to guess who was to be the next victim, but that wasn't as difficult as you'd think. We didn't know exactly how we were going to deal with your case, but after you radioed for a secretary it was easier."

Mr. John Mortimer had recovered from his natural annoyance.

"I see," he said, "and you are the Bill who is supposed to be 'looking after' me?"

She nodded. "Well, keep at it," he said. "I want you to escort me to the Hotel safe when I deposit those infernal stones and then you can take me to a place where we can dine and dance."

Bill did not demur. Officially she was still on duty.

Her pointed fangs snapped within a thou of my throat as she leapt between us. Her eyes were the eyes of a devil-dog. *Angel*, he called her . . .

**Rex
Dolphin**

ANGEL

This is the third story by Rex Dolphin to appear in our pages and, following "The Phantom Guest" (EWMM No. 1) and "The Last Bandit" (EWMM No. 2), we are confident that it will need no recommendation to our regular readers.

THE bitch had always hated my guts, I knew.

Hated me from the moment Harry had rescued her from an unsentimental farmer who was about to have the snarling, unlovely and unwanted pup destroyed.

I'd said: "Come on, Harry. We don't want that ugly brute . . ." And she'd sensed my hostility, glared at me from yellow-green eyes that said she wished she were fully grown so that she could tear me apart.

That was when our mutual hate was born . . . and at the same time her love for Harry and his for her.

Angel, he called her. A fine name for a now mature mongrel bitch, mostly Alsatian with some mastiff blood and a dash of Labrador – as strong as they came and grey and black and savage as a jungle night. But with Harry, she crooned and fawned – she worshipped him, was dead jealous of anyone who went near him, especially me, his partner in crime and best pal.

And Harry thought the world of her, could do anything with her. Me, I never understood animals. Harry liked them better than human beings. I always thought that if it ever came to a toss-up between me and *Angel*, he'd choose her and throw me overboard . . .

I prayed he'd never be faced with that dilemma.

Me and Harry were buddies in crime. Oh, we were smooth. We planned things down to the last detail, even if it took months. Four or five jobs a year, nothing very big, but nothing that paid less than five grand – in hard cash. We never took jewellery or anything that had to be converted into money. We never went in for violence, never mixed with the underworld professionals. For one thing, those precautions meant we didn't get known to the police. For another, Harry just had to avoid exertion and nervous strain. He was overweight, and his heart wasn't too good.

Harry was the brains, I was the mechanic. Angel became our third partner, needing no extra cut. She was our scout, prowling the scene, scenting trouble a mile off.

This night I'm telling about, the job was specially easy. And it was a special night, too.

"The jackpot, Frank," said Harry. "Ten or fifteen thousand for a cert. And my last job. I'm getting too old for it, and anyway I'll have enough to see my years out."

Yes, Harry was getting tired of the game. However easy it looked, some risk and danger were always present, and it puzzled me why Harry, with his brains and organization genius – and above all his morbid fear of prison – had ever turned crook in the first place.

His dread of confinement – a kind of claustrophobia – was even stronger than his natural fear of death. He always said they'd never take him alive – somewhere in his pockets he carried a cyanide pill. Maybe it was even in the very same pocket as he kept the glucose sweets he chewed to give him energy and keep him relaxed while on a job.

It was a thought that always gave me cold shivers, those sweets and that death-pill. But Harry would laugh. One thing he'd never do was to swallow the pill by mistake, he said.

Tonight our job was a small car-breaker's and sales yard on the edge of a market town some twenty miles from London. Harry had found that the weekend takings were mildly sensational, mostly in plain cash and not banked till Monday mornings. Harry found these things out by posing as a freelance insurance broker during the day.

We became hikers for this job. We acted the part for a few days to get a nice tan. The act enabled us to mix with the yokels in the local inn, where we made friends with the car-dealer's caretaker.

Harry slipped a delayed-action knockout dose into the caretaker's last drink. The dose was carefully calculated to allow the man to get to his post, settle down, and sleep – sleep long enough for us to finish the job and get away.

Being hikers also meant we could carry tools in our haversacks without causing suspicion. Also that we could camp in a field not far from the car dump. Which we did.

We crept from the tent in rubber-soled shoes and made across the field. It was cold. There were a few sharp stars but no moon. Angel trailed at Harry's heels, her eyes savage yellow spots in the ground mist. Harry popped another glucose sweet into his mouth, gave one to the dog.

No lights in the dump, not even in the caretaker's hut. We reached the stout wire-link fence, with the junk cars parked close to it. There seemed acres and acres of cars, all shapes and sizes. With strong wire-cutters I removed a section of the fence and we crawled through.

I'm a sucker for cars, and we passed close to a beautiful old Lancia, only twenty-five quid. I ran my eye over it professionally. It could have been done up real nice for another twenty-five or so. I wanted to lift the bonnet and look at the engine, but Harry hissed: "Come on!" and Angel growled softly but with plenty of malice.

We walked through rows of cars till we reached a low annexe, the battery-charging shed, which we knew to be the weak spot. There probably wasn't a strong spot in the whole dump, which was a collection of sheds and brick buildings all thrown together in no sensible pattern, like pimples round a boil.

Harry had a key – he always had. The charging-room hummed with transformer noises and reeked of acid. Faint glows came from meterboards. At the end of the shed was another door. And Harry had another key. He locked the doors behind him each time, his regular routine, a precaution against surprise.

Angel was behind me, and I could feel her hate, but she wouldn't worry me while Harry was around. I shuddered to think what she might do if anything ever happened to Harry.

And so to the boss's office, dead centre, like the spider's part of a web. A slightly more difficult door this time, but Harry had the answer, as always. It was a tall office, with a skylight. Harry locked the door behind him, put the set of keys into his pocket.

Angel sat by the door, her ears erect.

* * *

I took a shaded inspection lamp from my haversack, plugged it into a socket. We went over to the safe. Harry had already described the safe to me – it was vintage, almost veteran, like some of the cars. It was small, and set in the wall, none too firmly or cleverly. Chip it out of the wall, lever it round, and the back – always the weakest part – would be soft cheese to my diamond-tipped drills.

I selected tools, and we started chipping gently, muffling the slight noise with part of an old blanket. It went well. No sound from Angel, except gentle breathing. She might have been asleep, but I knew better.

Harry chewed away at his sweets.

At last we finished with the brickwork. Now I fitted up telescopic crowbars and started levering. This part of the job was entirely mine, in view of Harry's weak heart. I'm a strong bloke, but lightweight. The sweat streamed from my scalp and armpits, and the strain pulled all my muscles. The safe budged a little, but not enough. No good, I wasn't heavy enough.

"Sorry, Harry," I gasped, "but I'll need some of that fifteen stone of yours."

Harry picked up another crowbar. Angel growled – not at anything outside, but at me. No reason for it. I hadn't done anything to annoy her, except just being alive. Maybe that was enough. Harry quietened her.

"All we need is your weight, Harry," I said. "Just lean against it, don't strain."

He got his bar into position, and we heaved. The safe grated against its cocoon of bricks, and bits of mortar broke loose and fell. I redoubled my efforts. Slowly she came round . . .

Then she stopped, and I saw that Harry wasn't leaning on his crowbar. He'd gone limp, and he gave a great shudder as he struggled for breath. His face became a bluey-grey pudding, and his eyes shouted of pain and fear. The crowbar clanged to the floor.

Harry's mouth twisted and stretched as he tried to speak, and before I could do anything he went down smack in a heap.

I dropped my bar and went to help him. A snarling fury leapt between us. Angel's shoulder hit me in the face and her pointed fangs snapped within a thou of my throat as she went through. I felt like a boxer who'd stopped one he hadn't seen coming, and I went spark out, but retained enough consciousness to roll out of her way.

She was berserk.

Harry just lay there. He wasn't out, I could just see his eyes moving. His jaws started, too, but no words came out, just a strangled mess of noise. He looked almost rigid, but there was a little movement in one arm. He'd had a stroke, and it scared me stiff.

Angel sniffed around him, pawed him, grabbed his lapels in her teeth as though to lift him, all the time whining as if she was hurt herself. I got up slowly. Angel jumped so that she was between Harry and me. She snarled and slavered, her razor-edged teeth bared in a wolf-like grin.

I said: "It's all right, Angel. I only want to help. Boss sick, see?"

I moved forward, very slowly, sweating at every pore. Her eyes fixed themselves on me, waiting . . . I didn't like it one bit. All right, I was real scared. But I'd just got to get to Harry . . .

Her throat rasped, a low, menacing gurgle. Her ears were stiff, pointed forward, her coarse hair stood up. Her eyes were the eyes of a devil-dog. *Angel*, he called her!

I got within a yard of Harry. Then she sprang. Her teeth were on my throat. This was my lot. I beat her away frantically with my fists. Her jaws swung, and my whole arm caught fire as her teeth sank into my hand and almost went right through it.

I kicked her hard. She shuddered, but hung on, trying to drag me down. I kicked and kicked again, wildly . . . and with each kick she bit even deeper. She'll eat me alive, I thought . . .

There was a strangled noise from Harry. It must have meant something to Angel, for she loosed hold. I don't know what he thought of me in that moment, kicking his beloved dog, the creature I said he'd always favour if it came to a showdown . . .

My hand, streaming blood, dropped to my side. Angel backed away from me, making horrible noises, and again sat down by her master. Harry's hand made an attempt to stroke her, and in a few minutes she was settled. But her eyes, yellow-green and vicious, were fixed on me . . .

I got out a handkerchief and tried to bind my hand, but the blood kept oozing through the white. Meanwhile Harry, ever so painfully, managed to tip a few sweets from his pocket. He gave Angel one. She chewed it, paper and all. It seemed to calm her a bit.

What a spot to be in! My chewed-up hand was bad enough, might even lead to gangrene or tetanus and an amputation, but

stupid though it sounds, that was a minor consideration. The real trouble was, I couldn't help Harry in his desperate plight. I couldn't even get away myself – Harry had the keys. Maybe I could have broken my way out, but all the tools were near Harry, so was the door.

And to go near Harry was certain death – death from a devil in the shape of a one-man dog . . .

I watched Harry. I didn't know what good that could do, unless he got his voice back. My eyes met his. His eyes moved a little, his mouth tried to. I tried to talk to him, but Angel snarled every time, and I was so tensed with pain and fear that my voice stuck and I didn't make sense. I wasn't getting through to Harry, and he wouldn't have been able to answer, anyway.

His pocket with the keys was in the pool of light cast by the inspection lamp. I watched his stiff hand clawing at the outside of the pocket, ruffling the cloth. It was agony to see.

The tip of a key glittered, poking from the pocket . . . Harry got his hand under the hem of the jacket, lifted it slowly . . .

The keys slid part-way out. Harry gave a sudden jerk. The keys clattered to the floor. *Two inches from Angel's jaws!*

I looked at the keys, hypnotized by their glitter in the light-beam. They represented my arm, my freedom, Harry's freedom and maybe his life, too. But they were as far out of my reach as if they'd been orbiting round the moon.

Harry's stiff hand pushed another paper-wrapped sweet to Angel. His eyes tortured themselves looking at me.

Short of a miracle, I'd had it, Harry'd had it, and Angel'd had it. And all her stupid fault. This was jackpot night all right, but not for us.

I watched Angel, she watched me. I drowsed, but the danger and the pain in my hand kept me from going right off. Angel looked as if she was drowsing, too, but that was just her way, the treacherous bitch . . .

I was still watching her when the cops came. The P.C.s grabbed me. The inspector walked over and looked at Harry and Angel. He prodded Harry with his toe. Harry stirred.

The inspector turned to me. "What's the matter with you then, chummy? Why didn't you get away? The keys are lying there . . ."

I laughed, almost hysterically. "That bloody bitch stopped me –"

He put his polished shoe on Angel. I tensed, but didn't warn

him. Why shouldn't a blasted copper get the same treatment from her as I did?

"That quite ordinary bitch," he said, "has been dead about four hours. Looks like your friend poisoned her so that you could get away."

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"You don't understand human nature, Thorpe," said Harrison Potter. "Gilbey is just the man we can trust. As you say, he has no initiative, and initiative is one thing a criminal needs . . ."

J. T. Lang

FAITHFUL SERVANT

J. T. Lang is a writer of long experience in many different fields. Where thriller fiction is concerned, he was for many years a regular contributor to the Sexton Blake series, while more recently, being a Lancastrian, he has contributed to Granada TV's "Coronation Street". He says: "I also seem to be one of Holland's favourite serial writers. De Geillustreerdre recently sent a writer and photographer to do a feature about me . . . about one of me."

THE company secretary looked worried as he entered the office of the managing director. He was a thin and anxious man, in contrast with his chief, who was stout and red-faced and prided himself that he allowed nothing to disturb him.

"Yes, Thorpe?"

"I've brought the wages cheque for your signature, Mr. Potter."

Harrison Potter took the cheque from him and signed his name above that of the secretary, which was already inscribed. The sum stated was large, for Potter and Partners was a prosperous little company. Harrison Potter admired the sweep of his signature and then looked up inquiringly.

"What's bothering you, Thorpe?" he said.

"It's - er - about the method of collection, Mr. Potter," Thorpe explained slowly. "I was - er - wondering if I shouldn't take a taxi and go round to the bank myself . . ."

Potter sighed and leaned back in his chair.

"Thorpe, you know our security arrangements. They were carefully worked out on lines advised by the police. Each week the wages cash is collected at a different time, by a different person. So that anyone with criminal intentions isn't able to familiarize himself

with our habits."

"Yes, sir."

"We worked out a rota. Every person with a responsible position in the office takes his turn to do the job. Now who's on the rota this week?"

"That's just the trouble, sir. It's Gilbey."

"Very well then. I'll send for Gilbey."

Thorpe spoke hurriedly before Harrison Potter could flick the switch of the inter-com on his desk.

"Is Gilbey responsible, sir? That's what I'm asking myself."

"How do you mean? Desmond Gilbey's been with us thirty years."

Thorpe eased his thin neck in his collar.

"Thirty years," he said indignantly. "And Gilbey is practically in the same position in which he started! The man has no drive, no initiative, and it has been quite impossible to promote him. And then there are his habits, sir. Besides being lazy and unambitious, he drinks. He spends practically all his free time in public houses."

"I think I'd do the same if I was in Gilbey's position," said Potter. "He pigs it in one room. His wife left him years ago because of his idleness. Gilbey's a failure, and I should think he's resigned to it by this time."

"Well, sir, is he the man to be trusted with our payroll . . . several thousand pounds? I mean to say, a man with no hope, no prospects, not even the expectation of a pension, and coming up to the time when we shall have to dismiss him . . ."

Harrison Potter smiled in a superior kind of way.

"You don't understand human nature, Thorpe. Gilbey is just the man we *can* trust. As you say, he has no initiative, and initiative is one thing a criminal needs. Gilbey simply hasn't the imagination to appreciate the fortune he will be carrying in his briefcase, nor the brains to work out a method by which he could keep it for himself."

He touched the switch, spoke into the inter-com.

"Send Mr. Gilbey in to me."

Desmond Gilbey came in hurriedly and nervously, dusting the cigarette ash off his wrinkled waistcoat. The red veins in his flabby face revealed a dissipated nature as well as a weak one. His nervousness conveyed recognition of his own unimportance.

"You wanted to see me, sir?"

"Yes, Gilbey," said Potter. "I should like you to take this

cheque and your briefcase, and go to the bank and collect the cash for the wages. As you know, it's a task we pass around the office in the interests of security. Of course, we only send responsible people, and now it's your turn. I hope you appreciate our confidence in you."

"Why, yes, sir," said Desmond Gilbey. "Thank you very much. Do I . . . er . . . take a taxi?"

"No, Gilbey. That would defeat the whole object of the exercise. Walk through the town in a perfectly normal way, by any route that suits you. Behave as though your case contained nothing more important than a pair of kippers for your supper. Understand?"

"I do, sir. And if I may say so, I think it's a very clever idea."

Thorpe sniffed as Gilbey hurried out.

"I wouldn't mind betting that he calls in a public house on his way back from the bank."

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Harrison Potter calmly. "For once Mr. Gilbey's bad habits have my approval. What could look more natural?"

Desmond Gilbey had returned to his desk, the cheque in his breast pocket. He took out his battered old briefcase and emptied it of its contents – some office documents, long out of date, and a couple of racing newspapers, together with a quarter-of-a-pound of bacon he had bought on his way to work that morning.

Before he left he picked up the telephone on his desk and dialled a number. He spoke softly and briefly as soon as he had a reply.

"It's today."

He put the receiver down, waited a moment, glancing around to convince himself that no-one was near at hand. Then he dialled another number and he spoke again.

"It's today."

* * *

Desmond Gilbey had entered the bank carrying a very thin briefcase in his hand. When he emerged the briefcase was fat and under his arm. No one took any notice of him, an overweight, shuffling figure with a patch on one of his shoes. His face wore the dull, vacant expression which was habitual with him.

He walked the length of two streets, and then he pushed open the swing door of a public house, the *Rose and Crown*, and now perhaps a gleam of interest showed on his face, for these were the surroundings in which he felt at home – even happy. There was a

long old-fashioned bar with gleaming mirrors behind it and stools arranged along its length, and one or two scarred wooden tables with ashtrays about the big room.

Gilbey hesitated, and a look of annoyance came to his face. He was looking towards the barmaid – a bleached-haired young woman with large blue eyes with dark rings under them, full lips, and two chins, both of them weak.

She had not spotted Gilbey, for she was interested in the bright conversation of another customer. He was a man of about thirty, with large teeth over which his mouth never completely closed. He had a thin line of black moustache. His hair was black and thick and arranged in careful waves, and he wore a check suit that made itself be seen.

Gilbey sat down at one of the tables, scraping his chair as he did so, setting his briefcase on the table beside him. The barmaid heard the scraping chair and looked round. She started, and flashed a dazzling smile.

“Good morning, Mr. Gilbey,” she called. “The usual?”

Gilbey nodded, and a few moments later she came to his side, bringing with her a glass of whisky on a tray which had a cloth hanging down around it. Her smile did not win a response from Gilbey.

“Who’s that fellow?” he said, with a nod towards the man the girl had just left. “Who is he, Shirley? Haven’t I seen you talking to him before?”

Shirley put her long red nails to her straw-coloured hair.

“Oh, him!” she said. “What do you want to know for?”

“Now, Shirley . . .”

She lowered her tray to the table and bent over him, serious for a moment.

“You don’t want to take any notice of him,” she said. “That’s only Fred Kerr. He comes in here regular. We have to be civil, you know.”

“Not too civil,” said Gilbey gruffly. “I’ve seen you with him before. You didn’t ought to do it, Shirley. You can’t trust them fellows.”

Shirley heard him out, listening to him gravely, looking him in the eyes, and she nodded as she took up her tray and straightened herself up.

“You don’t have to worry about him, Des,” she said. “You should know that. Everything all right, love?”

He smiled gratefully.

"Everything all right," he said warmly.

She left him, and a few moments later he finished up his drink, tucked the briefcase under his arm and went out.

* * *

He walked down Brinton Street, where the dome of St. Paul's was briefly in view, and turned into one of the quiet City alleys which might, or might not, have given him a short cut back to the office. There was another public house at the end which Gilbey sometimes used.

He never reached the pub. He was halfway along the deserted alley-way when there was a sudden rush of feet from one of the shadowed doorways.

Gilbey clutched his briefcase and turned. Two men were close upon him. He opened his mouth to cry out, but he made no sound, for he was struck sharply over his bare grey head from behind. He sank without a murmur towards the ground, but before he reached it the briefcase was plucked away from him.

The men were off, as quickly as they had come, darting through the open door of a warehouse as if they knew exactly where they were going. Desmond Gilbey groaned and lay still.

The attack had been brief and efficient, but it had been seen. Two other men had just entered the far end of the alley and stood a second, rigid, before they shouted and started to run forward. By the time they reached Gilbey, the men who had struck him down had vanished – with the briefcase.

A few moments later the alley was crowded and Desmond Gilbey was sitting up and rubbing his head.

* * *

At the police station the inspector was unpleasant to Gilbey at first, when he discovered he was not badly hurt. A police doctor had examined the victim's head. He had found a large swelling which was soft and painful to the touch, but had decided that it was better left uncovered; he did not even apply a plaster.

One of the questions which the police inspector shot at Desmond Gilbey was a very pertinent one.

"If you knew that you were carrying a large sum of money, why did you go down that deserted alley-way? It isn't even your shortest way back to the office."

Gilbey looked nervous, and glanced up at Harrison Potter, the managing director, who had arrived promptly in his Jaguar after being summoned from the office.

"Go on, Gilbey," said Potter encouragingly. "Answer the officer."

"You told me to choose my own way back from the bank, sir," Gilbey reminded him. "Ferrers Court seemed just as good as any other way. And - er - there's a little bar at the end of it, the *Wilbury Arms*, and I thought . . ."

Harrison Potter laughed. He could afford to laugh; he was insured.

"You thought you'd have a little drink before you came back to the office?" he said genially. "All right, man, I don't blame you. But you mustn't keep anything back that might help the police."

The police inspector tapped Potter on the arm and drew him aside. He nodded in the direction of Gilbey, who sat up dazedly in his chair, touching his head.

"You don't suppose he had anything to do with it?" the inspector asked softly.

"Gilbey?" said Potter. "Good lord, no. He hasn't the brains. Besides, he's been with me thirty years."

"He doesn't seem to have put up much of a fight," commented the inspector. "He was just dazed, hardly hurt at all."

"That would be enough, wouldn't it?" commented Mr. Potter. "I'm afraid Gilbey isn't the stuff heroes are made of. Nor master criminals either. Believe me, inspector, Gilbey's all right."

The police inspector returned to continue questioning Gilbey.

"Could you give me a description of the men who attacked you?" he asked.

"I only saw one of them."

"Could you describe him? I don't suppose you recognized him, did you? I mean to say, have you seen anyone like him hanging about?"

Gilbey hesitated, staring into space. For a second a gleam of something like malice showed in his eyes.

"Now you mention it," he said, "I believe I might have seen this fellow before. I've been all muddled, since they hit me, but it's coming back to me now. I'm sure I've seen him in the *Rose and Crown*."

"What was he like?" demanded the inspector eagerly.

Gilbey spoke with deliberation.

"He had a lot of black wavy hair, and one of them little moustaches, like a black caterpillar. A most objectionable chap, he is, with teeth like tombstones. I believe I've heard his name. Someone said he was called Fred Kerr, or something like that."

"Fred Kerr . . ." said the inspector. "Thank you very much, Mr. Gilbey."

"Can I go back to the office now?"

Harrison Potter intervened.

"Don't you worry about the office, Gilbey. We'll have to get along without you for once. You go off home and take the rest of the day off."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Potter," said Desmond Gilbey.

* * *

He did not, however, return to his dark little room. Soon after leaving the police station he was back in the bar of the *Rose and Crown*, nourishing himself with another Scotch. The girl called Shirley served him, and after she had got rid of some other customers, she returned to where Gilbey stood alone at the bar.

"Is it all right?" she asked nervously.

Gilbey replied with unusual confidence.

"Of course it's all right," he said. "How about you? Did you have any trouble?"

"No trouble at all," said Shirley proudly. "It worked a treat, just like you said it would. I might tell you I was frightened to death, switching them cases under the tray. Did everything go smooth at your end?"

"Smooth as the cloth of a billiard table," said Gilbey. He hesitated, touched the back of his head. "Them fellows hit me harder than they said they would, though. But I'll have my own back on them when they open that case they snatched. What have you done with the other one?"

"It's in my suitcase," said Shirley. She giggled. "All labelled for Paris! I can't believe it!"

"You'll believe it all right, when we get there," said Gilbey. "Like to take a look at the passport, just to convince yourself?"

Her eyes widened expectantly. Gilbey took a cautious glance around, took something from his breastpocket and slid it across to her. She opened it below the level of the counter.

"Mr. and Mrs. Henry Jones!" she read out. "And you and me

staring out there side by side! It's a pity it isn't a better picture of me, though."

She took a cloth and wiped down the bar and at the same time returned the passport to him. Gilbey slid it in his pocket and prepared to move off.

"Don't forget now: three o'clock at Victoria . . . boat train platform."

"Boat train platform!" breathed Shirley reverently.

* * *

No one noticed Desmond Gilbey at Victoria that afternoon, for he was not a man who attracted attention, and large stations seem to be places where nondescript men of his type pass much of their time, hanging around the bookstalls, staring at the slot machines, getting in the way of people hurrying for trains.

They look expressionless, unhurried, incapable of emotion.

Mr. Gilbey, however, did show signs of emotion as time passed by. As three o'clock drew near he glanced more and more often at the large clock, and twice moved to a fresh position where he could check the clock with another.

By three o'clock, when activity became feverish on the boat train platform, the haste and anxiety seemed to have communicated itself to Gilbey. He moved about restlessly, staring into the faces of people as they approached, and he shifted his labelled suitcase from one hand to the other.

When the train finally drew out, Gilbey, if anyone had looked at him closely, would have given the impression of being deflated. His shoulders sagged, his suit looked more wrinkled than ever, and his flabby face was grey.

After the train had gone he moved around listlessly, as if uncertain what to do with himself. For a long time he stood looking at the line of telephone boxes. Once he even put his hand on the door of one, but then he seemed to think better of it and drew back.

At four o'clock he went home to his room. There were plenty of empty seats on the buses at that time, but he chose to walk. After all, he had nothing special to do before nine o'clock the following morning, when he would be expected back at the office. If the prospect crossed his mind it did not cheer him. The suitcase with the Paris label seemed to drag his shoulder down a little further.

Desmond Gilbey used his key to open the door of his room, but before he could enter someone called him. He looked round. Two men had been waiting for him around the turn of the landing. They had stepped out at his approach. Gilbey looked alarmed.

"We were waiting for you, Mr. Gilbey," said the police inspector who had interviewed him earlier.

"For me?" Gilbey said huskily.

The inspector's smile was genial and reassuring.

"Nothing to worry about, Mr. Gilbey," he said. "We thought you would be interested to know that we've got one of the men who attacked you. And we've got the money back – every penny of it."

"The money back?" Gilbey sweated.

He stumbled into his room and set down his case, and the police officers followed. The inspector clapped him on the shoulder and offered him a cigarette.

"We need a little more help from you," he said. "We want you to come along to the station and see if you can pick someone out of an identification parade. You won't have any trouble, and it's hardly necessary. He had the money on him when we picked him up. Fred Kerr."

"Fred Kerr?" said Gilbey.

"That's right," said the inspector. "We got him at London Airport, with the money, and a barmaid from the *Rose and Crown* – a girl called Shirley. They were headed for Spain, but that little holiday will have to wait."

It was a shock for Desmond Gilbey, and he sank into a chair. The inspector must have thought he was going to pass out, for he moved quickly to his side. As he did so he stumbled on Gilbey's suitcase, knocking it over. The officer glanced down, and saw the new Paris label.

The police officer's face changed, and the sympathy went out of his voice.

"Paris, eh?" he said. "So *you* were going abroad, too, Mr. Gilbey? Planning on a gay weekend?"

"That's right," said Gilbey. "A gay weekend."

He looked up defiantly.

"Not yet, of course. I'll be back at the office tomorrow. But I thought I'd like to go over to Paris soon. There's no harm in that, is there? Lots of people go abroad."

"We are well aware of that, Mr. Gilbey," said the inspector. "But, just as a matter of routine, may I see your passport, please?"

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Arthur Kent has worked for the Australian "Daily Mirror" and the London "News Chronicle" and is the author of several novels. He is now with the Beaverbrook Press.

HARRY COOPER spent the afternoon emptying the drawers of his desk, jettisoning the accumulation of years into the wastepaper basket. Brochures, holiday souvenirs, second and third reminders. After all he didn't know if he would ever be back, and he could think that, he realized, without in any way being melodramatic.

His secretary came into the room, walking with a slight sway, conscious of what she had, and the effect she was having. Cooper watched her. She was new. He might not get the chance to know her better. He was conscious then of a momentary regret. Unfinished business, what might have been.

Reaching the desk she took the collection of letters he had signed, smiled slightly, and left the room. He watched her go. He took a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket and began to read it again - for the hundredth time.

Then, suddenly, he lifted the telephone across to his blotting pad and asked for an outside line. Dialling a Whitehall number he asked for an extension number. He instantly recognized the public school voice which answered it.

"George," Cooper said.

"Harry here. Your note is most interesting. But are you sure he's the sonofabitch I want?"

He was aware of hesitancy in Bannock's reply. After all, Bannock, a Civil servant, had passed on classified information. And if Cooper got himself killed, Bannock might face some awkward questions like how Cooper, a civilian, was in possession of highly secret information.

Bannock said, "I'm absolutely sure, Harry. It was double checked. He's your Colonel Dietz."

S.S. Colonel Dietz. Cooper felt the excitement rise. The man he had clashed with head-on in Marseilles all those years before. And now he had come into the open at last. He said doubtfully, "But after all this time?"

Bannock said, "You'll get me shot. I'm sure, Harry. Even his home address fits - Hamburg. Apparently he was a cashier there, suddenly threw up his job, left for Paris, and blew his savings. Then he joined the Legion. The reason - God only knows. Boredom, domestic trouble, the urge to get back in uniform."

"And all this happened three months ago?"

"Yes. Should be safely in the Legion now, right in the middle of the blasted Sahara. Which will make your job hard, if you're still determined to look for him. Frankly, I think it's all rather crazy."

Cooper smiled. Bannock would. Maybe it was. In some ways he could understand Dietz - if boredom had sent him to the Legion. Come to think about it, he was bored with the monotony of silk-lined living too. "I like to clear up loose ends, George. I hate mysteries - important mysteries. I hate the idea of not knowing what really happened, and never being able to know."

He replaced the receiver as Bannock began to protest. He knew that Bannock would elaborate on the worth of such a dangerous mission; that Suzanne had been dead these seventeen years; and what was the point?

And Cooper knew there was no real defence. He had loved Suzanne but that had been a long time ago . . . there had been other women since. He knew that he was not going after Dietz as a mere matter of revenge. Revenge was a part of it, but he was also curious to know the truth. And perhaps boredom and the urge for a little colour and adventure in his dull lawyer's life was swaying him, too.

They had been great days, dicing with death in the warrens of Marseilles.

He looked to the window. He saw the November fog already

ghosting the corners of the roofs opposite. Yes, they had been great days . . .

He lit a cigarette and crossed to the window, stretching. He was conscious of the fact that, although he would be forty on his next birthday, he still felt young physically. If there was a splash of grey in his dark hair there was no fat on his body. And if Dietz could get into the Legion, why couldn't he?

He was still smoking at the window when his secretary came in, putting on the office light. He recrossed to his desk and took a



letter from his drawer. It was addressed to the head of the firm. Cooper did not want Basil to get it until the following morning. He was being cowardly by not telling Basil of his intentions in person. But he knew Basil. Basil wasn't very bright, even for a lawyer. Basil would want to hear the story three times in minute detail, and then he would put forward a reasoned argument as if in court. And Cooper knew he could not answer reason on this. It was purely emotion.

He gave the letter to his secretary, telling her to post it on the way home. She took it, read the name and address on the envelope, and said, "Very good, sir."

No hesitation, no curiosity, no surprise. And of course she didn't say anything. She was new. Not yet in the job long enough to become familiar or paternal.

Cooper collected his raincoat. He left the office without looking back.

* * *

Cooper packed a lightskin bag, finished off the remains of a bottle of Dimple Haigh, and checked his passport and cash. After this, he moved aimlessly around the room, feeling the soft springy carpet beneath his feet. Goodbye to luxury. Goodbye to all this. He realized then that he was putting off the moment when he should ring Denise. He supposed he really didn't have to. But Denise was as simple as she was inconsistent and promiscuous, and would be terribly hurt. He looked at the clock.

He had a mental picture of what Denise, a dreamy creature of habit, would be doing now. Incredulously watching *Coronation Street* and saying in her phoney Mayfairese, "Do people really live like that and behave like that?" As if she didn't know. Cooper smiled.

He supposed he should go round and tell her, not phone, but if the tall willowy blonde had another date that night, she would put on a peculiar act, not letting him through the door, saying, as if she really thought that Cooper would believe it, that a couple of Nuns were expected or the place had been fumigated. Or, as she had told him once, she had definitely - but definitely - caught something contagious.

Cooper had one more drink, the last of the bottle, then he phoned her. The *burr-burr* lasted some time. Either Denise was getting herself a fresh glass of pineapple juice or somebody in a television thriller was having his head crushed. Denise would brave it through, fingers clenched, until the last drop of blood had been spilled.

Then the receiver was lifted. But there was nothing from Denise for a moment. Just the canned sound of voices. Denise, her eyes still on the foggy screen (she could never adjust it properly) was waiting for something to happen. Cooper heard a scream, and then a series of shots. Then dramatic music. And then Denise.

"Hello," she said in a strangled voice.

"Harry here, Denise."

"Oh, Harry!" There was delight and surprise in her voice as if he had just returned from Brazil unexpectedly. "But . . ." the problem now. "What's happened? You come tomorrow."

"Sorry, tomorrow's off. I'm going away on a trip."

"Oh, no, darling! How long for?"

"About three months."

"Can I come, darling? I won't be in the way or anything!"

Cooper had a momentary vision of the luscious 38-28-38 blonde not getting in the way in some sleazy Saharan Foreign Legion town, and shuddered.

"Sorry," he said. "But I'll write you."

"Where from?"

"From Algiers."

"Algiers!" she sounded horrified. "That's a terrible place, with all sorts of wars and smuggling going on, Harry! Why, I saw a thriller on telev —"

"Never believe what you see on television," he chuckled.

"But why, Harry?"

"A private matter," Cooper said. "I told you about it once. Remember?"

"I don't remember you ever mentioning Algiers, Harry," Denise said, with reproach in her voice.

"I told you about Suzanne. I told you about Marseilles. I told you about a German named Dietz. Remember now?"

"Oh, yes," Denise said. "That lovely story in your life, the one that made me cry."

"Well," Cooper said, "I've discovered the whereabouts of Dietz.

"And?" there was wariness in Denise's voice.

"I'm going to see him."

"All the way to Algiers? But can't you write him a letter?"

Cooper said, "No, Denise, I've got to go. This is unfinished business. I'll write you. I'll even try and bring something nice back for you . . ."

"How about a camel?" Denise said sarcastically. "Listen here, Harry, if you disappear for three whole months, don't expect me to wait for you."

"That's the least I expect from you, Denise . . ."

"After all, Harry," she said with self pity, "I'm in the May of my life, and I've got to make the most of it."

"You do that, darling," Cooper said, a slight smile on his lips. "But I'll still give you a call when - and if - I get back. Meanwhile, I've put a cheque in the post for you."

"That's very considerate of you, Harry. You are one of the most considerate men I know. *Do* call when you get back. I'll be simply dying to know what happened."

"I'll do that. And if you can't be good, at least be profitable."

"Thank you, Harry, for seeing it my way. And don't forget the postcard from Algiers. A saucy one."

"Algiers isn't Brighton, kitten," Cooper said, then hastily said goodbye.

He left the flat ten minutes later and took a cab to Cromwell Road air terminal.

2.

Flashback

THE interior of the Air France Super Constellation was stuffy. Most of the passengers on the night flight were slumbering. But as the plane bore through the clouded night sky over the Alps towards North Africa, Cooper could not sleep.

All he could do was sponge his perspiring brow and think of the similarity of this flight and another one he had made long before. Then, too, it had been night . . . and a heavy plane had been surging through the layers of cumulus above the snow-tipped Alps. Nearly a score of years ago, and he had been the only passenger . . . squatting uncomfortably on the metal floor of a Lancaster bomber, weighed down by parachute harness and equipment.

Around him had been the heaped, impersonal canisters of equipment, Sten guns, mortars, plastic bombs, food, ammunition, to be dropped to Nancy Wake's powerful Maquis group waiting near the Nazi garrison town of Aix-en-Provence.

First the drop of canisters to the remarkable Australian woman's tough guerrillas; then the Lancaster would carry him on a few kilometres. He would be dropped near the port of Marseilles to work with Peter's newly-forming Maquis group.

Peter, a Dutchman, had asked for trained leaders. Cooper was one of the first to go. Cooper smiled. Peter had asked for men who were good with a gun and a knife, could think quickly and kill without compunction.

"You're just the chap we want," Cooper had been told dryly.

"We know you'll go. There isn't much fun left with the Commandos anymore! And you can speak French like a bloody native."

Cooper had not been sure if he should take that as a compliment. He had accepted the mission, too, with some misgiving. There was Pam, the WREN, conveniently stationed at the Admiralty in Whitehall; there was an accumulation of pay to squander in the West End. Even if there wasn't much of value to spend it on.

But the adventure of it all had appealed to him. Cooper lit a cigarette. He smiled at the memory. He had been expecting so much. And he remembered how disappointed he had been – at first.

He had expected action and tension, nerve-wracking tension, to begin as soon as he dropped. Instead, it had been like a dreamy Mediterranean holiday. True the first few hours had been thrilling enough.

The aimed drop, falling between the spaced electric and car lights, the hurried scrambling to dis-harness, the stumbling through the thorn-covered field, the furtive, muffled greeting, the fast, hellish drive into Marseilles and the brush with the Vichy Milice police patrol on the way.

He had been quartered in a sleazy, peach-coloured building on the front of the Old Port, overlooking the docks on the Rue Nicole. His room was serenaded by alley noises – water sloshing in iron basins, kids screeching, old men snorting, painted girls complaining and lamenting.

He had fitted into his part. He neglected to shave regularly and combed his hair only once a day. He was now Pierre Arnal, a seaman who refused to carry on his trade because lunatics were planting electronic mines and firing off torpedoes indiscriminately.

"While such insanity lasts," he told regular winos in the cafés, "I rest and live."

Nobody bothered to argue with him. Everybody seemed to be sick with the war. The French lack of interest puzzled him. They often seemed to resent Britain. They were jealous of the fact that Britain had survived and continued to fight. They also held Britain responsible for France's collapse in 1940, arguing that if Britain had done more, the Germans would have been held.

But underlying their bitterness, there seemed to be a hope – a hope that Britain might last out and France would be freed. But, for the moment, there were more pressing problems. There was

the food shortage; there was the constant watchfulness of the Vichy Milice police force; there were the hoards of Germans in the city, carrying on their cloak-and-dagger activities under the thin disguise of educational, agricultural or fishery commissions.

Cooper waited impatiently as the days became weeks. He had been told that as soon as he was needed, he would be contacted by somebody using the code word *Armband*.

So Cooper spent his days lazing, drinking, sleeping, gossiping. Daily, to keep fit, he went swimming in the blue-green rocky swimming holes with which Marseilles abounds.

The contact arrived in the third week. Cooper would never forget that first meeting with Suzanne Phillips.

Cooper had been flopped out on the long narrow bed with the iron bedposts – the type you usually see in French feature films. The sun had been beaming through the tall, open wooden windows. And he had been feeling drowsy and queasy after a lunch of sausage which seemed to have contained sawdust and a red wine which had tasted vinegary. The French cigarette he had been smoking – he was sure it contained cork – was not helping, and died on his lips.

One moment he had been looking at the brown door with its cracked paint, the next moment the door had opened, quietly closed, and she was there. The rusty bed springs had creaked beneath him as he had sat up – the only sound. He remembered that he must have looked slightly idiotic, with his mouth hanging open.

Having closed the door, she stood facing him, a slight smile crinkling her lips. She was dark, very dark, like a Moorish Spaniard is dark. Her lacquered black hair gleamed in the sunlight. Her eyes were dark brown; she had high cheekbones and a tiny chin. She was wearing a white two-piece tropical suit, high-heeled shoes, and held white gloves and a crocodile handbag in long, tapering fingers.

“Pierre Arnal?” she asked. But it did not sound like a question.

He nodded.

“Armband,” she said, and smiled, as if she found code words melodramatic and theatrical.

Cooper could see nothing funny about them. Not when a mistake could mean torture and death.

He said casually, “Good. I was beginning to despair. I even thought of going home.”

“There was little point in fetching you until you were actually

needed. You are safe here. And the less people who know about you the better."

She told him her name and some of her background. She sold perfumes in a large store, was an auxiliary nurse, which meant she had the use of a car and a petrol allowance, and did not have to explain her movements to her employers.

Her father was still a prisoner of war, she said, but she had a mother living on the outskirts of town. She herself had a small flat near the Old Port.

Cooper had judged her age to be about twenty-two. Actually she was only eighteen.

She walked across the room, and Cooper noticed she walked with a slight lilt. She was medium height, petite.

Cooper got off the bed. He indicated the squalid room. "Make yourself at home; what there is of it."

She said, "There isn't time. We are going out. I should make yourself presentable."

Cooper crossed to the washstand. He poured cold water into a metal basin. "Where are we going?"

"Basso's."

"The bar?"

She nodded. "The Germans use it. The important ones are there now. I'll point them out to you. It is wise you should know them."

"Gestapo?"

She nodded.

"Won't it be dangerous?"

She smiled slightly. "Don't fear anything, Arnal. I'll protect you."

Cooper grinned. "The name, for the moment, is Pierre."

"Yes, Arnal," she said. "Incidentally, I hope you had a good night's sleep last night."

"On that narrow bed?" Cooper said. "Why, Basso's shouldn't take long, should it?"

"Oh, that's only a first call," she replied. She paused, lighting a cigarette. "There is a job for you to do. Late tonight. An important one."

Cooper had stripped off his shirt and began to wash. He turned, looking at her. "Do I learn about it now, or later?"

She shrugged. "I'll give you the full details later. You have to kill someone."

The Life Of Suzanne

BASSO'S was fashionable, leisurely, expensive, and there the war seemed a thousand years away. It had something of the atmosphere of a pukka English club. Only very French. But better class French.

The ornamentation was gilt, the cushions and carpets, Edwardian opera house red.

Cooper was surprised to find that he was not nervous, although the long bar was packed with obvious-looking Germans. They wore impeccably tailored white ducks but their hair-styles were Army. They sat around little tables in fours and fives, drinking, smoking and gossiping. But very starchy. Almost clicking their heels as they correctly shook ash into the ashtrays.

Suzanne was very calm and very serene. She led Cooper to a wall table. She made a production of crossing the room. She gave that little extra swing of her exquisite hips as she strode across the heavy carpet.

Cooper was very conscious of the Browning automatic under his left arm as the Germans looked at them. But they were only looking at Suzanne. Suzanne was putting their minds on things more earthly than nationalism, politics or warfare.

They sat, facing the Germans, their backs to the walls. Most of the Germans stopped looking. Suzanne sat very close to Cooper.

Suzanne said smilingly but bitingly, "Stop being so self-consciously British. Be continental, Englishman."

Cooper, surprised, said, "What do you mean?"

"Stop looking at everybody, clot. Look at me. You brought me here for drinks. Why? Your intentions are dishonourable. You are trying to seduce me. So, try!"

Cooper smirked. "What here? In front of everybody?"

"The preliminaries, darling," she said. "I've been to Britain so I know that Englishmen have some hazy idea of how to woo." She paused. "So, paw me a little."

Cooper moved closer to her. He took her hand. He said, "But won't it attract attention to us?"

"It will attract more attention if you don't. Didn't you see the way they looked at me as we crossed the room? They know me."

"How?"

She paused, looking at him, and her eyes clouded momentarily.

"Do you mean . . .?" Cooper found himself flushing angrily.

She said quickly, "They think I'm a dizzy, empty-headed 'good time girl'. To them I'm a girl who is only interested in the effect I have on men . . . and in men. Politics, nationalism, war, collaboration, has no existence in my vocabulary."

Cooper found himself gripping her hand tightly. He was surprised to find that his anger was mainly compounded of jealousy.

"Every so often I go out with one of them," she said. "Just to confirm the impression they have of me. I learn something each time, too. Don't look so angry, Pierre. I don't enjoy it. I think about something else. And I have an excuse for avoiding them most of the time."

"What's that?" Cooper said angrily.

She turned and looked at him with puzzled surprise. "Don't be so upset, Pierre," she smiled softly. "After all others, many others, have given more. They have given their lives."

"I know," Cooper said, talking with all the experience of his twenty-three years. "And rape after all is a meaningless word."

Cooper looked across at the Germans. He found himself looking them over carefully . . . wondering which of these sons-of-bitches had been out with Suzanne.

He analysed his emotions. He discovered suddenly, although he had known her less than an hour, that he had an overwhelming respect and affection bordering on infatuation if not love, for Suzanne Phillips.

He supposed it was because of the courage she had shown as she had brazenly entered the bar. Of the things she had to do to keep up her pretence of being a "good time girl". Of the fact, although sophisticated and worldly, she nevertheless seemed in many ways to be still a child in her teens.

And her courage was double edged. Not only did she flaunt herself at the Germans, where a mistake could mean a horrible death, but she earned the hostility of her own people by openly collaborating with the Germans. For very few of her countrymen would know the real story.

He said tenderly, still holding her hand: "You said just now you had an excuse for avoiding the Germans most of the time. What is it?"

She said, "They ask me out almost daily. You see, they buy in the store. But I tell most of them, especially the young ones, that I would like to but my relatives and friends get angry. They

understand that. It's only the older, more experienced officers that I have to succumb to. You see, they are ready with all sorts of plans to avoid public attention – a car drive to a neighbouring district, a chateau which is serving as a club for German officials and the Vichy scum. To refuse on those terms, especially if the man is attractive, would immediately arouse suspicion. Besides, I pick up important pieces of information."

A waiter arrived at the table. Suzanne ordered a bottle of white Burgundy – *Aligote*. Neither spoke again until the waiter had arrived with bottle and glasses, uncorked the bottle, Cooper had tasted, and the waiter had left.

Cooper lit a cigarette. Watching the Germans, he said savagely, "Which one of those bastards do I have to kill?"

"Is it worrying you?" Suzanne asked.

Cooper considered that. "Not greatly. I've killed before. I suppose I'll kill again. I only hope the person deserves to die." He looked at her for a moment searchingly. "I hope I'm not being asked to kill a woman?"

"Say you were asked to kill a woman? What then?"

Cooper hesitated. He said, "I don't know. I'm not sure."

She flushed angrily for a moment. "Stop being sentimental, Arnal. If you were asked to kill a woman, be sure that she really deserved to die."

They drank wine.

Cooper asked Suzanne if there were any important Germans among the collection in the bar.

"No," she said. "The man I want to point out to you hasn't arrived yet. He's Otto Dietz. An S.S. colonel posing as a cultural official. You know the sort of thing, you British are masters of it, lantern slides and lectures about the beauties of your country."

She smiled. "Otto is quite good at it. He even gives lectures twice a week. I've been to several. If only one could forget his nationality and the war – but one can't – one could go for Otto in a big way." She made a clicking noise with her lips. "Mmm. He has everything!"

"When not spreading culture or sex appeal, what does he do?" Cooper asked.

"Do I detect an undercurrent of jealousy?" she asked, amused. "He runs the complete show here. Mainly, however, he concentrates on espionage. He leaves the dirty work to the Gestapo."

"Espionage?"

"Mainly information from across the Mediterranean. It trickles

in through seamen and fishermen along the docks. Dietz has it well organized. The fishing boats go out, meet other craft from the other side. And that's where you come in, Pierre. The man you have to kill is a French trawler skipper. You do it when his craft docks tonight. He's become too dangerous and the British fear he picked up something useful today. The order came through from Cairo only two hours ago."

"A rush job, eh? That leaves little time for planning." Cooper sipped his drink. "Tell me, just as a matter of curiosity - why pick me for the job? Surely you have plenty of trained and ruthless people?"

"There wasn't time to bring in somebody from outside Marseilles. We do have local people. But this man - his name is Jean Dusacq - is a very popular local figure."

"Enough said," answered Cooper. "In which way is he popular? Local football team or one-time mayor?"

"No," she replied, and hesitated.

"Well, out with it."

She said, "Before the war he was a reasonably wealthy man. He opened a home for orphaned children. Most of the people round here call him Papa Dusacq. That's the story of his life. Giving."

"God," Cooper said. "What a bloody filthy war."

* * *

Dietz arrived a few minutes later. Tall, slightly arrogant in his bearing, conscious of his fine figure and the glances it brought from women.

He had closely-cropped flaxen blond hair, a square jaw set firmly in an intelligent, finely-shaped face, and light blue eyes that some girls would have given their honour for.

His effect on Suzanne was instant. She crushed herself closer to Cooper, placing silk-sheathed legs against his.

"Be very, very affectionate, Pierre," she whispered; "I don't want him to see me."

Cooper thought that odd. Dietz could not avoid seeing her. In fact, he saw her immediately, broke his stride and turned towards them, letting his colleagues wait.

Suzanne placed her cheek close to Cooper's.

Cooper watched Dietz. He stopped before the table. Suzanne

looked up with pretended surprise. Dietz clicked his heels and bowed.

"Good day, Fraulein Phillips," he said.

"Good afternoon, Monsieur Dietz," Suzanne answered in the same slightly mocking vein.

"I have tried to contact you several times in the past week. But the people at the store said you were not available." There was concern in his voice. "I hope you haven't been ill?"

"No, not at all," Suzanne replied. "You see, we aren't allowed to take telephone calls at the store."

"Oh, I see. Then I must think of some other way of contacting you . . . when you are not so busy."

He smiled at her. He looked briefly at Cooper. He bowed once more, clicked his heels, and walked away.

"Well," Cooper said, "you have made a killing."

"Don't be silly." Suzanne relaxed beside him. "He only came over to have a look at you."

"You underestimate your charms, Suzanne."

"Not at all," she said serenely. "Had Otto Dietz phoned me at the store, nobody would have dared not to put the calls through."

"Then why should he want to look at me?"

She smiled her vixenish smile. "To see the competition only. Relax. He doesn't suspect you of anything other than trying to seduce me. I've been out with Otto Dietz. He knows how to reach me without going through the store's almost public telephone switchboard."

Cooper scowled and poured himself a fresh drink.

4

Assassination

COOPER felt a little cramped and stiff and a little frightened as he waited in the darkness. He was seated in the front of Suzanne Phillips' small car. Suzanne was behind the steering wheel beside him.

They were on a high street which overlooked the docks, with a high iron fence separating them from a fall to the street some forty feet below.

Cooper decided that the position was ideal for an assassination - if the assassin was a good shot. When Papa Dusacq was sighted, coming along the quay, Cooper would leave the car,

hurry across to the railings, shoot him, and then bounce back to the car, which Suzanne would already be turning for the open road.

Perfect, Cooper had decided. Almost too perfect. Life wasn't that easy, he told himself. Something, somehow, could go wrong. But the more he thought about it, the more perfect it seemed.

The only policeman he had seen in the hour-long wait had been patrolling along the dock, way below them. Should he be on hand when Cooper fired, he would never get up to the high level in time to see them even, for the steps were some fifty yards to the right.

Cooper began to think about Suzanne then. But there were no worries there. She looked calm, confident, if anything a little bored. He contrasted her mood now with the one she had shown earlier - at Basso's. A strange girl. During the evening at Basso's, as the wine had taken more of a hold, she had been challenging, mocking, flirtatious, and sometimes very bold in her conversation.

When they had driven away, Cooper, wheezy in the head and stomach from too much wine, thought he was going on a seduction rather than an assassination. The war, even if he was in enemy territory, seemed a thousand miles away.

But Suzanne's mood had changed abruptly before they were out of the boulevard. Since then she had said little. She had remained silent and introspective.

Cooper lit his fifth cigarette, tossing the matchstick on the floor of the car instead of in the road.

Suzanne moved then, as if disturbed. She whispered: "They are coming. The trawlers are coming."

Cooper looked across the harbour. All he could see at first was the black smudge of the sea. Then he saw the small, orange-coloured mast lights, slightly to his left, although he could not yet detect the throb of auxiliary engines.

"It looks like three," he said.

"There are three. They work together. They all berth here. Dusacq is their spokesman and leader."

Cooper lifted the gun from beneath the seat. It was a Belgian Browning target revolver with an extra long barrel.

Suzanne almost became friendly again. She said, "I hope your prowess with firearms hasn't been exaggerated."

"If anything," Cooper replied, "it's been understated."

"I see," she smirked. "British modesty."

Cooper checked the gun again in the semi-darkness. He said, "I suppose there's no other way?"

"Cold feet?" she asked, slightly mockingly.

"No, common decency."

"There is no other way," she said softly. "It's essential. Your own people have asked for it. After all, he's a traitor, isn't he?"

"There are degrees," Cooper said, "in treachery."

"Meaning what?" she said sarcastically.

"Well," Cooper hesitated, "extenuating circumstances. He might have a reasonable excuse or explanation for working for the other side."

"He can save his excuses for heaven," Suzanne said cuttingly. She lifted a pair of binoculars from beneath her seat and placed them to her eyes. She swept the bay.

Now faintly they could hear the popping throb of the trawler engines.

Suzanne said, "Dusacq's trawler is leading. He's always first in, I understand, and always first off, leaving his crew to finish up." She put the glasses down and looked at Cooper. "Any problems, Arnal?"

"No." Cooper checked his reactions. He felt a little sweaty and a little excited. But that was all. He was surprised that he wasn't unsettled and nervous. He decided that Suzanne's calmness was catching. She was quite a girl.

"Have you killed before?" she asked.

He nodded. "But never like this, never in cold blood."

Her hand touched his in the darkness. Her fingers were cool and reassuring. "You will be all right, Harry," she said, using his English Christian name for the first time.

Cooper tightened his hand around Suzanne's and her fingernails, digging into the palm of his hand, were a promise.

The throbbing engines of the trawlers were now loud and persistent. Cooper took the target pistol in his right hand. His left hand pushed the catch of the door. Both he and Suzanne looked through the side and rear windows of the car, searching the deserted street.

Nobody in sight in the semi-darkness. This was a small factory and warehouse district, of the meaner type and, unlike on the docks below, there was little worth stealing.

The minutes ticked by. Cooper could see the trawlers clearly now and the shapes of men in the deck lights. Five - less than five - minutes, he told himself, and it would all be over. Dusacq's life would be snuffed out.

"That's Dusacq's trawler leading," Suzanne whispered.

Cooper wondered why she was whispering. It seemed ludicrous. Certainly Dusacq would not have heard had she shouted.

The first trawler reached the dock. Cooper clenched his teeth as he thought he heard, or only imagined, the scrape of the side against the stone dock. A lithe figure sprang from the trawler and began to fasten the ropes to a bollard.

Almost immediately Cooper saw a fat squat figure detach itself from the black mass of the trawler.

Suzanne lifted her glasses to her eyes. Then, hitting him lightly on the shoulder, she snapped.

"That's him! That's Dusacq."

Cooper kicked the door open. He sprang from the car to the railing. He could see Dusacq clearly in silhouette now, almost distinguishing his spade-shaped beard and the slant of his peaked cap.

Cooper realized he had moved too soon. Dusacq was still a little too far away. Cooper realized that he would be standing against the railings for a minute or more. He stepped back to the shadows of the car. He felt a trickle of sweat zig-zag down his forehead and along the curve of his cheek.

A moment later Suzanne started the car. "Now, now!" she called.

Cooper moved to the railing. He gripped one spike in his left hand and used the arm as a rest. He placed his right hand on the elbow aimed the gun along the quay, squinting along the barrel.

He saw Dusacq, short, stubby, unsuspecting. It crossed his mind that the orphans of Marseilles were again to be orphans. At least let it be quick and painless, he whispered to himself.

The double sight on the barrel was squarely pointed at Dusacq's chest. Cooper tightened his finger against the trigger. Then he gave a final hard press.

The gun bucked. He saw Dusacq stagger. He quickly aimed again and fired. Then he fired a third shot as Dusacq's legs buckled beneath him.

Behind him, the engine of the car roared to life and deadened the echoing sounds of the three shots. The yellow headlamps raked across him as Suzanne turned the car.

Cooper did not panic. He stood at the rail a moment longer. He saw Dusacq hit the ground and thrash about. He saw members of his crew leap to the quay. Cooper told himself it was not really good enough. He was sure that all three shots had hit the skipper

in the chest around the heart. But Dusacq, with good medical care, might still live long enough to talk to Dietz.

He should have got nearer; to make certain.

Suzanne's voice reached him. It was overtones of sarcasm with undertones of fear. "Come on! Are you waiting for a medal?"

Cooper got into the moving car. And Suzanne drove skilfully through the narrow streets.

Cooper sat silent, the gun held down between his knees. Barely a man, he was thinking, but already an assassin.

5

Louis And Luipy

COOPER said, "Suzanne, you can't be serious?"

Suzanne had brought the car to a squealing halt outside Basso's.

"I mean," Cooper added quickly, not sure of himself, "we have just murdered a man. He was a friend of the Germans. Now we return to Basso's, which is packed with Germans."

She smiled and Cooper thought the smile rather wicked.

"Just for one drink," she said. "I'm very thirsty. And, if he's still there, I would like to see Dietz's face when they bring him the news."

Cooper said, "Are you carrying on a sort of friendly feud with Dietz? There are other people in this war, you know. And is it advisable to parade ourselves publicly? Somebody might have seen me. I'm still carrying the gun. Your car might have been spotted."

"All right, Pierre," Suzanne said irritably. "It seemed a good idea. I thought we would be safe in Basso's. Nobody would dream that Dusacq's killers would go there. And I couldn't resist wanting to see the commotion - when they heard."

"Well," Cooper said, "you could be right. You possibly are. I'm inexperienced in these matters. This is my first piece of gangsterism."

"No," Suzanne said. "We'll disappear. We'll go to my place and have a drink there. On the way, you can drop the gun in a canal."

Cooper could not think of any objections to that. And Suzanne, not expecting any protest, had already started the car.

"Incidentally," Suzanne said, "I have news for you. You are moving."

"Moving?"

"You are taking a room opposite my place on the Rue de Grande. You are sharing an apartment with two of our best men - Louis and Luipy. There is no need to return to the docks. Your few belongings have been collected."

She drove the car quickly and expertly through mean, narrow and badly-lit streets. On the way she stopped at a canal and Cooper tossed the gun over the side without leaving the car.

The apartment was in a flaked white building through a courtyard. Steep steps led to the apartments in the narrow building. Suzanne led the way.

She whispered in the darkness. "I live on the top floor. It is always wise. If *they* come for me I gain several valuable minutes. It's a long climb up. I can go across the roofs and, I hope, escape."

"What do your boy friends say?" Cooper panted.

Suzanne only laughed.

Cooper could not see anything to laugh at. He felt flaked out. Somehow he thought Suzanne would find him disappointing tonight. What with the assassination, the rushing about and now the climb, he felt too tired to be either amusing or sociable.

The flat was tastefully but sparsely furnished. There were a lot of little ornaments, pictures and cushions about which made the lounge look homely.

"I purloined most of these from my parent," Suzanne explained. "She lives just outside the town."

"You told me," Cooper said, sagging into an upholstered chair.

"So I did." She stood with a slight smile of amusement on her lips. For the first time Cooper noticed that there was a touch of cruelty about her mouth. "What will you have to drink?"

Cooper raised eyebrows in mock surprise. "Is there a choice?"

"There is always a choice," she said enigmatically. "How about cognac?"

"Just the thing." Cooper watched her cross the room. He lit a cigarette absently.

She brought two large tumblers of brandy across the room and folded neatly into the chair beside him. She made a *Follies* production of it. Whatever Suzanne had on her mind at this moment, Cooper told himself, it wasn't espionage or sabotage.

"Tell me about my room mates - Louis and Luipy," Cooper said.

She laughed suddenly as if he had said something funny.

"What's amusing you now?" he grinned.

"Your room mates. Or should I say, the two you share an apartment with."

"What about them?"

"Oh, nothing." She looked mysterious again.

Cooper gave her an old fashioned look. "I see. You are going to keep me in suspense?"

She grinned. "Yes, darling." She added: "But I don't want you to get the wrong idea about them. They are very tough and ruthless. And the most dangerous thing about them is that the Germans would never suspect them. They find them amusing."

"What are they - a couple of comedians? A local Laurel and Hardy?"

"They juggle. At the *Blue Angel*. That's a very popular night club. In between acts, they blow up bridges and such like. They're good, too, at strangling Germans with bare hands. In fact, they go out of their way looking for trouble."

"Charming room mates," Cooper said. He wondered what his father would think of all this. Major Adrian Cooper, M.C., was an old school soldier who thought opposing officers should shake hands before the artillery opened up. "An assassination and thuggee room mates. And all in one day. My father would have a fit."

"He would, too." Suzanne rippled with laughter again.

Cooper decided to change the subject. It did not make him happy to think about it. He suddenly felt a sense of pity and compassion for Suzanne. Why should this lovely girl be mixed up in all this? She should be going to dances and parties or be married and thinking of babies. Instead, she was driving a car on assassinations, fraternizing with Nazis to get information, and mixing with two oddities like Louis and Luipy apparently were.

For, although he had not seen them yet, Cooper had guessed from what Suzanne had left unsaid that they were not nice types.

Cooper finished his drink in one swallow. He got up and crossed to the decanter on the sideboard. "How about you?" he asked.

"Bring the bottle across," she said.

He looked at her. She looked slightly sulky. Then suddenly she began to shiver. Concerned, Cooper put the bottle down and

crossed quickly to her. He sat on the arm of her chair and took her hands firmly in his.

"What's the matter, Suzanne?" he said.

She was pressing her lips together tightly now and still trembling, as if she had a sudden chill.

She held on to him tightly. "It's - it's the reaction," she whispered. "It - it always affects me like this - after - after . . ."

"Drink your brandy," Cooper said. "Can I get you something?"

"No." She went on trembling slightly as if in the grip of a severe cold. "If I - I relax it will pass."

Cooper got up and crossed the room. He opened one of the doors and found it was a bedroom. He returned to the chair and scooped Suzanne into his arms. She made no protest.

He carried her into the room and across to the bed. The light from the lounge enabled him to see his way. He laid her on the bed, placed a pillow beneath her head and covered her with a blanket. He went to leave but she gripped him by the hand.

"Don't go," she whispered. "It will go in a moment. I promise you."

Cooper lay down on the bed beside her. He covered himself with the rest of the blanket and placed his arm around her.

Eventually the shivering ceased. Suzanne lay still and warm beside him as if she were asleep. Cooper felt a great tenderness for her. He began to stroke her black hair which glistened slightly in the reflection of the light from the other room.

Suzanne lay still for a considerable time under Cooper's soft caresses. Then suddenly, and unmistakably, she came alive, her fingers digging into his arms and her warm soft lips seeking his.

* * *

They looked like brothers. They had the same steelhard grey eyes and soft, silky black hair and small girlish noses. They were the same height, had the same slimness and feminine gracefulness about them.

"But," as Suzanne later explained, "it's all right. Really it is. You see, they are second cousins and really not blood relatives at all."

They had just got back from the club when Suzanne took Cooper across to meet them, and they were eating, curled up on a

thick carpet and listening to a clandestine BBC late night swing broadcast.

Louis – Cooper was to discover that he was the one with the sense of humour – said, “Decadent democratic broadcast. They are supposed to send us coded messages in between the cat noises. I’ve never had one yet.”

“That,” Suzanne said, “is because they don’t know you. You are not a big enough cog.”

“It’s because you don’t know the code, Louis,” Luipy said seriously. Cooper was to discover that he was the jealous one. He did not like it if Cooper talked too often to Louis.

“Don’t make a parliamentary debate out of this,” Louis said. “It’s only because I’ve never bothered to learn the code.”

“Boys,” Suzanne said, “I want you to meet Pierre Arnal. From England.”

They got up effortlessly from the carpet, like greased springs uncoiling, and shook hands.

Louis said, “Glad to have you. I understand you are an expert with plastic bombs. Well, we can take you to the targets and deal with all opposition while you blow them.”

Cooper nodded. He wasn’t too sure about that. Although he had been taught about plastics, he had been sent to Marseilles to form, train and lead a Maquis battle group.

Luipy noticed his hesitation. Suspicion registered on his boyish face.

“You do know about bombs, don’t you?”

Cooper nodded. He said, “Don’t misunderstand what I’m about to say. I was sent here for a specific purpose. I can’t go off on any freelance ventures.”

“Oh,” Suzanne cut in, “these boys are officially in. They are the first two men seconded to you for your group. By the weekend there should be another nine. In about three months we should have more than fifty and can take the field and work in co-operation with Nancy Wake.”

Cooper showed annoyance. He said, “I know this sort of work involves a certain relaxing of military procedure, but how can I take your word for all this? I was given the code names of three leaders of the underground in this area. I haven’t met one of them yet.”

Suzanne smiled at the boys. “Isn’t he being terribly, terribly British? You will be meeting one of the three – my direct superior – on Wednesday.”

"Well," Cooper said, "that's something. Even if Wednesday is four days away."

"Patience," Suzanne said, taking his arm tenderly. "Come, I'll show you your room."

The boys followed them and stood in the kitchen door. They saw Cooper and Suzanne enter a room and listened to their voices for a moment. Then the door was closed.

Louis looked at Luipy. "He's one of those," he said.

"Yes," said Luipy, with disgust.

6

"Don't Become Involved"

COOPER sat in the darkness of the car with a Sten gun across his knees and looked along a bleak, moon-illuminated country road. He felt tired and terribly fatigued. If he moved his head too quickly, he experienced dizzy spells.

The tempo had never let up since the night he had assassinated Dusacq. The Germans, aided by the Vichy police, had cracked down hard. They had even tried to arrest Pierre Arnal, raiding the dock hotel he had stayed at.

God knows how they had linked him with Dusacq, Cooper had reflected. But perhaps it had only been a general alarm. For they had certainly combed Marseilles, and had picked up everybody who appeared to be by himself, without foundations, work or family.

Not that they had said Dusacq's murder was political. They had talked about robbery or hate as a possible motive. Dusacq had certainly been a popular local figure, too. Cooper had discovered that from the newspapers. Nobody had been loved locally as much as Dusacq.

The entire city seemed to turn out for the funeral. Children - orphans - featured in the procession. Cooper had grimly read the account and seen the pictures in the newspapers on the following day.

And Cooper had other worries. Besides the nervous tension of being an enemy and a hunted man, he had Louis and Luipy to worry about. They were really a problem, he discovered. The two juggling acrobats went into action with an irresponsible drive that was more pathological than patriotic.

Time and time again Cooper had to knock down their battle

suggestions as unwarrantedly risky and irresponsible.

On the night following the Dusacq assassination, he had agreed to accompany them on the burning of two German petrol trucks.

Because of the Royal Navy's blockade the Germans had begun to supply Rommel in Africa in piecemeal. They would load small craft with supplies and hope they could beat the blockade by going across to Africa at night.

Luipy had discovered that two petrol trucks were due to arrive in Marseilles that night. It meant meeting them outside the city, on the open road, killing the drivers and igniting the trucks.

Cooper had been initially against the idea. Two trucks did not mean a lot of petrol. But he was aware of the antagonism which was growing between the boys and himself. The boys were beginning to think him yellow.

So he had led the raid, with Suzanne driving the car. Cooper had shot the soldier in the first truck. The driver had given himself up. Louis knifed the German in the second truck to death, and Cooper had placed plastic bombs against the petrol drums.

Then they had argued. Bitterly. The two drivers were French. Louis and Luipy said they knew how to deal with traitors. They wanted to tie them to the trucks, which would belch into flames and explode in minutes.

Cooper had refused point blank to agree. Suzanne had seconded him. The two Frenchmen, working for a trucking company, said they had been unable to refuse to drive the petrol.

Cooper had let them go, suggesting that it would be wise if they stayed away from their families and employer. Luipy and Louis had said nothing, but the tension had grown between them.

Then there was Suzanne. Cooper hated to admit to himself that he was in love with her, but he knew that it was true. He was more in love with the beautiful, passionate Suzanne than he had ever been with any girl before.

And the way she acted often infuriated him. Like on the Tuesday night. How many times had he told her he loved her before that? A dozen times he had whispered his love and she had kissed him and whispered back that she felt the same way.

Yet on the Tuesday night he had called for her and found her dressing for dinner. A new hairdo, jewellery, evening gown, the works.

She had said, "Darling, kiss me quickly - before I put my lipstick on."

He had kissed her lips, watched her face in the mirror, and asked, in surprise, "Are we going somewhere?"

"No," she had said gaily, "I am. I'm going out to dinner. With Colonel Dietz."

She had seen the thunder on his face and said, "Oh, darling, don't be silly!"

He had felt silly. Then he had said, "All right. I'll read a book. And wait up for you."

"Oh, I shouldn't do that," she said, slapping powder on her cheeks. "I won't be back before tomorrow morning."

Just like that she had said it. Cooper tried to speak, to protest, but words escaped him. He had never been so astonished in his life before.

She had shown irritation then. "Stop behaving stupidly, Arnal," she had said. "This is war."

"To hell it is!" he thundered. "In war men fight . . ."

"And what do women do?" she said. She turned on him. "Which war are we talking about - the Boer War?"

"Now listen . . .!" Cooper began.

"Stop acting like a jealous schoolboy, Harry," Suzanne said. "You don't think I'm going to enjoy myself, do you?"

Cooper had only one weapon: sarcasm. He said, "I wouldn't know. Are you going to . . .?" He left it there.

She understood him. She said, "Well, Dietz is a professional. I want to find out all I can."

He had slammed out of the flat then. He had said from the doorway, "Well, you won't find out much. As you said, Dietz is a professional and can guard his tongue. And he'll have other matters than military ones on his mind!"

Cooper had got drunk that evening. He had sat in a bistro in a side street, drinking wine, tormented by his thoughts.

Later he had gone back to his apartment, and the boys had not helped. They seemed to know what was upsetting him and they moved about in studied silence - as if there was an invalid in the room - with tight little smirks on their compressed lips.

On the following morning, the Wednesday, Suzanne had taken him to meet her superior. They had met at a dockside café. They had driven to the docks in silence. Suzanne, Cooper noticed, looked a little pale as if she had had a heavy night.

There seemed to be an unmentioned agreement that all was over between them. Cooper had got in one sarcastic smack as

they had stopped the car. A roadsweeper was energetically sweeping the cobbles.

Cooper had said in an aside, "Like you, he enjoys his work."

Suzanne had blushed and said nothing. She had introduced him to her superior and then left to wait in the car. The man whom Cooper knew under the code name Reginald looked a shrewd, tough French provincial businessman. Which he was.

He talked for five minutes, quickly and harshly, bringing Cooper up to date. He told Cooper that the Maquis in the province was so strong that, given tanks and artillery, it could take the field as an army.

He then snapped, "It is because of this, because you are experienced and valuable, that I don't intend to tolerate any more incidents like that trucks episode. For two damned trucks you risked your own life and the lives of three of your group."

Cooper went to protest, but swiftly realized that he could not blame the boys.

Reginald said, "I understand what happened. I know Louis and Luipy by repute. You, being new, wanted to show them how good you are. Well, that's not professional. But you are young. Don't let it happen again."

He then switched the conversation. He asked if Cooper had any problems.

Cooper said, "Louis and Luipy worry me. They are reckless."

Reginald nodded. "We can't always choose whom we'll fight beside in a war. They are stupid, but they are courageous. They'll eventually get killed, but they'll do a lot of damage to the Boche in the meantime. They are driven on, not by patriotism, but by a death wish. Keep an eye on them but, in a battle, let them have their heads."

Cooper said, "And Suzanne, she worries me a little."

Reginald smiled at him through knowing provincial French eyes. He said, "I think she loves you a little, too."

Cooper wished he had not said that. Wished that he had not guessed it. He said quickly, "I think she needs a rest, a break."

"Take her to St. Tropez for a weekend," Reginald said, not with sarcasm. "There are ample funds. From your Government." He smiled. "Have a little honeymoon at His Majesty's expense."

Cooper said, "I think she should go to England. Or perhaps Gibraltar."

"No," Reginald said. "Forget your personal feelings. I need Suzanne here. She's the best man I've got. All I can say to you,

not that you will heed me, is what I told her this morning: don't become personally involved. By that I mean emotionally."

Cooper said, "She reported to you?"

"She learned something while she was with Dietz. He received instructions about a large munitions convoy." Reginald smiled. "Dietz did not know Suzanne can speak German. Besides, she was with him in his room; his superior was on the phone. But she gathered enough. I'm working on it now. By the time I have finished with it, I'll have all the data."

"We'll hit it ourselves?"

Reginald said, "That depends upon time. The further we can attack it out in the country, the better. But if the information cannot be passed back to the country groups to attack in time, we'll have to do it ourselves. 'Muster all hands' as you British say."

Cooper left soon after that, rejoining a still-subdued Suzanne in the car.

Driving back, Cooper tried to think of some way in which to apologize without actually seeming to do so. For he felt that he was, in a way, also an injured party. Was he supposed to remain mute while the girl he loved went out with other men - albeit for patriotic reasons?

They reached the Rue de Grande, left the car and walked up to Suzanne's flat still without exchanging a word.

They entered the flat and Suzanne discarded her bag and gloves and Cooper, helping himself to a drink, sat in an armchair.

Suzanne turned, looking at him, a slight reproach showing on her lovely dark features. "Will you eat?" she asked.

Cooper nodded glumly.

"Then will you put up some water for coffee while I cook a meal?"

Cooper nodded again.

She came across to him then, and there were tears in her eyes, and she stood in front of him, looking down at him, and she whispered, "Harry, Colonel Dietz was very disappointed."

"Disappointed?" He looked up at her.

"All I could think of was you, and how unhappy you were, and how unhappy you would be. And I left him. I came home shortly after midnight."

"But you were in his apartment?"

"I know. We dined there. Then we listened to music. Then he had that phone call. And then I left."

She swung down on to the carpet beside him and rested her arms on his legs. She looked up at him, a smile shining behind her tears, and she said, "Do you forgive me, Harry?"

He bent forward, grasping her shoulders. "But there is nothing to forgive, my darling!"

"I mean - I mean everything in the past."

He said he did and took her into his arms. They kissed.

During the next few days, Cooper reached a great happiness with Suzanne. They spent all their free time together, planned for the future, when the war was over, when Suzanne could come to England, and they could spend their holidays in France.

Even Louis and Luipy, with their hairbrained schemes, couldn't detract from the happiness. And then an urgent appeal came from Reginald. Details of the convoy had come through, but not in time for action to be taken by the stronger, better-trained and equipped country Maquis.

The heavily armed convoy was expected that night. Already squadrons of E-boats were massing in Marseilles Harbour, ready to be loaded to crash the munitions across the Med.

Reginald, showing for once anxiety and strain, said, "Pierre, your people have asked for a maximum effort. The convoy will be heavily-escorted. I only hope we can bring it off."

So Cooper sat alone, in a stolen German car, on a country road and waited. Scattered in the ditches along the road and hidden by the brush, were a score of men. Somewhere there was Reginald. In the ditch nearby the car were Louis and Luipy and Suzanne.

Cooper had the toughest job. When the convoy was sighted, he would drive the car, heavily laden with rocks and stones, into the road to block the way. Then, amid the burst of fire from the leading German armoured car, he would have to run for cover.

7

The Ambush

COOPER knew of the motor convoy's existence long before it came in sight. First there was the orange glow of headlamps on the blue-black horizon. Next the roar of heavy truck engines, tortured sounds implying that the engines were overworked, pushed too hard, neglected by the mechanics.

And that told a story. The Germans rarely neglected their

machinery. Rommel must be desperate for supplies.

When the convoy reached the bend, a hundred yards along the track, Cooper started the car. There was a dryness in his mouth and a salty taste.

He clamped the Sten between his pressed knees and grasped the steering wheel with both hands. He discovered then that his palms were sweating.

There was an armoured car leading the procession. There was another at the rear. Each of the twenty-eight trucks had an armed soldier accompany the French driver. The only thing, Cooper reflected, that gave his group a chance of success was firstly surprise and secondly the fact that they were well hidden.

Reginald had gone over the plan in minute detail. Measurements had been taken of the ground, and the probable length of the convoy, going by the make and size of the trucks, had been estimated. Cooper had then stationed his men at intervals so that, he hoped, the occupants of each truck could be dealt with almost simultaneously.

It was up to himself, aided by Louis and Luipy, to deal with the lead armoured car. Suzanne, hefting a stolen German Schemisser sub-machine gun, would deal with the occupants of the leading truck.

Reginald, with another Resistance man, armed with Stens and petrol bombs, would deal with the armoured truck at the rear.

Cooper heard the harsh grate of engines now as the convoy began to climb the slight incline. Two beams of yellow light, the headlamps of the armoured car, coned the road.

Cooper waited, engine running, then he released the brakes and the little German staff car ploughed forward on to the track from the bumpy bank.

Immediately the headlamps of the armoured car suffused Cooper and the car in light. But Cooper was already moving. Brakes sharply and harshly applied, he switched off the engine and tore the ignition key from the board. His leg kicked the door open and he bent, swinging free, discarding the key towards the ditch.

As he freed himself, so the mounted Spandau in the armoured car opened up. Machine gun bullets hammered at Cooper's car. Glass, in bright, diamond-hard shards, sprinkled the road around Cooper as, crouching, he leapt into the ditch.

Then the ambushers opened up. As he sprawled into the ditch, Cooper turned. He saw the armoured car, with increased speed,

moving towards the car, in an attempt to ram it and clear the road.

But Louis was up, standing in the ditch, reflected in the light of the armoured cars' lights and tracer, Sten gun raised and firing. Luipy came on to the road and his arm swung and a black shape curved from his hand and thumped against the armoured car.

And along the road, from the ditches on both sides of the track, the Maquis began to fire on the trucks.

As Cooper regained his feet, he saw flames lick up the side of the armoured car. Then mushroom above it. The car still bore on and then, hitting Cooper's weighed down car, came to a jarring stop.

Cooper lifted the Sten, pushing off the safety, swinging it for something to fire at. He had a momentary impression of the first truck, with its windscreen shattered and occupants dead, swinging out of control into the ditch.

He saw the trap door of the flaming armoured car spring up and a head appeared. He aimed and fired a burst and the head jerked and came to rest, the chin propping it against the edge.

Cooper began to stumble along the ditch, moving towards the firing. Up the track further, he saw a gusher of flame shoot skyward, and guessed that Reginald had accounted for the second armoured car with petrol bombs.

Cooper could see that the ambushers in the centre of the convoy were not as successful as he had been. With a little more warning, some of the Germans had taken cover and were firing back at the ditches.

The occupants of the first truck were dead, killed by Suzanne. The second truck stood motionless, with its glass windscreen shattered. But the guard in the third truck was still alive, although the driver was slumped over his wheel, one arm extended through the shattered door.

A burst of fire hammered against the driving compartment from the opposite ditch. Cooper saw a figure sprawling over the rim of the ditch just ahead of him. The guard, then, had got the Frenchman.

Cooper, crouching, moved on to the road, the Sten sighted on the windscreen of the truck, waiting for the soldier's head to appear.

Then he saw Luipy spring from the opposite ditch, his arm raised, a mad grin on his face. He reached the offside door where the dead driver's arm held the door open.

Then, with his juggler's skill, he threw something into the cabin. Cooper ducked back instinctively. He hoped the idiot had not thrown a grenade. The truck could be loaded with ammunition or petrol. But Luipy had thrown, not tossed. And a moment later Cooper saw the soldier straighten up as if stunned by a rock.

Then Louis fired. Cooper saw him straighten in the ditch, parallel with the truck's bonnet. The soldier slumped through the shattered windscreen, his fingers clawing glass.

Cooper moved on. Ahead of him, others moved up to finish off the few remaining drivers. Before Cooper was halfway along the convoy, the action had died off. There were just a few sporadic shots now . . . as the wounded soldiers were killed.

Cooper stumbled across two more dead Resistance men in the ditches. Then he met Reginald and a group of men, coming along the line to meet him.

Reginald's fat face was streaked with sweat and grease. But there was a flush of triumph also.

"We have done it!" he said. "We have finished them off. It went better than I ever dreamed."

Cooper agreed. He said, "There's only one problem. The lead armoured truck had a radio mast. It might have got an S.O.S. away."

Reginald frowned. He said, "But there wasn't time?"

Cooper said, "Perhaps not. But let's not take any chances. Leave three men here to blow the trucks. The rest of us had better get back into Marseilles before the Germans and the Milice can block the roads."

Reginald agreed. He gave the necessary instructions.

The getaway cars were hidden in nearby scrub. Luipy, Louis, Suzanne and Cooper went in the first car.

But Cooper's fear became a fact. The wireless operator in either the lead or the rear car had had time to inform Marseilles.

The Germans and the Vichy police were waiting for them on a narrow road a mile from Marseilles - in ambush.

8

Street Battle

LOUIS and Luipy were excited and happy. They bumped around in the rear seat of Suzanne's car talking about their successes.

"I got three of them," Louis kept saying. "My only regret is I didn't get close enough to finish one off with my hands."

Luipy said, "I'm sure I got two. How many did you get, Sue?"

Suzanne ignored him. She was putting the car along the dark, winding road at top speed.

Cooper said, "The point is we blew the convoy. Let's forget the unpleasant side of it."

"What's unpleasant about killing Germans?" Louis said.

"About half of them happened to be French," Cooper retorted.

"Frenchmen working for the Hun," Luipy said. "They deserved a slower death."

Suzanne said urgently, "What's this - a lot of traffic?"

Cooper's eyes flashed along the road. He saw the shapes of vehicles coming up in the headlamps. He saw uniformed, steel-helmeted figures.

He lifted his Sten gun instinctively. "Turn off, Sue!" he snapped. "The field! Quick! It's a roadblock!"

"There's a gap!" Suzanne snapped. "Lower your heads. We are going through!"

Suzanne pressed the pedal on the small car to its top speed and the car hurtled towards the collection of vehicles at better than sixty miles an hour.

Cooper did not duck. His teeth clenched, he saw the gap between the two military trucks. There were still drivers behind the wheels, which suggested that the road block was just being prepared and the trucks had not been arranged in place.

Troops - Cooper recognized them as Milice - fell away on either side of the hurtling car. Somebody opened fire and the window by Cooper shattered. Then they had reached the trucks.

And Suzanne was too far over. There was a grinding scrape and the ripping noise of tortured metal. Then they were through and into the darkness behind.

"Mon dieu!" Luipy said. "That was close."

"We have lost your front wheel mudguard," Louis said conversationally.

Behind them, the two trucks had closed the gap. And there came the stutter of machine gun fire as the remaining five cars ran into the trap. The second car hit one of the trucks at something like fifty miles an hour, and they heard the crash in Suzanne's car above the clatter of firearms.

"Those Vichy S.O.B.'s!" Louis said savagely.

Luipy said, "We'll pay them off. We'll do some silent knife-work!"

"Two for one," Louis answered him.

Suzanne had slackened speed. The first houses of Marseilles began to show up on either side.

Cooper looked at her. Her face glistened with sweat. She looked fatigued and beaten.

"Shall I take the wheel?" he asked.

"It's all right. You don't know the roads. We'll have to use back streets."

"Do you think they got the licence number?" Luipy asked.

"We took them by surprise," Louis said. "They were just going through routine. They didn't expect us to return to Marseilles. They thought it would have been the country groups. Nancy Wake's mob. They are better armed and stronger."

"I don't think they could have got it," Cooper said. "We were going too fast. But they have the mudguard and the colour."

"It's goodbye to your car then, Sue," Louis said. "You drop off with Arnal. Luipy and I will take away the plates and drive it off the dock into deep water."

Cooper said, "That's sound enough. We should be able to duplicate the car for you. Even to the colour. It's a common make."

Some of Suzanne's light-heartedness returned. "There," she said, "and I was just falling in love with this old crate."

Cooper could no longer hear the noise of battle behind them. He said, "I wonder how many of them bought it?"

"Possibly the first two cars. The others had time and room to turn," Louis said.

"Reginald could have got away?"

Suzanne said, "It's more than likely. He stayed behind a little while, supervising the blowing of the trucks."

Cooper lit a cigarette. His mouth was as dry as old leather. The cigarette was harsh, containing the usual dry black French tobacco. What wouldn't he give for a good English cigarette and a decent cup of coffee?

They began a tortured, circumspect approach to the Rue de Grande through back streets.

When they reached the Place de Grande, they waited at the corner, looking down the darkened Rue de Grande. There seemed to be nothing abnormal in the activity there. The two or three

pavement cafés were doing a little business. The others had closed long ago.

Louis squinted forward. He was looking over the few patrons sitting at the pavement seats. A few girls, still hoping for a patron to arrive; a few drunken layabouts and waiters, from the more fashionable restaurants, "tanking up" before going home.

"Everything seems to be in order," Louis said.

In the moments of waiting, Suzanne's hand had stretched out along the seat. Cooper's hand had moved to meet hers. He was surprised to find her fingers cool. He turned and looked at her and she looked at him.

Fatigue had given her black lustre eyes a peculiar beauty, and they were very expressive when they met his. Cooper felt his heart go out to her. He realized that he loved Suzanne very deeply; that it was more than a mere physical attraction; that if anything happened to Suzanne it would be the end of everything for him.

Louis said, "Luipy and I will dump the car. We'll come back to your apartment, Sue. How about some coffee and food?"

"I'm keeping open house tonight," Suzanne said. She started the car, turning into the Rue de Grande.

Cooper said, "You had better drive straight into the courtyard before Louis takes the wheel. There are too many people at the cafés with nothing much to look at."

Suzanne nodded. She drove quickly down the street then turned sharply, driving into the narrow neck of the courtyard, expertly. She brought the car to a stop outside her door in the semi-dark cobbled yard. They all got out of the car. Cooper left his door open so that Louis or Luipy could get in.

Afterwards, there was very little Cooper could remember of the action. Just a very few, sharply detailed fragments. Like the burning pain in his arm and how he wanted to lie in a stream of cool water and die. Like Luipy, with a hysterical shriek and naked knife blade in his upraised hand, smashing it into a man's chest as a Luger emptied into his body. Of the running, twisting, turning, heavy breathing and always the pain as he tried to escape.

They had been waiting in the darkened doorways of the courtyard. Colonel Dietz was there, supervizing. The snapbrimmed hat and mackintosh brigade. Lugers in their right hands with the safetys off. Silent, purposeful, patient. Men with no mercy because they could not afford to show mercy – not after their own countrymen had been massacred in the munitions convoy. Germans determined to avenge their dead compatriots because they could not

wholly depend upon the Milice – French policemen, after all, would be a little sympathetic to French patriots.

They had stepped forward from the shadows when all four had left the car.

Cooper had, instinctively, protected Suzanne, stepping in front of her. The little light from the upper rooms of the house had shown the wicked sheen of the guns they held.

A voice – Dietz? – had said in careful French.

“Stand where you are. All of you. Don’t anybody move.”

They had stood there for a moment, rooted to the ground by surprise. Then Luipy had moved. With his swift, acrobatic gracefulness, he had flashed forward, a knife appearing in his hand.

Cooper had seen it illuminated in the flash of the pistol report as the man facing Luipy fired. The bullet had hit Luipy, but not centrally, and his momentum had carried him on. A second bullet had hit him as he forced the knife into the man, driving it with the weight of his dying body.

The German, mortally wounded, had fired twice more into Luipy. Then they had crashed to the cobbles, entwined together, with Luipy’s steel-strong fingers around the Nazi’s neck.

Cooper had moved, his Sten gun flashing up and flaming. And so had Louis. Louis had jumped backwards, his Sten blazing, the weapon aimed haphazardly and indiscriminately. One German had fallen from a doorway, his head shattered.

Then Louis had died as three Lugers blasted at him.

Cooper had opened fire, spraying the bullets in a short arc, waist-high, in the doorways in front of him. And Suzanne, snaking out from behind his protecting back, had obeyed his nudged orders to flee. Darting to the shadows of the buildings behind Cooper, she had run to the far corners of the yard, but away from the entrance.

As he fired so Cooper had folded, dropping to find what little shelter the car afforded. And as he did this so a bullet had hit him. It had smacked into his shoulder and smashed him to the cobbles. He had coughed, seeking air, and had dropped the Sten gun in the process.

He had rolled over then, gritting his teeth in pain. And, as he came up on his knees, he had reached for the hand grenade he had in his duffel coat.

He jacked out the pin. Then he tossed it, heaving it across the car. Then he ran, doubled up and clutching his shattered shoulder,

for the entrance to the courtyard.

The grenade exploded. The report was deafening in the confined space of the yard. The Germans who remained active had ducked for cover. The sound of Cooper's running feet was lost in the explosion and the echoes and the fall of shattered glass.

Cooper reached the Rue de Grande. He turned right and ran, his pistol held against his shoulder in his bloodstained hand.

The pavement cafés were now deserted. The girls and the layabouts had thought first of discretion instead of valour and had possibly gone home together.

A solitary waiter watched solemnly from the pavement as Cooper staggered by on the other side of the road, his expressionless eyes showing his neutrality. Two streets down Cooper found a taxi. He took a chance because he had to take chances.

He clambered into the back of the cab, and the man turned, protest shaping on his lips, thinking Cooper was drunk.

Cooper said, "I'm English. I have been shot by the Boche. Take me across to the dock district. And keep your mouth shut about it."

The man had started the cab.

"I am on your side, Monsieur. Please believe me. Here, take this for your shoulder."

He had passed Cooper a small first aid kit and a linen scarf.

From the dock district, Cooper had contacted Reginald. Reginald had had him picked up and taken immediately from Marseilles. For two days Cooper had fretted impatiently – and painfully – in a farmhouse, waiting for news. But no news had come. They had got to Reginald on the morning following the ambush – shooting him down in his office.

Cooper had asked the Resistance men who had carried him deeper into the countryside for information about the group – about Luipy, Louis, Reginald, but more especially about Suzanne.

But they knew nothing. All they could say was that resistance – thanks to Dietz – had ceased to exist in the great port.

The RAF had landed on a small Resistance-occupied airfield and Cooper had been flown to North Africa. He had spent months in hospital and, on his return to Britain, he had returned to an orthodox fighting unit. No more holidays, he had told himself.

He had collected another wound and a DSO in the holocaust of Arnhem. After the war he had made several trips to Marseilles. But nobody remembered Suzanne.

"It was a long time ago, Monsieur," he was told, "and nothing and nobody stays still – especially a beautiful girl."

Friends who had transferred to the Secret Service and Special Branch were sympathetic. They had offered to help. Cooper had kept in contact with them. They had humoured him, thinking it all very romantic, had watched, but had failed to produce anything.

And then news had come on Dietz after all these years.

It had been a jolt for Cooper. But an exciting one. He had a partnership in a solicitor's office. He had had a series of girl friends, but none of them had lasted. He had often told himself that his standards were too high. All Suzanne's fault, of course!

Chattering secretaries and flapping social butterflies paled in comparison with Suzanne, passionate, humorous, intelligent, courageous.

And Cooper had been dissatisfied with his job, too. He had missed the excitement of the war years. He had become a chair-borne general but not of battles. His tactics were used in handling sleazy divorce cases and company wrangles, not the positioning of fighting men.

He foresaw long dreary unglamorous years and he knew he would eventually end up like his partner Basil. And God forbid he should ever be as dreary as Basil!

And then Cooper had received the news about Dietz. Dietz had turned up in Paris, and joined the Legion after some scandal involving his firm's money in Hamburg.

Cooper relaxed in his aeroplane seat and lit a fresh cigarette.

He was on his way to North Africa. He was going to find Otto Dietz. He would join the Foreign Legion himself – why not? – if it was the only way he could find the German.

And he wondered about the German Otto Dietz. He wondered if the German had worn well down the years.

9

Otto Dietz

OTTO DIETZ was down to his last five hundred New Francs, for Paris was an expensive city for a man with expensive tastes, especially if that man had a woman he wanted to forget – a woman who had got down right under his skin and whose treachery started his nerves jangling.

Drink was a way out . . . drink and women. If you took a fresh

intake of alcohol to straighten out a hangover, then to get over one woman you found another.

Dietz had had a busy week of it in Paris, putting the old theory into operation. There had been the usual round of the night clubs and the usual round of women. But there was nothing permanent about these things.

His wife had betrayed him. She had betrayed him twice. Partially, Dietz knew that it was his own fault. He had not done well for himself in the business world. After the war he had joined a company in Hamburg as a cashier. Fifteen years later he was only chief cashier.

And his wife, lively and remarkably beautiful, liked the plushier things of life. Eventually she began the affair with the elderly industrialist – not the first affair she had had by any means, Dietz now realized.

It was after midnight. He had worked his way across to the market district of Paris, and he sat drinking the cheapest wine, Vin Ordinaire, and eating the famous dish of the area – onion soup. Outside the steamed-up windows he could see the heaped crates of farming produce on the pavements. Across the street, beneath a yellow light which said *Hotel*, three girls, bleached blonde and decoratively dressed, stood on the step and waited with professional patience.

Dietz morosely drank, and he reflected. If he could forgive his wife for unfaithfulness, which was only human, he could never forgive her for the way she tried to get rid of him.

After all, she couldn't blame him for fighting to keep her. She had told him about the industrialist, how the old man wanted to marry her, how she could live the luxurious life she had always craved and to which, when a child, she had been accustomed.

Dietz had refused to divorce her. She had stormed around their small Hamburg flat then, smashing things, cursing him for being a failure, comparing his wartime rank and honours with his menial standing in the community now.

Dietz had sat silent through this. For, always completely honest with himself, he knew it to be true.

And then she had uttered the threat. She had stood before him, hands firmly placed on her slender waist, her dark eyes flashing.

She had snapped, "Otto, this is your last chance. If you refuse to divorce me, I'll report you to the authorities for crimes against humanity in the war."

Dietz had lifted his head and laughed at that.

"Why laugh?" she had demanded, puzzled. "Since the Eichmann arrest, there has been a new drive against war criminals. Only last month that butcher two blocks away was arrested. You were an S.S. officer, Otto. Don't forget that."

"I hadn't forgotten it," Dietz had retorted. "But I was Waffen-S.S. remember? Purely military, the élite, the Guards of Germany. I had no connection at all with those thugs who terrorized the occupied countries and ran the concentration camps," he snapped savagely. "And you know it!"

"Oh," she said, "and what about the time you spent in the South of France? On special duties?"

Dietz had lost his temper. He had been completely infuriated by her lack of loyalty. "Do your damndest!" he snapped. "But I'll never divorce you!"

"We shall see about that," she had said, collecting her things. "If I can prove a case against you – even if I have to fabricate one by telling the tribunal that you have confessed crimes to me – I will do so. For then I will be able to get a divorce from you on the grounds that you were a war criminal!"

She had left the flat then. For good. And, completely numbed, Dietz had let her go.

A day later she carried out her threat. But Dietz had not waited for it to happen. He had sold the furniture in the flat, sold the clothes she had left behind, drawn his savings from the bank, and left for Paris.

Had he been a coward? he asked himself as he sat imbibing onion soup in the French café. Should he have stayed in Hamburg and fought his case? He knew his chances of clearing his name would be good, but would it be worth it? His marriage was ruined and his wife had left him for good.

But until she found him, until he returned, she would never be able to get the divorce she yearned for. And that was the only advantage Dietz had.

Dietz stopped thinking as his attention was attracted. The three girls on the doorstep opposite moved slightly, as if loosening themselves for action. And Dietz saw the soldier – slightly intoxicated – come in to sight.

* * *

He walked along the centre of the road with great confidence, which only came from too much drinking. He stopped in the

centre of the street and he looked at the girls. He swayed a little. Then he turned and he looked at the café. Then he looked at the money he had left in his wallet.

He scratched thoughtfully at his face, looking in turn at the girls and at the café. He was a man with a great decision to make, a man with two hungers, only one of which he could sate.

Finally, with a nasty gesture at the girls as if it was all their fault, he came determinedly into the café. He saw Dietz by the window and knew instinctively that he was a German, too.

He came across, flopped into the seat opposite Dietz, and greeted him in German. He introduced himself as Heinz Dubacher, corporal of the Foreign Legion Paras, veteran of Indo-China.

He gestured across to the girls. "Food first. At my age, one must think first of the constitution."

Dietz was only warily friendly. Dubacher seemed to be a nice enough fellow and he was a compatriot, but Dietz knew – like all Germany – that only the worst types of Germans had joined the Legion after the war. Usually they were war criminals and the yellow scum who had committed atrocities in the concentration camps.

It had been only too easy in the confusion following the war for them to collect identity cards under false names in Germany and then cross to France. And the French Army authorities, anxious to build up the Legion in a world sickened of soldiering, had accepted them after only a cursory check.

But Dietz was lonely and depressed, and the idea of joining the Legion as a way out had occurred to him.

And Corporal Dubacher gave tribute to the Legion in slurred words of gaudy technicolor.

"The old Legion is dead and finished, my friend," he said, smashing his spoon through the layer of yellow cheese to get at his onion soup.

"In the old days a Legionnaire was treated like cattle. The NCO's could – and did – thump the poor sod with a rifle butt. For a simple misdemeanour you could be buried up to your head in sand beneath a merciless sun. For striking a superior you could go to the penal camp at Colomb Bechar."

"But," Dietz replied, "the days of the Legion are surely numbered. The colonies are receiving their Independence. By statute, the Legion is limited in number to 32,000 men. They must never serve garrison duty in France. After the colonies have gone – where does the Legion go?"

Dubacher smiled wickedly.

"Let me finish, my good friend. The Legion is strong, it has never been so strong or carried so much pride before. Politicians . . . ! To hell with them. The Legion is sick of politicians. It is sick of being used as cannonfodder to gratify the whims of those S.O.B.'s here.

"Never fear, the Legion will go on existing. There will always be countries who need a first-class fighting force and who will be willing to pay handsomely for the Legion's services.

"And there will be no more fruitless sacrifices and mistakes like we had in Indo-China. From now on the Legion will make its own laws and its own decisions, and if the French Government don't like it, they can do the alternative.

"There is trouble in Algeria. It has been dragging on for seven years. The Moslems attack and burn the French farms and massacre families. We Legionnaires retaliate and butcher the Moslems.

"My friend, it is a three-cornered fight. Morally, the Algerians are right, I suppose. By twentieth-century ethics, they should have their independence.

"But two things will stop an easy or early solution. One is the determination of the million French settlers who are dying to hold the lands they have cultivated and keep Algeria as a province of France. The other is the skilled and dashing Legion who will back them with every gun in defiance of Metropolitan France.

"And it is great days to be a Legionnaire, my friend. Prospects are good in every direction. There is loot and there are women and there is self-respect. There is fighting in plenty and always the prospect of a glorious death.

"What more can a man who is a man ask for, my friend?"

Dietz ordered wine. The wine had the effect of lifting his depression. He listened, with growing excitement, as Dubacher told him of the modern Foreign Legion. And of the Paras of the Legion, the new élite, the professional ruthless soldiers, formations not witnessed by the world since the days of Rome.

And Dietz asked Dubacher how he might join such a force and Dubacher told him.

"Otto," he said, "I have friends in Paris. For a man like you it will be easy. We are short of professionals. Show you are a professional, and a place in the Paras and quick promotion will be yours."

They had finished the bottle of wine. They left arm in arm.

Within a day Otto Dietz had been enrolled in the Legion. Within the week he was in Sidi-bel-Abbes, the Legion headquarters.

With Dubacher pulling strings for him, he won a place in the Paras, and as a First Class Legionnaire was posted to the tenth company of the Second Para Regiment.

A few short weeks later under company officer Captain Charles Dubois he went into action, a punitive mission against the Algerian village of Suz.

10

The Legionnaires

LEGIONNAIRE First Class Otto Dietz shifted uncomfortably in the sand and looked to where the camouflaged figure of the captain lay - close by him.

Dietz reflected dryly that never had he ever come across an officer quite like Captain Charles Dubois. Here they were, cut off, surrounded, outnumbered, and Dubois had been cursing for this last half hour because he had broken a date with a beautiful Moslem girl.

And then he had launched into a learned lecture on the advantages and disadvantages of the Moslem girl in general and his own little piece in particular.

The captain spoke only to Dietz, who was the man closest to him in the dried-up riverbed.

"They are passionate, my dear Dietz," he had said, "and having said that you have named all the advantages. But the trouble, or the disadvantages, are that they now take an interest in politics, so you must never turn your back on them.

"Take my own little girl. 'Geeta,' I call her. Now I know Geeta is a member of the Algerian underground. I also know that she has been ordered to have an affair with me so that she can spy on me. But I also know that in a limited way she loves me.

"And, my dear Dietz, you do see my problem there, don't you? I also must limit my love. Her damn politics preclude me from becoming completely emotionally involved with her. And that makes it rather a dirty thing, as if I was paying her, as if it was a damned business arrangement!"

Dietz grunted. He was only half listening. Out there, just above the rim of the riverbed, lurked the *fellahgas*. For all he knew, they

might be sneaking towards them now.

Dietz listened to Dubois ramble on. He wondered about the man. He had been wondering about him ever since he joined the platoon.

The Paras – especially those who had been in Indo-China – swore by Dubois. He was, for them, the greatest officer who ever lived. The most courageous, the most daring and, more important, they said, the most amusing.

But Dietz knew that courage alone did not make a good officer. Dubois struck Dietz as being foolhardy, and that was the worst type of officer soldiers could have.

He obviously had contempt for the Algerian terrorists, Dietz had noticed that as soon as they para-dropped on the village of Suz that morning.

And Dietz knew that was a bad thing. An officer should never underate an enemy. Whoever that enemy was. Dubois had admiration for the Chinese he had fought in Indo-China, but none for the Algerians. But an Algerian bullet could kill just as quickly and cleanly as a Communist one.

There was movement on Dietz's left. Sergeant André Levasseur dropped his bulky shape beside Dietz.

He lifted his head and called across Dietz to the officer.

"I am afraid there is no hope for Poperinghe, captain. He has a bullet at the base of the lung. He is in great pain and cannot last the night."

There was a pause before Captain Dubois replied. Then he said, "Do you think I should speak to him."

"I think, sir, you should speak to him," Levasseur replied.

Dietz heard the slight movement as Dubois took his pistol from his holster. He felt his blood go cold. Dubois, as the highest ranking officer present, had the unenviable duty of putting Poperinghe out of his misery.

Levasseur, moving close to Dietz in the darkness, began to talk to him. Dietz had been often surprised by the friendliness the French NCO had shown him.

Levasseur, after all, was a Frenchman and the French – particularly in France – had never disguised their hatred of the Germans. Levasseur, too, was a sergeant, and for that reason could keep aloof from an ordinary private.

The sergeant said softly, "Poperinghe was with Dubois in Indo-China. He was with him on the death march from Dien-Bien-Phu to the cage. He was there after they brainwashed

Dubois and made him confess his sins on a specially built stage before the assembled troops."

Levasseur chuckled in the darkness. He said, "I was there, too. Do you know what Dubois did? He turned it into a pantomime. But those stupid Communists did not see it, and they smiled and nodded with approval as our captain confessed.

"And these are some of the things he said. 'On 5th March, at approximately 2315 hours, I called Mao Dung - yes, he used the word dung - a Communist pig. I now apologize for this stupidity.'

"He said next that 'On 1st April, after reading a magazine crammed with American Capitalist propaganda, I was so carried away by the flimsily-clad pinups therein contained - the opium for the down-trodden masses - that I predicted Mao Dung would lose the war in Indo-China. I now apologize for this misconception'."

Levasseur added, "Dubois kept it up for nearly an hour. But the men were laughing too much and the Reds became suspicious. They threw him in a coffin-shaped cell for three days."

Levasseur paused. Captain Dubois's voice came to them from the other side of the riverbed. Dietz could vaguely discern the captain's shape as he bent over the wounded man.

Dubois had the wounded Para's hands clasped in his own and was talking to him in a lowered voice.

Levasseur nudged Dietz. He said, "I know you haven't quite made up your mind about the captain, but he's made up his mind about you."

Dietz said, "What do you mean?"

Levasseur chuckled. "He thinks you are a good soldier. He also thinks you will make a first-class Para. If I get it in this action, you will automatically step into my rank. It is my wish and the captain's wish."

"Thank you, sergeant," Dietz said.

"You sound surprised?"

"I am surprised," Dietz replied.

"Because you are a German, I suppose," Levasseur said. "Well, don't let it worry you, my friend. You ceased to be a German when you joined us. That does not mean, however, that you became French. You are not a German and I am not a Frenchman. We are Paras of the Foreign Legion. And that is something to be proud of, more so than an accident which gave us nationality.

"Where you are born is an accident. What you become, what

you want and wish to become, is not an accident. We are often ashamed of our nationality, ashamed of what our blasted politicians do, but we are never ashamed of the *Legion Étrangère*. For wherever in its history has it shown cowardice or stupidity or deceit?"

Dietz reflected upon that. He linked Levasseur's words with the action of that morning, the punitive mission to Suz. After all, wasn't that a rank act of atrocity? Certainly it would be classified so by most people throughout the world.

But Dubois', Levasseur's - the Legion's - answer would be that you couldn't fight this kind of war with the handbook of the Geneva Convention. That by stomping down hard and ruthlessly you would save more lives in the end.

And this had been confirmed by the facts. The Algerian problem had been going on for seven years. The French regular army had done little, the police had done less. It was not until the French settlers protested, and the Legion with all its ruthlessness, had taken over the functions of the police, that the terrorists went on the defensive.

On that morning Dietz had seen how the Legion acted. The briefing had been: The village of Suz is giving aid and comfort to the Algerian revolutionaries. Particularly to El Sollo. Teach them a lesson.

Captain Dubois had led the platoon. They had dropped just before noon near the village, and had then surrounded it, marching in, with carbines ready, from every direction. Dubois had called the village elder to the village square. The men, meanwhile, had hustled all the adult men from the mud hovels and lined them up in the square.

Then Dubois - with the showman in him always to the fore - had made a flowery speech. There was nothing personal on his part in what was about to happen, he told them. In fact, he had added, he was very miserable about the entire business.

After all, he was a soldier who preferred to wage war against soldiers, not civilians . . . and here he was acting not as a soldier but as a public executioner.

But that had been the unfortunate lot of soldiers from time to time throughout history, he had concluded, for the soldier often had to play the politician.

Dubois had then picked every fifth man from the villagers and had him placed against a mud wall.

He had taken time off to smoke a cigarette, allowed the wailing

womenfolk of the condemned men to say farewell and spoken kindly and understandingly to new men in the platoon who had not participated in a firing squad before.

Despite the high noon heat Dietz had experienced a cold numbness.

Then Dubois had smiled at the dozen condemned men and gestured suddenly with his hand. Fifteen carbines stuttered. Dietz had got the Arab who stood in front of him – an old man with a mottled nose – with a three-slug burst over the heart.

Sergeant Levasseur had gone along the line finishing off the twitching remainder, with a carbine bullet in the head.

An old Legionnaire standing by Dietz as Dubois afterwards addressed the assembled villagers, had looked at the veiled women.

“In the old days we would have stayed the night,” he recalled, “to drum the message home. But now our officers have scruples.”

They had marched out then in the late afternoon. They had to walk to a table of flat ground where a transport had been scheduled to pick them up. But *en route* they had been ambushed by El Sollo.

It had been beautifully done. But as Captain Charles Dubois had excused himself, “What could one expect? Hadn’t the bandit known as El Sollo served in the French Army as an NCO and, more, hadn’t he won the Military Medal at Dien-Bien-Phu on the sector known as bloody Marianne II?”

El Sollo’s scouts had spotted the parachutes dropping at noon. The scouts had informed their leader. El Sollo had thought about the matter, decided it was a punitive action against Suz, and had then dwelled on the problem of evacuation after the mission was accomplished.

There was only one place, he had rationalized, where the Legionnaires could be picked up within ten miles, and he had rushed his group to the area by jeep.

He had carried out the ambush in the prescribed manner. First mortar, then crossing machine gun fire. Priority targets – the wireless operator and the officers.

They had got the wireless operator with mortars. He now lay with his shattered equipment still strapped to his back in the shale, looking like bright red ribbon against the greyness of the rock.

Around him, doubled up and sprawling, as if in an uneasy sleep, lay seven of his comrades, including two corporals.

Then, firing as they went, the mauled platoon retreated in good

order to the banks of a dried-up river. They scrambled into it, finding cover behind its crumbling banks, and answered the rebel fire. Later in the evening they had been attacked from the rear by the villagers from Suz, who had hammered inaccurate fusillades at them with a motley of ancient weapons.

Dubois had rapped out a series of commands. He seemed calm, cold, and a little amused. The Paras had split up, lining all points of the bank to fire on the villagers as well as El Sollois hill position.

The trapped Paras had heard the plane arrive in the distance; an hour later they had heard it depart. They knew that if they could survive until the following morning, they would be rescued, for planes would be sent to search the area and Paras would be dropped.

The only problem, Dubois told Levasseur, was that ex-NCO El Sollo knew that, and would probably try and finish them off tonight.

With darkness came silence from the summit commanded by the Algerian, but the Suz villagers kept up their undangerous complaint.

They kept it up throughout the night. They were still firing bursts at the trapped Legionnaires when Dubois put the good Legionnaire Poperinghe out of his misery.

Lying beside Levasseur, Dietz had keyed himself to expect the shot. But the sharp crack of Dubois' pistol still made him jump when Dubois fired.

It was as if the bullet had entered Dietz's own body. He felt a sharp momentary pain, which passed immediately because it was only imagined.

A moment later the captain rejoined them.

"It's finished, sergeant," he said.

"I know a little French widow in Algiers who will miss Poperinghe," the sergeant replied.

"But we will miss him more. Poperinghe was beside me on the march. Do you remember the march, André?"

"I remember the march, captain."

"And to think he had to be killed by useless animals as these!" Dubois said savagely. "God. I am too kind. A more experienced officer would have killed all the men in Suz - and then our rear would have been open.

"There are only twenty or thirty of the swine up there. But already they have accounted for nearly ten of my Paras. They are not even trained soldiers - but they can kill my men easily from

ambush. Yet one of my men, face to face, bayonet to bayonet, is equal to five of them."

Levasseur did not reply.

Dietz, realizing that Dubois was upset because he had just shot Poperinghe, also kept silent.

Dubois, after cursing the French Government for its weakness, de Gaulle for his betrayal of all fellow soldiers, began, in a calm voice, to weigh up their chances of escape. He thought they should hang on until the morning, until fighters strafed the Algerian positions, and reinforcements arrived.

He asked Levasseur for his comments. The sergeant was on the point of replying. But before he could do so shingle had sifted down from the rim of the bank and sprayed his bare arm.

Levasseur swung up. His carbine pointed just over the rim. He fired quick, single shots in a short arc and a moment later a man screamed. He had hit the man who reared suddenly above him with a shot in the chest. But although dying, the terrorist summoned strength. He hurled himself at the crouching sergeant, crashing down the rim, bringing a cloud of shale with him.

Dubois fired twice, his carbine cupped in his hands. He hit the Algerian in the head, but the dead man's knife had already pricked through Levasseur's tunic and the weight of the man's dead body, falling on to the sergeant, buried it to the hilt in his chest.

Dubois, on his feet, was firing short automatic bursts up the gradient. Dietz, beside him, emptied his carbine, spraying the darkened slopes, looking for movement in the quick momentary gun flashes.

Other Paras, on both sides of the bank, were firing into the darkness.

Vague forms of crouching, running and dying men, were shown up in the crimson carbine fire. El Sollo had pushed a score of men down the hill in a creeping attack on the Paras.

Detected, the men now bunched, trying to flee back up to their sheltered rim. Others, nearer the rim, decided to die and hoped, as they came forward, to take a Para with them.

A figure suddenly detached itself from the darkness in front of Dietz. It lunged, a big black shape, with a stuttering carbine cradled in its arms. Bullets zipped by Dietz's head. He had barely a half a clip left in his own carbine.

Quickly he put the catch on to automatic fire, for it would take more than one bullet to stop this charging man. Dietz waited. It

seemed like minutes. But it was only a little longer than a second. As the man reached the rim and the shingle broke down the bank beneath him, so Dietz fired.

Half a dozen carbine bullets hit the man in the stomach and the chest. The heavy impact hurtled him back. He fell, dying, with his feet kicking jerkily over the rim.

Moments later it was all over. Dubois yelled, "Save ammunition, my children! Rest a little."

He moved towards Levasseur. Dietz was already there, with the sergeant's head cupped in his arms.

Dietz could feel the blood that cupped the sergeant's chin and spilled down from his mouth. He felt rather than saw Dubois kneel down beside him.

Dietz said, "He's still alive, I think. But he's unconscious."

"How badly is he wounded?" the captain asked, then probed the wound with gentle fingers. "Is he bleeding at the mouth?"

Dietz said he was. Dubois swore savagely. He said, "I'll get it over with, before he comes round. Move away."

Dietz gently slid his legs from beneath the sergeant's head. Dubois moved quickly. He cupped the unconscious sergeant's head in his hand and laid his pistol against his forehead.

"Goodbye, comrade," he whispered. And then he fired. Dietz saw Dubois's face in the flash of his pistol shot. It was a black, aged face, with a hard grimace around the lips which bared the teeth.

Out beyond the rim somewhere a wounded Algerian regained consciousness and began to chant in a dry croaking voice.

Dubois snapped at Dietz. "You assume Levasseur's rank immediately. I will have it confirmed on our return. Make the rounds, sergeant, check ammunition and supplies. Tell the men we march on the summit just before dawn."

"March?" Dietz said astonished. "Do you mean we attack?"

"Exactly that, sergeant," Dubois said crisply. "If we are to die then let it be in the open and with the bayonet where we can do the most damage. Not in a funkhole like this where anybody can pick us off like rats in a bog."

Dietz moved off to make his rounds.

Two hours later El Sollo risked his mortars. He sent his mortar-men down from the heights to bracket the riverbed. There were four men with two mortars.

They stopped some thirty yards away from the waiting Paras and moved five yards away from each other. The first mortar

bombs landed well away from the rim. It was not until the sixth and seventh that the jumpy Algerians got the range.

By then Dubois and Dietz, at his orders, had gone over the rim.

Dietz moved across the rocky ground in a swimming motion. He held his carbine crosswise in front of him and jerked his body forward by kicking out his legs and digging his rubber-toed boots at the lumpy ground.

He moved quickly, taking risk, for it was only a matter of time by the law of averages before the mortars began to kill the men. His face was bleeding with the friction of the ground and his knees and elbows were rubbed raw.

Dietz could see the mortar-men. They were momentarily illuminated in the flash of their fire, tight little shapes bent kneeling around their snouted weapons.

It happened quite suddenly, and showed Dietz that Dubois had moved more swiftly than he. Something thumped beside the men on the right-hand mortar and Dietz saw them jerk round. A moment later there was a terrific explosion. Dubois had got them with a lobbed grenade.

Dietz came up on to his legs and charged forward, firing as he did so.

He fired a burst on automatic at the men on the remaining mortar. He saw the men fold away from the gun, hit by the burst and saw sparks as one of his bullets ricocheted off the mortar's barrel. Then, his carbine empty, he threw his grenade to smash the mortar and finish off the Algerians.

To his right Dubois threw another grenade, then peppered the still figures of the gunners with carbine fire.

Above Dietz, somewhere on the summit, a heavy machine gun began to chatter. Dietz dropped quickly, scrabbling back across the ground towards the river.

Machine gun bullets kicked the shale and ricocheted off rock as Dietz fell back, but the gunner was only guessing.

Back in the riverbed, Dietz found Dubois waiting for him. Instead of a congratulation he got a smiling reprimand.

"If you wish to stay alive, my son," said Dubois who was nearly ten years younger than Dietz, "you must learn to move much faster."

Dietz sat down, his back to the river bank, and lit a cigarette.

Dubois joined him. He said, "I think that El Sollo will evacuate that high ground at dawn, sergeant. Why do I think that? Because

El Sollo is a very clever man. He knows that he will stand little chance when our fighters attack, should he remain on such a peak. So he will evacuate, and wait in positions on lower ground."

"That sounds reasonable enough," Dietz agreed.

"Just to be sure, however," Dubois said, "we won't risk the entire platoon. You and I will lead. Two other Paras will accompany us. The remainder will follow at twenty yards."

Dubois smiled. "Pick your volunteers. We leave in half an hour."

11

El Sollo

THE four Paras moved carefully through the fading darkness moving slowly uphill towards the cup-shaped summit.

Captain Dubois was slightly ahead in the line, his head oddly twisted over to one side, as if listening. He held his modern carbine in one hand, finger ready on the trigger; a hand grenade, the released pin held down by his finger, was ready in his other hand.

Acting sergeant Dietz was slightly to his left. The other two volunteers - who had accepted the assignment without a murmur when Dietz had approached them - were also spread out. One of them, a bearded Norwegian, had a hand grenade ready in each hand.

His carbine hung before his face, because the rifle strap was gripped between his large teeth.

This had brought the crack from Dubois as they had started off over the riverbed rim: "Mind you don't swallow that carbine, Markusson."

Markusson, who was a huge blond Viking of a man, had replied, "Are you sure you want me along, captain? The *fellahgas* can't avoid spotting me. I look like a barn."

"I most certainly want you along. I want to distract them, Markusson. They'll shoot at you first."

Now they were off. Dietz felt very vulnerable as they started up the gradient, moving silently in their rubber-soled Para boots. He looked at the rim of the summit etched clearly against the murky-coloured sky, looked until his eyes ached, to see if a head moved.

The ground fell away behind them. At the riverbed the remainder of the men were now starting off to follow them.

Dietz felt a bead of sweat trickle down towards his chin,

despite the early morning cold. Now, if the terrorists were waiting for them, they would stand no chance of surviving; a quick burst of machine gun and carbine fire and they would be finished.

Dubois and Markusson might do some damage with their grenades. But it would not save them. Dietz knew what Dubois was about. He was attempting to make something of a disgrace look like something of a victory. And it would not worry Dubois that he might lose his life in doing so.

By the code of the Paras, death with honour was preferable to life with shame – even small shame. Dietz could imagine Dubois writing his report. He would write that he learned El Sollo was in the area and, after carrying out his justice at Suz, had given chase.

True he had lost men. But had he not destroyed El Sollo's artillery – mortars – and many of his men?

Despite the fact that he might die for Dubois's good name, Dietz was surprised to find he had only a growing respect for the dandified captain.

He had joined the Legion for a refuge, but he had discovered it was much more than that. It had opened a new vista of life for him. For once in many years he had felt not only wanted but a part of something. The Legion was a family and every Legionnaire was a favoured son.

Not since the war, after Marseilles, when he had rejoined the crack Herman Goering Division for field service, had he felt so good in himself. Then he had been wounded twice and received the Knight's Cross to the Iron Cross. Now he was in another élite military formation, the Second Para Regiment, who had dropped into besieged Dien-Bien-Phu through flak. They had lost a third of their officers and men before they had reached the ground.

Dietz found the same conceit and jealousy for the regiment's good name – and the same contempt for everybody else – as he had found in the crack S.S. military division he had served in.

After all, what better way to create the perfect military machine? Had not the same spirit permeated the Legions of Rome, and had not they been honed into the greatest fighting formation the world has ever known?

* * *

El Sollo sat at the base of the hill as dawn greyed the sky. He scratched at his black stubbly chin. Around him, in bent hunches in the darkness, his men sprawled, waiting and watching him.

El Sollo was going over the plan again in his mind. *The Big*

Trap. He knew he would not survive . . . but if he could take enough *lizards* with him it would be worthwhile.

Already the surviving men of the village of Suz would be receiving their modern carbines, ammunition and grenades. His political officer, a smoother speaker than a fighting soldier, would be lecturing them.

He would be telling them that they had nothing now to lose; that Suz had condemned itself to destruction by firing at the trapped Paras. That would it not be better to die like a lion instead of a lamb, fighting the Paras with modern guns instead of waiting for the planes to bomb their mud houses?

El Sollo calculated that Suz would supply sixty men of some fighting ability. Most would have had experience with guns. They would be able to hide in the rocks to the rear of the Paras and snipe. If they never hit anybody, at least they would make a lot of noise.

Many would be killed when the French fighters began to strafe, and that would take the brunt away from his own surviving men and the fifty reinforcements he was expecting momentarily.

This then was El Sollo's plan. Neat, simple, suicidal.

El Sollo would evacuate the high ground and let the surviving Legionnaires take it. But they would be surrounded and under fire because El Sollo would hold lower ground. The Paras would not be strong enough to fight down from the height because there could not be more than ten of them left.

They would therefore wait on the hill. Soon after daybreak aircraft would come looking for them. Supplies would be dropped to them. Fighters would come and strafe the Algerian positions. But they would have to bomb and machine gun with great care, for their own men would be here.

They would bomb and strafe and they would kill some of his own men and more of the Suz villagers, but their Paras would still be pinned in.

What would they do? El Sollo, formerly of the French Army, knew what they would do. They would push more Paras in. If they lost a hundred Paras to save ten they would do it - for that was the Paras code.

And El Sollo smiled grimly in the semi-darkness. He was certain that the French would lose a hundred men. If they miscalculated, if they bungled, they might lose many more.

This then, El Sollo told himself, was a good way to die and to avenge the insult he had received. Death would also bring forget-

fulness of the insult. And on that account alone death was a very good thing.

El Sollo's thoughts went back to Paris. It was her laughter he remembered most. Like the tinkling of precision-made miniature bells. And her beauty.

He had been Sergeant Ali El Mahoudi then. Fresh from a military hospital in Indo-China. With a military medal and a wound stripe on his walking-out uniform.

She had been the sister of his closest friend, Corporal Jean Marindelle. They had fought and bled and suffered together. Jean had insisted that his good Algerian friend, El Mahoudi, quarter at his parents' flat off the Rue Michael during his furlough.

El Mahoudi, proud of his heritage – for did he not have the blood of Arabian princes? – had been captivated by Marindelle's sister.

Annette had light blue eyes, golden hair, a sure but not overbold manner. And she had found the olive-skinned, be-medalled sergeant attractive, El Mahoudi had been aware of that.

On the second night he had taken her to the *Lido*, on the third morning she had shown him the bookstalls along the Left Bank. On the third night he had taken her to the *Place Pigalle*. They had seen a risqué show and El Mahoudi had been enflamed by the show and the wine and enchanted by Annette's gaiety and beauty.

That night she had not demurred when he had followed her into her room. Not protested when he had taken her in his arms. But when dawn had shafted light through the high bedroom window and she had become aware, as if for the first time, of the colour of his skin against her whiteness, then the bitterness had started.

For this enchanting girl whom he loved had looked at him with a severe coldness and said haughtily, "Go away from me, black man."

She had complained to her parents. El Mahoudi had insulted her by attempting to seduce her, she had lied.

The father had ordered him from the house. That night the brother – his comrade in adversity – had come with members of his family and beaten him up.

After that El Mahoudi had returned to his home. He had soon become a prominent member of the Algerian Nationalist Movement.

He became famous and feared, attacking the farms of the French settlers, slaughtering families right down to babies, burning crops.

France was paying dearly for Annette's insult.

El Sollo became aware of movement around him in the darkness. He looked up. The last man left on the summit had now rejoined him.

"The Paras are coming up the hill now, my leader. They have walked into the trap."

El Sollo smiled. "Good. Let us take up our new positions so they will be surrounded."

* * *

Captain Dubois was first over the rim into the cup-shaped summit of the hill. Assuming the rebels might just be going down the other side, he scurried across, reached the opposite side, hunkered down and peered over.

All he saw was grey, arid rock formations, rising and falling into small hills like the one he held. A grey mist vapoured the points. The area was deserted, lifeless, unloved.

Suddenly Dubois shivered. He felt vulnerable and alone, and fear slithered along his spine. A premonition? Where had the bandits disappeared to? Had their cursed Allah turned them into ghosts and whisked them to safety?

Dubois heard footsteps behind him. He swung, lifting his carbine, finger against trigger, in one hand.

Dietz came to a stop. He saw the fear on the captain's face. He turned away. At such a moment a man should be alone, should have privacy.

Dubois neutralized the hand grenade he had carried up to the summit. He looked over the rim again and scowled.

The other Paras reached the rim. They took positions around it automatically, without being ordered to do so.

Dietz knelt beside Dubois. Markusson had taken a position close to Dubois. He had neutralized his grenades, pouched them in the large pockets on his camouflage trousers. Now he was absently combing his thick mop of blond hair with blunt fingers.

"Where have the salmon gone to, comrades?" he asked. Markusson, who had been a fisherman when young, always referred to terrorists as "salmon".

"A good man to have with you in a fight," Dubois had once said of the Norwegian.

"Providing he doesn't lose his temper," Levasseur had replied. He had been on leave, drunk with the Norwegian, and the huge

man had put almost as many Colonial troops in hospital as the Algerian rebels.

Dubois had shrugged. "Every man must have a hobby. You should find him a nice rounded Moslem housewife . . ."

"And what would happen to the husband if Markusson called round at the wrong time?" Levasseur had replied.

"Perhaps you are right," Dubois had retorted. "I'm not going to lose a good man like Markusson by having the authorities arrest him for murder. Let him go on beating up the Colonial troops."

Dubois scratched reflectively at his chin. He turned from the rim to look at Dietz. He said, "No sign of them. This El Sollo is a wily bird."

Dietz nodded. "And where is he? Down there somewhere, waiting for us to break for the airstrip?"

Dubois scowled. "I cannot take any more chances, my first consideration now must be to save as many of the men as possible. Even if we do look stupid by waiting here if El Sollo has evacuated his men."

Markusson moved quickly over the rim. He snapped the catch on his carbine on to single-shot fire.

He said, "Captain, at least one salmon would have been left there - just to watch us. I'll fetch him back and we'll question him."

Before Dubois could answer Markusson or protest the Norwegian had trotted down to the gradient, bellied down, and began to scramble from rock to rock.

Dietz said, "Do we stay here, sir, until the support arrives?"

Dubois nodded gloomily. He was watching Markusson.

"But the heat will be unbearable later. There is no protection from the sun."

"There is protection, however, from sniper bullets, sergeant."

Dubois suddenly lifted. "I think I know what El Sollo plans. Quick, call Markusson back!"

Before they could shout, a burst of firing came from the rear of the summit, from the direction of the dried-up riverbed.

Dubois, followed by Dietz, hurried across the rim. Looking down they saw the villagers of Suz, flooding noisily across the riverbed, screaming and shouting, and firing their modern weapons into the dead bodies of the Paras there. Some bent, long knives in their hands, and began to mutilate the bodies of Levasseur, Poperinghe and the others.

They crossed in a disorganized throng and began to charge up the slope, gesturing obscenely and firing into the air.

"Finish off the work I should have concluded yesterday," Dubois said with self reproach. He lined six men along the rim.

They waited with carbines on automatic for Dubois to give the word.

The villagers came on, seemingly unaware of the men who lined the summit.

Dubois dragged the pin from his grenade and hurled it towards the packed ranks. Dietz threw a grenade, too. Then the six Paras opened fire, swinging their carbines in short arcs.

The villagers stopped in their tracks. They broke to the left and the right, some hobbling, badly wounded. A dozen littered the slope, badly wounded and dead.

The villagers retreated to the riverbed. They took cover behind the rim of the bank and opened a useless carbine fire on the summit.

Dubois shrugged with contempt. He returned quickly to the opposite rim, anxious to discover how the Norwegian was progressing.

Markusson, unperturbed by the distant firing, had made good ground. He went over a ridge of rock, and, moving swiftly in a duck-like crouch, reached a high shelf.

Flat on his stomach, he began to edge around it. It happened very quickly. There was no time for Dubois or Dietz to yell a warning.

Three grey-clad figures moved swiftly over the mound of rock and dropped on the prostrate Norwegian.

Markusson put up a fight with his body, for his carbine had been knocked from his hand. Although he must have been wounded and was pressed down by the weight of at least one man – he struck out.

An Algerian was catapulted and fell, stunned, a few yards away. The other two took no chances. One of them knocked the Norwegian unconscious with the butt of his carbine.

Dietz raised his rifle. But it was useless. He looked at Dubois. The captain's face was twisted with misery. The captain read his thoughts.

He said, "It's useless. We'll never get down there in time. And it's out of carbine range to put a bullet in Markusson."

The Algerians – Dietz counted only ten of them – staked the Norwegian out on the ridge in full view of the summit.

They tortured the Norwegian until he died, in every conceivable way, but not once did the watching Paras hear him cry out.

When they finally killed him with long knives, Dubois said grimly (and not heartlessly) to Dietz - "This is the only time you'll ever see salmon catch a good fisherman."

12

Into Action

HARRY COOPER stood by a balustrade festooned with mauve bougainvillaea. It was a small white-walled Algerian town, typical of those to be found in the cultivated zones. A long street with three cafés, a Moslem veterans' association, French shops and a great number of Mozabite stores.

But now the town was in the military restricted area and an atmosphere of fear permeated the place. The Mozabites rarely ventured from their hovels; the military always moved about in pairs, heavily armed.

The town had three incidents a week. A plastic bomb would explode, wounding or occasionally killing a Legionnaire. The Paras would retaliate. A family of Mozabites would be found at dawn with their throats cut.

Cooper scratched at a sun-tanned chin. He was dressed in a camouflaged Paratroop uniform, his carbine rested against the iron table where his beer waited.

Cooper looked across the town. In one direction he could see the mountains, which began as a series of sawtooth hills. There Dietz was. In the other lay the vast, immeasurable desert.

Around the café, sitting at the tables or chatting down in the tree-lined square were the rest of the company. They were on stand-to, ready to go into action at a moment's notice.

Cooper had enlisted in *La Legion Etrangère* in Algiers. He had shown them his British Army papers. They had been impressed. A colonel had interviewed him. His record had been checked.

When they had confirmed that he had held a captaincy in the Commandos during the war and was an experienced paratrooper, they had permitted him to go into the Paras.

Eight weeks' intensive refresher training had followed. The first few weeks had been agony for Cooper. They had been weeks of pain and frustration.

The commando training had been severe, raking alive muscles

that had long been dormant. He had found frustration, too, in the fact that he was so near Dietz – so near to discovering the truth about Suzanne – yet still so far.

Dietz was out of touch, only a few hundred miles away in a restricted zone; and he, Cooper, was confined to a small training camp as a Para-recruit.

In the first few days he had found his fellow recruits raw and crude, if not without humour. But gradually, as his muscles came alive and his comrades ceased to be faces and became personalities – some even characters – he began to like the life.

It was tough, harsh, brutal. But what a contrast from Basil and his dreary London solicitor's office!

Cooper really dated the beginning of his new life from the night of the fight. On that night he became a part of the Legion, felt he really belonged, felt the spirit of companionship and brotherhood that was an integral part of the Legion.

He had been drinking with Legionnaire Henri de Voc. De Voc was a curious man. Tall, bulky, swarthy, with an ugly knife scar which quartered his face, he looked like a circus booth boxing block.

But de Voc, with seven years in the Legion's infantry, had the intellect and sensitivity of a poet. He had killed a fellow student in a quarrel over a girl in Paris many years before, he told Cooper casually one day, and he had joined the Legion – hoping to die – as redemption.

De Voc had given up corporal stripes to join the Paras.

"I'm frightened of flying," he would say, "horrified by parachute jumping, but I've got sick of walking in the infantry."

A perceptive man, de Voc. He would ask Cooper from time to time what was worrying him. At those moments Cooper would be thinking about Suzanne Phillips, of Dietz only a few hours' train ride away, and his hands would clench and unclench and he would smoke in quick and nervous movements.

But Cooper never told de Voc. He would smile and shrug.

On the evening, their first following a Para-jump, they were seated alone. There were four other Para-recruits drinking noisily at another table.

And then a battered, blood-stained Para Regular came bursting into the café. Quickly he told them that two of his comrades had been badly beaten-up by some Colonial troops in a house nearby.

De Voc said, "How many are the scum?"

"A dozen or fifteen," replied the regular.

The four Para-recruits at the adjoining table looked to de Voc for guidance. So did Cooper.

De Voc was on his feet. He grabbed a chair. "Equip yourself," he said to the others. They reached for chairs and bottles without protest. It was an unwritten law of the Legion that you went to a comrade's aid - no matter what the odds.

The regular, bleeding from a bad cut on the forehead, unsteady on his legs, reached for a small coffee urn. Then they were off - all seven of them - with the regular spilling scalding coffee on the cobbles. They ran down the street.

The shot through crazy, twisting alleys, skidded over slimy cobbles, crashed into walls as they turned corners. Passing Mozabites vanished into darkened doorways and arches.

They reached the house. They saw it in front of them facing an alley as they charged along it. The door stood open and the windows were smashed. Around the pavement, loitering drunkenly and singing about their victory, stood a dozen drab-uniformed Colonial troops.

Elbow to elbow, moving at a run, the Paras hit the Colonials in a flying, shield-waving wedge.

The regular doused two of them with boiling coffee. Then, throwing the urn at two more, he snatched a bottle from his pocket.

De Voc, his face glistening with sweat, a sneer making his face look like a grinning gargoyle, wielded the chair like a baseball bat.

Cooper was armed with a chair. He found himself carried forward on a wave of exhilaration. A Colonial backed away from Cooper, his arms raised. Cooper aimed the chair, smashing down the Colonial's guard, and caught him across the shoulder, sending him to the ground.

The troops broke away on either side, fleeing into the alleys. Some retreated into the house and the Para-recruits followed them.

Cooper surged along a dark corridor close on de Voc's heels. The Frenchman crashed through a beaded curtain and rushed into the long, heavily-draped and perfumed room.

The two wounded Paras stood by the bar, soaking their bruises in iced wine. Five scantily-dressed girls retreated along the long room and disappeared through a rear door.

There was shaking of hands all round. The Para-recruits began to help themselves to drinks at the bar. They were busily celebrating their victory when the military police arrived and dragged them off to the cells.

Next morning they were hauled before the Para colonel in charge of the school.

Silently he read the report, then looked at de Voc and Cooper who had been named the ringleaders.

"So," he said, fingering a cheek that was white after a plastic surgery operation, "there were seven Paras attacking fifteen Colonial troops – and the Colonials retreated?" He smacked his lips with satisfaction. "A fair victory, although there have been better. You men are worthy to be Paras. Sergeant, see these men are passed the course with honour."

His voice became harsh, but the smile still creased his lips. "But I'll say this only once. I don't want any more of these – er – disgraceful incidents from you during the few remaining weeks of your training here."

A deliberate pause followed. He smiled with his half-dead face. "France has great need, after all, of her Colonial troops."

A fortnight later Cooper and de Voc and five others had been posted to the Second Para Regiment as replacements. Both Cooper and de Voc had received acting corporal stripes, which meant they would automatically assume the rank when a vacancy occurred, subject to the approval of their own officers.

They had reached the battle headquarters of the Second Para Regiment, the town in the restricted area it controlled, on the evening before Dietz's platoon left on its punitive action against Suz.

Cooper had spent a restless night, knowing Dietz was in barracks nearby, and had gone round first thing in the morning to the tenth company barracks. He had learned there that Dietz's platoon, under Captain Charles Dubois, were at the airfield.

He had reached the airfield in time to see the air transport take off. Without return to the fifth company barracks room, Cooper spent an anxious day at the bar near the field.

He saw the air transport take off again in the afternoon.

He waited by the landing strip and saw it return. He told the airfield guards he was waiting for an old friend, now with the platoon, whom he had not seen for several years.

Before the plane returned, however, it had been in radio contact. It reported that the platoon had not been near the landing strip when it landed. The plane had waited an hour, sporadic gunfire had been heard in the distance, and it had then taken off.

This information was received by Cooper with a sinking feeling. Had he come all this way, after all these years, to question Dietz –

only to have the German killed by rebel bullets?

He had returned to the barracks. The sergeant had berated him. The news came trickling through. The platoon was surrounded somewhere near Suz. The fifth company – Cooper's company – would be ready in the morning to take off with the tenth company to the trouble spot.

Cooper had spent another restless night, to be awoken early by the bustle of activity. Around him, the long barrack dormitory came to life. Paratroopers dressed in their camouflage-daubed fighting uniforms. Crates of grenades were opened. Gleaming carbine clips were pouched in special pockets. Bayonets were greased, inspected, and sheathed.

They went out of the barracks at first light, marching. Already, overhead, the jet fighters, with engines screeching, were taking off to hammer any rebel positions they could find.

From the canteen Cooper sipped beer and watched the airfield across the rolls of barbed wire. He had seen the fighters screaming back, taking off again, and again returning.

He was looking morosely across the field when Henri de Voc found him.

"They're using a lot of petrol and ammunition," he said.

A little after eleven o'clock five heavy transports left the airfield, winging their way towards the hills. By that time the six fighter planes had landed, refilled, and taken off for the sixth time. Now Cooper could see bombs being fitted beneath the wings.

He was called to an NCO's conference a few minutes later in the kitchen of the canteen.

Major Jules Paon was a short, scar-faced officer who had survived the battles of Dien-Bien-Phu and a prisoner-of-war death march. He spoke abruptly and lacked personality. But his love of the Legion and his bravery were beyond question.

He said, "Comrades. The survivors of Captain Dubois's platoon are on a cup-shaped ridge three miles to the south of Suz. The remainder of the tenth company are to go in and join them. They have given us the honour of asking for us to accompany them.

"Heavy transports are carrying infantry to consolidate a hold on the improvised airfield. But we will not drop there. We will make our descent on rocky ground between the point where Dubois is situated and the village of Suz. It is important to impress on all men the need to drop as closely together as possible for there are a lot of *fellaghas* in the area.

“Our object will be to link together, attack and annihilate the *fellaghas*. They are commanded, incidentally, by El Sollo. He is a very competent and brave Algerian who won the Military Medal in Indo-China.

“That is all, my comrades. Your individual officers will give you detailed briefings and position assignments.

“Good luck.”

* * *

Cooper had come out into the bright sunlight with mixed feelings. He was going into action for the first time in nearly twenty years. He was thrilled by the idea, but he was a little frightened.

Had he been a fool to leave his cushioned existence in London to chase a dream? Denise with her sentimentality and her harlot's heart had perhaps been right. She had cried a little when Cooper had told her the story. But she thought it insanity to come to Algiers to clear up the mystery.

And Basil, in the angry letter he had received in Algiers, had been equally blunt. He had described Cooper as immature, a romantic and completely irresponsible, and suggested he get the next plane back to England and get on with his business, otherwise Basil would be forced to find another partner.

Were they right? In a few hours he could be dead, perhaps horribly mutilated in the obscene manner the Moslems dealt with captured Christians. And for what? He had no mission here. If anything his sympathies were with the Algerians, he had always been a bit of a socialist.

He stood with the other NCOs in the square. They showed no concern about the impending action. They took up their earlier conversations where they had left them off. Mainly they were talking politics. The Paras, Cooper had noticed, talked more about politics than any other army he had ever known.

They had a hatred for French politicians and a mistrust of France that surprised him. They were firmly convinced that France did not care about Algiers and was willing to forsake it and the million French settlers who lived there – along with the Foreign Legion.

And what would happen to the Legion then?

They had flown out a little before noon in three potbellied transports, slow-moving and cumbersome like bloated Arabs.

They were laden down with equipment, arms and parachutes and harness.

On the journey they saw the fighters screech by, returning once more to base for a refuel and ammunitioning. There were only five jets now and there had been six when taking off. This started a lively and heated speculation in Cooper's transport.

Private Pierre Dollent, who sat beside Cooper in the cramped positions along the sides of the plane, became very angry about it.

Dollent, with ten years in the Legion and five decorations, had never given Cooper the impression of being seriously interested in anything.

It was Dollent who, as they climbed aboard the transport, had said, looking at the town, "Goodbye, girls."

Dollent had been saying this for ten years before going into action - because one never knew when one was going to get it.

Pierre Dollent said to Cooper:

"One fighter lost already. The fatigue gets the pilots, you see. The blasted jets are too fast. Then the sun comes up and the pilots eyes are tired, and they go nose first into one of those blasted hills. We'll lose a couple more before the day is out, you watch my words.

"And those rats in Paris never learn. They don't want to, you see. They want to thin us out. So they keep us short of equipment and pilots. De Gaulle, who is a soldier and should know better, and all those blasted politicians and their obscene mistresses.

"They want us killed, you see. They are frightened of us. We are too good. The best fighters in the world. Well, my *mon Anglaise*, we will one day teach those rats a lesson. Even if we have to land on Paris to do it." He spat into his hands and rubbed them. "One good pilot lost for want of a few reserves. A slow pox on the rats of Paris."

Later, the amber light flashed for dropping stations. They stood up in the confined space. Parachute harness hooks were fastened to the rails above their heads. They were lined up now. Minutes seemed to drag by. Cooper felt an empty sensation in his stomach. He found the palms of his hands were sticky. He looked to the small rounded window near his head. All he saw was wisps of cumulus cloud.

Then the nose of the transport dipped. The old plane slowed, it seemed, almost to stalling speed. The red light began to flash. And then they were jumping, running along the rail, holding their hook on the rail to give it speed and stop it from dragging, then

springing, with a tap on the shoulder from Major Paon, into space.

13

Death In The Sun

THEY lay in the cup-shaped summit basin with the sun blazing down on them. Dietz thought he was sizzling in a puddle of sweat. His tongue seemed to be bloated in a dry, cracked mouth, swelling to such proportions that it must eventually choke him.

Water had been severely rationed to a mouthful each hour. Nobody bothered to eat or to smoke, and nobody talked. They only watched, looking down from the rim.

Only Captain Dubois seemed to be unaffected by the heat or his thirst.

He periodically made his rounds, moving from man to man around the summit, occasionally talking, more often lightly touching a shoulder.

He always came back to the same point – overlooking El Sollo's position, ignoring with complete contempt the activity of the Suz villagers at the other end.

He would sit silent and watchful. Every now and then his eyes would stray to the white blob that was the remains of Markusson, staked to the ground. Then his lips would tighten slightly and his brow would crease.

Dubois had once ventured an opinion to Dietz. He thought El Sollo had been reinforced. He thought that the terrorist was no longer interested in them, but was out for a bigger victory.

Dubois showed a slight happiness, however, when the jet fighters attacked the villagers, screaming in along the almost straight riverbed, hammering cannonshell at the banks. They left only to return, and return again, making a "milk run" between the airstrip and the point of ambush.

Dubois became worried. He told Dietz, "This is terrible. They keep strafing the villagers. But El Sollo is the greatest danger. Yet they don't know he exists. They must be surprised because we don't break out to the north."

After the third attack from the air, the villagers began pulling back when they heard the fighters approaching in the distance. The fighters hammered some twenty propped-up corpses in the riverbed, which started Dubois complaining angrily again.

Next time they came, the fighters dropped napalm petrol

bombs in the rock formation behind the riverbed. Dubois became jubilant. The deadly jelly petrol sizzled across rock and scrub grass destroying everything in a wide area.

When the villagers opened attack again, the power of their firing had perceptibly weakened.

In the meanwhile, there had been activity to the north. Heavy transports were heard flying into the table landing strip. Later there came the sporadic crackle of small arms fire.

Dubois said, "They have landed infantry to hold the airstrip. El Sollo's pushed a few men there to snipe." Dubois gave a huge smile. "We have really started something. It looks like developing into a full-scale action. This should mean at least a mention in despatches."

Only one thing was worrying Dubois. It worried Dietz too. Their comrades thought they were under attack only from the *fellahgas* in the riverbed. They did not know that El Sollo with something like a hundred well-armed men, with heavy machine guns and mortars and grenades, were waiting silently in ambush.

Dubois tried to pass the message back when a light transport winged in low and dropped them supplies.

The transport crossed the summit just after the fighters had bombed the riverbed for the second time. It came trundling through the geysers of black smoke at little more than 120 m.p.h. It dropped six containers on miniature parachutes.

Only two landed in the rim. The others were lost. At least two would eventually fall into El Sollo's hands, for they fell well to the north.

Dubois tried – successfully – to tell the air crew of the *fellahgas* in ambush to the north. He ordered three men to fire down the hill at El Sollo's positions. Meanwhile, Dubois stood on the edge and indicated the position with his hands.

The pilot got the message back. The next time the jets roared in, they clobbered the area with napalms. The petrol foamed over the rocks like black treacle, then burst into a sizzling flaming mass. Black, coiling smoke shrouded the area.

But neither El Sollo or his men showed themselves. Nor could Dubois see whether any had been killed or injured.

Dietz supervised the distribution from the containers. There was ammunition, water, food and a few cigarettes.

Dietz rejoined Dubois, passing him ten clips of bullets for his carbine.

Dubois heaped the gleaming clips beside him in the rock. He

looked a very worried man. He said, "They'll make a Para drop next to give us support. But they don't know El Sollo is to the north. They think we are only under attack by those Suz idiots. And they've almost wiped them out."

"El Sollo and a hundred men," Dietz whispered.

"Yes," Dubois said, "if they make the drop over El Sollo's positions, we could be in for a bloody defeat."

"If we go down the hill and give the Paras what little support we can, it might help," Dietz said.

Dubois scowled. "That's the least we can do. But Raoul Salan will still curse the day I was born. Still," he smiled, "that's what generals are paid for."

A little later they heard the heavy transports coming in over the hills.

"Here they come," Dubois said. "Call the men together."

* * *

Harry Cooper felt a shove. Then he was falling, hurtling into space. His body span. He saw a vivid blue sky; the grey volcanic rock.

There was a sudden jolt. He swung to and fro as if on a gigantic swing. And then he rightened. Around him other parachutes were opening and men were kicking on their harnesses.

To Cooper's left somebody went plunging down. Cooper saw his second "Roman Candle" since coming to Algiers. The first had been on the training ground to the south of Algiers.

Cooper had seen the remains much later. He had wondered how such a large man could be fitted into such a small sack.

A few hundred yards from the ground and Cooper could see clearly the grey and brown volcanic hills spreading out like gigantic waves from a whirlpool to every horizon. It looked a grim, deserted, forbidding place. Not even fit for vultures.

He heard gunfire now and could see the remnants of the tenth company, which had landed first, forming up and hurrying to the north in fighting formation.

The tenth had the privilege of landing first because it was one of their own platoons which was trapped. As Major Jules Paon had said airily:

"The helpless going to the rescue of the hopeless."

Pride of company and jealousy was very pronounced in the Paras.

Cooper saw the cup-shaped summit and vaguely the outline of khaki shapes. He could not detect movement among them at the distance. For all he knew Dietz and the others might already be mutilated corpses.

Then he jacked up his knees and the hard, rock-strewn ground thumped him. He rolled, momentarily winded, jerking on the parachute harness to save himself from being dragged. Quickly he unlatched the clip and let the parachute skid away, freed.

He came to his feet, unslung his carbine and rammed home a ten-bullet clip, moving simultaneously to where the men were forming.

Up ahead, the tenth company were engaging the *fellahgas*, who seemed to be firmly placed in a rock formation that rose and dipped and was strewn with boulders.

A lieutenant called to Cooper and the men formed up around him. He led them off, running to catch up with and support the tenth company.

A score of them charged forward with their carbines raised, their short, wicked bayonets fixed. A man beside Cooper lurched, then fell, hit mortally by a bullet.

The tenth charged up the gradient, yelling, shouting, cursing and firing at the terrorist in the rocks.

Cooper's group began the climb. The lieutenant went down, riddled by a machine-gun burst. Cooper found himself stumbling over razor-sharp rocks. An Algerian reared suddenly at him from a foxhole.

Cooper got a momentary impression of a bearded, snarling, grease-blackened face. A rifle roared but the bullet missed his face.

Cooper's finger tightened on his own trigger. The carbine on automatic fire. Six bullets thumped into the terrorist and the man dropped, as if skewered into his hole.

Then it was all over.

Cooper had been expecting stronger resistance, a larger group. Otherwise, why were the trapped platoon incapable of fighting their way out?

Cooper reached the crest of the gradient, jumping over rocks and fallen bodies. Seven terrorists were backing in a group, wounded, their carbines raised.

About fifty carbines had levelled on them. The fifty carbines stuttered together, on automatic fire. The terrorists were cut to pieces.

Now the tenth, it was still their privilege, finished off the

wounded Algerians. Cooper stood by, sickened by the brutal sights.

Nearby a young Algerian with a smashed arm, was finished off by two Paras with bayonets. They made a lengthy job of it. Another Legionnaire stomped heavily on a dying Algerian's face, grunting heavily as he did so.

Other Paras were moving back over the battle ground. They were firing bursts into every Algerian they could see, no matter how dead they might seem. Yet others were attending to the wounded Paras.

Major Paon advanced with the fifth company. He left the tenth company behind. Cooper found himself in the leading line as they went down the gradient towards the dried-up riverbed.

The ground had been seared and scarred by cannon-fire and napalm bombs. Here and there, black and unrecognizable, were the shapes of men. In the riverbed, as they surged across it, they saw more corpses. Some of them were horribly mutilated Paras.

Ahead Cooper saw Paras standing on the crest of the hill. With Major Paon leading the way, they began the climb.

Cooper - one step behind the major - jumped into the cup-shaped rim. He came face to face with Otto Dietz, who was standing beside Captain Dubois.

14

Face To Face

OTTO DIETZ held his carbine loosely across his thighs. He smiled a welcome at the new arrivals. For a moment his eyes looked at Cooper, then hurriedly returned again, before passing on to Major Jules Paon.

A small corner of Dietz's mind had noticed Cooper and recognized him, but had failed to place him. Hence the slight frown which had shown on Dietz's face.

But a moment later Dietz seemed to have forgotten it. The German was much more interested in the conversation which was about to take place between his captain and the major.

Cooper reflected that Dietz had no reason to remember him. They had only met once. In Basso's. When Suzanne Phillips had taken him there, Dietz had come in, and she had briefly introduced him. And Dietz had not been interested in him. He had had eyes only for the lovely Suzanne.

Cooper could see that the years had served Dietz well. No surplus fat, although the German was a little heavier. There was a cone of grey beginning at the centre of his forehead and sweeping back across his head, dividing his still blond hair.

But Cooper could not see the ladies objecting to that.

Paon came to a stop before Dubois. It wasn't exactly a meeting comparable with Stanley's with Livingstone. But Dubois thought it important enough to click his heels and come to a salute.

Paon answered his salute. They then shook hands. Paon said drily, "Thus, once more, the fifth company of the Second Paras comes to the aid of the tenth company of the Second Paras. It was ever so."

"On the contrary, sir," Dubois smirked, "once again the tenth invite the fifth to share their battle. I have held the enemy here pending your arrival."

Paon looked around the crest. He saw ten weary Paras, some with slight flesh wounds.

"But why wait for help, my dear Dubois? Why didn't you dash for the airstrip when the transports landed? The *fellahgas* are behind you - were behind you."

Dubois made a gesture towards the riverbed.

"They were nothing. The real threat stands just to the north. I need a little help to conclude that matter. El Sollo is in ambush there. He has a hundred well-armed men."

Paon looked surprised. He whistled. He looked round quickly at his men. He saw Cooper.

"Corporal, bring the wireless operator here at once."

Dubois said smirkingly, "No more companies, please, the tenth and the fifth are capable enough of handling this."

The wireless operator, his instrument strapped on his back, was already to hand.

The major commanding the fifth company now came into the cup with his officers and men. Cooper found himself away from the centre of planning activity as Paon and the officers radioed headquarters, passing on information and receiving instructions.

The NCOs had gathered together and were discussing the battle. Besides the men lost in Dubois's platoon in the earlier engagement, the tenth had lost five men killed and eight wounded in the action following the airdrop. The fifth had two wounded in this action.

Cooper could not see de Voc anywhere. He moved to the rim, looking down on the men who were on the gradient, squatting,

smoking and chatting.

He saw a sergeant of de Voc's platoon and crossed to him. The sergeant was discussing Major Paon and Captain Dubois with the sergeant of Cooper's own platoon.

Cooper heard him say, "A fine damned officer, only he doesn't know when to stop playing the clown. He's doing it now, see. Ever since Paon arrived. They don't get on well together."

The sergeant looked at Cooper questioningly.

Cooper asked what had happened to de Voc.

"Roman candle," the sergeant said briefly, and turned away.

Cooper stood frozen to the spot. Not de Voc! It had not been de Voc he had seen go crashing down with a useless parachute to be smashed on the rocks below.

"But . . ." Cooper began.

"We don't like to talk about it," the sergeant said not unkindly. "It happens to the best. We like to think the one who becomes a Roman Candle is favoured by the Gods. That's the only way to look at it, comrade. Otherwise we would never make another jump."

Cooper turned away, moving miserably among the gathering of NCO's, heading in the general direction of Dietz. Dietz was telling the NCO's of the way Levasseur - a favourite NCO - had died.

"We will lose a few more men yet," somebody said, "if El Sollo's forces are still intact."

An old sergeant with an amazing accumulation of scar tissue on his face, was very pessimistic about the forthcoming action.

"That El Sollo," he snapped; "we might out-number him, we might have air power, but he's firmly entrenched and he doesn't care. He's a fanatic. He wants to die. And he wants to take as many of us as he can to Allah's happy hunting ground."

"The jets will deal with him. Toast him with napalms, then we'll go in," another answered.

Then there began an argument of how many men it would cost the two companies to finish off El Sollo. It became a very heated argument.

Cooper found himself standing beside Dietz. Dietz, like himself, obviously considered it a stupid argument and took no part in it.

Suddenly Dietz looked at Cooper. He said. "I think we must have met before?"

Cooper said, "I think we have."

"You are English?" Dietz said.

Cooper nodded.

Dietz said, "Then I should remember. I have had very little occasion to meet Englishmen."

"You have had more opportunity," Cooper said, "to meet Englishmen posing as Frenchmen."

Dietz frowned. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," Cooper said, "Marseilles. During the war."

A gleam showed in Dietz's eyes. He smiled softly.

"We met there?" he said. "You mean we are old enemies?" Then he smiled with recognition. "I remember - I remember. You were with Suzanne Phillips."

Cooper said quickly, "You remember Suzanne Phillips?"

Dietz smiled softly. "How could I ever forget her?"

There was a small sarcastic smirk on Dietz's lips. Cooper felt his facial muscles tighten, and his fists clenched.

Cooper was about to reply, but the angry retort and question became frozen on his lips.

El Sollo had bided his time. He knew the moment when he should make his assault. His mortarmen had the cup-shaped crest, thickly-packed with Paras, bracketed. Four heavy mortars fired simultaneously.

Two mortar bombs, with premature timings, exploded in the air above the crest. Several Paras went down screaming with jagged face wounds. Another two bombs reached the ground before exploding, killing and wounding several more men.

Although they were shooting upwards and could not see their targets, the *fellahgas* handling the heavy machine guns opened fire. They would score occasionally with ricochets.

More mortar bombs exploded, churning up sand, sending deadly rock splinters in every direction, supporting the metal shrapnel.

Cooper found himself hugging the ground. Dietz was beside him. Some Paras, near the rear, were scrambling from the rim and down the gradient to the riverbed.

Paon's voice reached Cooper above the hubbub of exploding mortar bombs, stuttering machine guns and screaming of the wounded.

Major Paon had his whistle held towards his lips. He was yelling something at Dubois and pointing. Cooper thought he was telling the captain to get off the crest with the Paras who had already retreated or had never reached the crest - and hit El Sollo from the sides.

Then Paon was blowing shrilly on his whistle. He was stalking forward. His arm was jerking down and his finger was pointing north. Behind him his officers were forming. Paras, coming up in a crouch, were following him across the crest.

"Christ," Cooper whispered. Paon was going to make a frontal assault. Casualties would be fantastic. He wasn't even waiting for the jets to blast the terrorist positions first!

But what else could Paon do with mortar shells exploding on the summit? The thing to do was to get off the crest and hit the rebels quickly, before their mortarmen could adjust their sights.

Cooper found himself moving forward. And he was moving quickly, to catch up with the leaders, even though he knew the affair would be bloody. He found himself carried forward by an emotion that he could not describe, which over-ruled his logic. After all, this was a quick death. And he had no personal vendetta against the Algerians anyway!

Dietz was there beside him, bayonet fixed. They were almost running now.

The leaders had reached the rim. Some opened fire with their carbines on automatic, sending quick bursts down at El Sollo's positions. Others curved their arms through the air, faces twisted, bodies bent, hurling hand grenades as far as possible.

Several fell, hit by machine gun bullets, twisting back into the cup-shaped summit or falling and rolling down the gradient.

Cooper went over the rim and down the gradient. There were a score of men ahead of him. Some were already on their bellies, scrambling for cover. Others were spreading out, turning towards rocks to the right or left of the Algerian positions.

Up ahead, still blasting on his whistle like an officious tram inspector chasing a runaway tram, was Major Paon. Behind him were three or four Paras. They were trying to reach a high cleft of rock.

Cooper could see the stretched naked body of a European staked out on the cleft. He knew this must be the captured and tortured Norwegian named Markusson he had heard the NCO's talking about.

The sluggish humid air around Cooper seemed to be alive with death-dealing metal. He saw men go down, hit, in every direction. But fortunately the mortarmen were still blasting the summit, mutilating the dead and killing the wounded.

The Paras who had already found scant cover were firing at the Algerian positions. They were doing little damage for the terrorists

were well dug in. El Sollo had even forced them to chip out shallow foxholes in the shale rock.

Cooper found a slight ridge of ground. He dropped behind it. It was scant cover. But it was better than nothing. He poked his carbine forward, used up a clip in a long burst, then rammed in a fresh one.

His fingers were sticky with sweat, slipping along the metal. He looked to left and right. Now Dubois and other officers were leading the remaining Paras around the summit, curving in at El Sollo's positions in a wide arc.

There was firing from beyond the Algerian positions now. Alerted by wireless, the infantry Legionnaires were coming in from the airstrip and the Algerians were virtually surrounded. The Legion would wipe out El Sollo, massacring every last man of his 100-strong band, but at what a price, Cooper thought.

How many men had died on the summit? he wondered. Thirty, forty? For the wounded who had survived the prolonged mortar bombardment would die before they could receive skilled medical help.

And who was to blame? Not Paon. He had no idea of El Sollo's strength or even that the terrorist was in the area. He had thought all opposition ceased after they had wiped out the villagers of Suz.

Dubois was possibly partially to blame. He had been so busy playing the showman in front of Paon that he had allowed Paras to pack the summit.

Cooper then remembered Dietz. That old anxiety touched him again, more pronounced even than his fear and the animal excitement of the battle.

He lifted slightly from the ground. He saw the German some ten yards to his right. Dietz seemed calm and collected. He was using the same line of ridge for cover as was Cooper.

Unable to find targets because the *fellahgas* were well concealed, Dietz, like the others, was emptying automatic bursts at the rocks, hoping to collect on the ricochets.

Now the mortarmen lowered their sights. Shale and dust and shrapnel spouted around the gradient. A mortar bomb, exploding two yards from Cooper, deafened him. Paras were being wounded and were dying, but Paon had done the right thing under the circumstances - gotten off the summit.

Then above the racket there came the high-pitched scream of jet engines. Twisting, Cooper saw the fighters hurtling in, almost at

ground level. They came in pairs with their cannon and rockets firing.

Paon was on his feet now moving away from the rock. He was waving his arms, indicating where Para-held ground ended. The pilots would use the staked body of Markusson as a pointer. The napalms dropped. Geysers of flame crimsoned the boulders, searing back to the Norwegian's stretched body. Cooper felt the ground heave beneath him. The rebel positions were gouted in a holocaust of flame.

Cooper looked on in awe as the bubbling flaming petrol covered Markusson's dead body. It was a tribute. The descendant of the Vikings was having a Viking funeral – reserved only for kings and famous warriors.

Then Paon, well back now, stood out sharp and clear. He was blasting on his whistle like a football referee and waving his arms.

The flaming petrol reached into the sky and, with nothing but human flesh to live on, died on the scorched rocks.

Paras were up on their legs now, bayonets fixed, fresh bullet clips in their carbines, charging forward. Cooper found himself up and charging, it seemed, before his excited mind could pass the message to his limbs.

Paon shot ahead, carbine raised, whistle, still blasting, clenched between his teeth.

Cooper reached the point where Paon had been. He passed it. He reached the ridge – Markusson's funeral pyre – and rounded it.

Dietz was close to him now. Running parallel with the Englishman. It was as if he were determined that the Englishman wouldn't get into battle before he did.

El Sollo's remaining mortar coughed. The bomb exploded on the hard rock just in front of the running German's legs.

Simultaneously, Cooper received a clout on the side of his head. He felt his head was exploding. The pain was unbearable. He felt himself falling, crashing downwards, and then he lost consciousness.

15

Memories Of Marseilles

CONSCIOUSNESS returned like somebody pulling up a blind and revealing an eerie green light. Cooper regained consciousness and became aware of pain. His head was swathed in so much bandage that he felt like a swollen-headed Indian in a turban.

The green light was still there and, around him, there were little noises, movements, that set the scene for him when his mind had cleared.

But the throbbing in his head did not cease. An imp was behind the turban somewhere banging away with a pick.

Somebody coughed to the right. Somebody else turned and there was the squeaking of tortured springs. The green lights were real enough; the subdued night lamps of a hospital ward. There was the unmistakable smell of sickly French disinfectant, too.

Memory flooded back. The mad charge down from the summit. Major Paon's gallantry. The geysers of flame when the fighters dropped the petrol bombs on the terrorist positions. The mortar exploding close by as they charged in with the bayonet.

Cooper remembered Dietz. The German had been close beside him. What had happened to Dietz? But he was too weak to worry about it. Dietz ceased to be a problem. He slipped into a healing sleep.

* * *

He awoke with sunlight bathing his bed and the noises of an efficient hospital around him . . . the crisp whisper of starched smocks and smudged kiss of sponge shoes on polished floors. The French Army nurses were busy attending their patients.

Opinion varied extremely about the nurses. Those who had been fortunate said they were very *chic*. The unfortunate grumbled that they were just good medical nurses. One thing was certain, you were more likely to be lucky if you had an officer's bar on your tunic.

And in this respect the Legion was like any other army in the world. Thinking about such a subject told Cooper one thing: that he was not going to die or anything like that. In fact, he was definitely on the mend.

Cooper, by turning his head slowly, discovered he was in the first bed. The ward was long and narrow and there seemed to be about twenty beds on either side.

The occupant of the next bed was sitting upright, with pillows piled behind him. He looked like a French country boy with a heavy leathery face and large, vacant cow-like eyes. His hands were ploughed down beneath the blankets, his mouth hung open, and he was looking at Cooper - having heard the Englishman move.

"You've got back then," he said casually. "Quite a few of them

didn't make it. Left without medical aid for too blasted long. There will be an inquiry about that."

Cooper learned the facts about the battle from the Frenchman. He had caught a bullet in the shoulder coming off the summit, had remained conscious all the time, and had seen everything.

Dubois was dead. A bullet in the lung.

"All things considered," said the Frenchman, "it was the best way out for him. His father will get a medal instead of Dubois a courtmartial. Of course, they're treating it as a great victory. The figures have been juggled for the newspapers.

"But General Salan, they say, is very worried."

Salan had reasons to worry. Nearly a hundred Paras had been killed or permanently wounded. Another forty-five had light wounds and would return to battle fitness.

True El Sollo was dead. He had been found badly burnt in a cave. He had not died slowly like the other *fellahgas* who had survived the bombing and the bayonet charge. Major Paon had done the former French Army hero the honour of finishing him off quickly with his own automatic. A bullet in the brain.

During the course of the day, Cooper made inquiries about Dietz. But nobody knew anything about him. He discovered that he was not on the death list. He also discovered that he was not in the ward. But of course there were other wards.

On the following day Cooper discovered that Dietz was in a neighbouring ward. The day following this, Cooper was allowed to leave his bed. It was another two days, however, before he could get permission to visit the neighbouring ward.

He arrived in the ward on the day that Otto Dietz came out of his operative unconsciousness and discovered that both his legs were missing.

* * *

At first you look down, see nothing there, and shrug. You have left them somewhere, mislaid them. Or somebody is playing a joke. Yes, that's it. While you were sleeping somebody crept up and tucked them under the bed to give you a nasty little jolt when you woke up. Some practical prangster with a slightly off-key mind.

But then the truth seeps in. You can't accept it. You drop off into a semi-unconsciousness again and dream. You dream of your past, great moments in your life. And in the dreams you always have your legs. You look down, and sure enough, they are there. Safely below you. Holding you up. Making you six-foot tall and

carrying you from one adventure to another.

There was an Englishman. They were on a summit just before the mortars dropped. Only the Englishman was really a Frenchman. No, it wasn't that. He was an Englishman who had posed as a Frenchman. That had been when he had met him before. In Marseilles.

Marseilles. Yes, Marseilles. A wonderful, sun-splashed city. Suzanne Phillips. Ah, Suzanne!

Memories filtered back. He remembered he had been very upset. What was a beautiful girl like Suzanne Phillips doing by mixing with bandits and leading attacks on their supplies?

But there were some things he wouldn't do for Hitler. He would kill the Reich's enemies, even risk his own life. But he would not kill a woman, not intentionally, not in cold blood.

It had been a close thing, though. He had been very angry. After all, she had killed some of his men or had been instrumental in their murder.

He remembered now. There had been blood on his face from a grenade splinter cut in his hair. The ambush had not been a complete success.

They had waited in the courtyard that night for Suzanne Phillips to return after the juggler with the black hair had informed on the Maquis group. What an odd, puzzling man he had been!

He was named Luipy and he had informed the Germans over spite. Louis, his room-mate, was doing something to annoy him. Yet, knowing that Dietz would be waiting at the house in ambush, Luipy had arrived by car with the rest of the party. And, more, he had been the first to attack the Germans, killing one of Dietz's men with a knife. Remorse? Guilty conscience?

Dietz had given up trying to explain that many years ago. But he would never forget that night – because of Suzanne Phillips.

After one of the party had thrown a hand grenade and escaped, they had caught the only survivor – Suzanne Phillips. The door through which she had hoped to escape from the courtyard was locked.

Two of them had dragged the girl to him. She had been slightly battered, but she had shown no fear. She had been resentful, sarcastic, courageous.

“Do what you like with me!” she had spat at Dietz.

They had handcuffed her hands. There was only one thing to do – a bullet in the head on a deserted road.

They had left quickly to avoid any complications with the French police. This was, technically, Unoccupied France.

"I'll deal with this," Dietz had said.

Two gaunt-faced men beneath snapbrimmed hats and heavy mackintoshes had said nothing. They had manhandled the handcuffed girl into the front seat of Dietz's Mercedes.

He had driven fast to the outskirts of town and by the time he reached open country his temper had abated. This girl had killed Germans, admittedly, but she still believed – like many misguided Frenchmen – that Germany and France were still at war. Why did they not realize that Hitler was France's friend and France could – would – share Germany's glory?

He had stopped the car by a copse in the darkness. He had been conscious of sweat seeping down his face and of the blood now clotted on his forehead.

He had calmly lit a cigarette, but it had been long moments before he had turned and looked at her. It was an odd and gawky sensation – like being out alone in a car with a girl for the very first time.

That he had been out alone with many girls did not seem to matter. That he had been out twice with Suzanne Phillips – taking her to a theatre and dinner – did not lessen the peculiar shyness he felt.

After all, hadn't he brought her here to kill her?

Finally he turned and looked at her, seeing her in the glow of light from the dashboard.

She was lying awkwardly back in the seat, half-twisted against the door – awkward because her hands were fastened behind her.

She was looking at him with a tight sarcastic and defiant twist to her lips. And her liquid black eyes were mocking him.

"Well," she said, "get it over with then."

He turned away, looking out of the window. Suddenly he felt lost, unsure of himself.

"What's the matter?" she said. "Lost your nerve? You can't go through with it? Hitler *will* be annoyed."

His lips tightened in anger.

Her voice lashed at him again. "Big Otto Dietz – as scared as a baby. Only half a man, not as ruthless as he always pretended to be. Well, I've killed Germans, and I found it easy. Damned easy!"

He swung at her then. He turned and raised his arms and swung at her, his lips quivering. He placed his hands on her shoulders and he dragged her towards him.

She was limp and unresisting. His lips touched her cheeks and the anger evaporated. A stronger emotion swept over him. He kissed her violently, hungrily, and then she looked up at him.

There was an odd little smile around her lips. "There," she said softly, "it isn't very difficult, is it?"

He did not answer her. Words were beyond him. He took her savagely into his arms.

Later - afterwards - Otto Dietz decided there was only one thing to do . . .

16

The Truth

OTTO DIETZ lay awkwardly in the narrow hospital bed, his drawn, waxen features as white as the sheets. He looked at Harry Cooper with misery twisting his lips.

Cooper had greeted the German awkwardly. For what did you say to a man who had lost his legs and was powerless from the waist down?

Dietz said, "I envy Markusson. I envy that big blond Norwegian very much. He died like a warrior under torture in full view of his comrades. And he never murmured. His funeral was great, too, as befitting a Viking descendant. Markusson will never be forgotten by the Second Para Regiment. They'll tell the story of his death while the Legion lasts. It will grow, become a legend. But who will remember me?"

Cooper offered Dietz a cigarette. He took one himself. Then he supplied the light.

Dietz drew savagely on the cigarette, crushing it in his fingers. His legs were gone, he had no proper anchorage in the bed, and he had to prop his back against the iron stand and grasp it firmly when he wished to move.

He moved now, and he grinned at Cooper. And he said, "Yes, your name is Cooper. I remember you. I remember even the question you asked me. Out there on the place they now call Bloody Summit or Markusson's Peak - state your preference. We met in Marseilles, you said. And you wanted to know what ever happened to Suzanne Phillips. Is that right?"

Cooper nodded. He took a chair and sat down.

Dietz smirked. "My memory is good, despite what happened." He looked at Cooper. The Englishman thought his expression crafty. "But why should I know what happened to her?" he added.

Cooper said patiently, "You should know. You were head of the German counter-espionage agency at the time. You also knew Suzanne. And you were in the courtyard on the night she disappeared, leading the ambush against her sabotage unit.

"You see, I know all this, because I was there. In the courtyard. I was the one who threw the hand grenade and got away."

Dietz smiled, "You stinking son! You injured me with that grenade."

But Cooper had no time for humour. He had waited a long time for this information and he had come a long way to get it.

He said, "Suzanne disappeared that night. She was never heard of again by her friends or relatives. What happened to her?"

Dietz was still in good humour, however. Momentarily he had forgotten his terrible wounds. He said - baiting Cooper - "But why should the fact that she disappeared worry you? Especially after all this time?"

Cooper scowled with impatience. Despite the horrible wounds Dietz had suffered, he found anger growing within him at the man.

"It does worry me, it worries me a lot, Dietz," he snapped. "I was in love with her. Terribly in love with her. I may have got over that to some extent, but I'll never be happy until I discover what happened to her."

Dietz looked surprised. "After all this time, after all these years, you can say that you have never been able to forget her?"

Cooper remained silent. He nodded his head.

Dietz thought a moment. Then he lifted himself in the cot, grasping the bedstead with both hands. He moved closer to Cooper and he lowered his voice.

He said, "Cooper, I'll make a deal with you. I'll tell you what happened to Suzanne Phillips if you'll do a small favour for me."

Cooper said immediately, "All right."

Dietz spoke in a whisper. A speck of moisture ran from his forehead to his nose. The exertion of shifting his body had brought him out in a sweat.

Dietz said: "I want you to go across to the barracks - any barracks - and steal me a bayonet. I want you to fetch it to me here and I don't want anybody to know about it."

Cooper hesitated. He knew, he guessed, why the crippled German wanted a bayonet.

Dietz said, "That's the deal. Take it or leave it." His face reflected the urgency he felt. It will take you three minutes - three

minutes and then you will know all about Suzanne."

That decided Cooper. After all, what did he care about Dietz? And it was the least he could do for him – for any hopelessly crippled Para.

Cooper left the ward. He went through the barbed wire, past the occasional sentry, and crossed to the nearest barrack-room. He walked casually, collecting an assortment of magazines and newspapers – "for a chum in the hospital," he would say if anybody asked him.

On his way out, in the narrow corridor, he took a bayonet from the wooden wall slots. He returned to the ward, the bayonet held under his hospital-issue dressing gown. He entered the ward. Dietz smiled when he saw him, knowing by the Englishman's approach, that he had brought the bayonet.

Cooper sat down on the chair. He looked both ways along the ward. Floral curtains fluttered in the breeze. Most of the wounded – for these were the serious cases – slept or stared vacantly into space. The nurses were busy around a dying man, his bed bracketed by screens, at the further end.

Cooper opened the gown. Dietz's teeth bared hungrily when he saw the clean sheen of steel. He snatched the bayonet furtively, dragging it down beneath the blankets.

Then his mood changed. It almost became bantering.

"Well, Cooper," he said, "now to business. What do you really think happened to Suzanne Phillips?"

Cooper shrugged. He became savage. He knew the system the Germans had employed in unoccupied France. To save complications with the Vichy authorities – some of whom would have obstructed them – they took saboteurs they found for one-way Chicago-style car rides.

Cooper said, "You made an agreement; you tell me."

Dietz nodded his head. He said, "I captured her that night of the ambush in the courtyard. She had hoped to escape through a rear door, but had found it locked."

Cooper's hands clenched on his knees.

"I caught her," Dietz continued, "and she had just been on a raid in which a lot of my fellow countrymen had been killed. I had been slightly wounded, too, by your hand grenade. You can understand it, therefore, if I say that I had a right to be in a violently angry mood."

Dietz paused, looking to Cooper for confirmation. But Cooper never gave it.

Dietz continued. "My men wanted to handle it because I had been injured. But I took care of it myself. I took Suzanne for a long country ride." Dietz added quickly, seeing the pain on Cooper's face, "But I never killed her. I suppose I intended to. After all, she had murdered Germans. But I couldn't. You see, like you, I was terribly infatuated with Suzanne . . . long before that night of the ambush. And she had always been distant with me - not like with some of my colleagues - and that made it all the more painful for me. Especially as I knew she found me attractive, too."

Cooper nodded. He knew, he remembered, that Suzanne had been terribly impressed by Dietz's good looks. He had been jealous of Dietz at the time; even thought Dietz had been a rival.

And it was perhaps because Suzanne was attracted to Dietz that nothing had happened - unlike with some other Germans.

"But," Dietz continued, "she wasn't aloof with me that night. She loved with a desperation which made that night unique for me. So you see, Cooper, I couldn't kill her. Not for Hitler. Not for anybody."

Cooper frowned. He disbelieved Dietz. After all, Suzanne had completely vanished.

"I was in an awkward position, Cooper. You do see that, don't you. Officially Suzanne was dead. I could not free her for she would return to her old tricks again. And I would have had some awkward explanations to make had she been found alive.

"So, there was only one thing to do. I talked to her, I made love to her, and I spared her life on the condition that she stayed away from Marseilles and took no part in underground activities again.

"She promised that. She went to Paris. I often visited her there, for she waited for me . . ."

"Paris?" Cooper said with surprise. He could not believe it! He could not believe that Suzanne was alive or had been alive, for surely she would have contacted him - especially at the end of the war.

He did not believe Dietz. He snapped, "If that is true, where is she now?"

Dietz smiled. "In Hamburg. I can give you her address. She is with a wealthy industrialist. You see, Cooper, I married Suzanne eventually."

"You married her?" Cooper was shocked.

"I married her," Dietz said grimly. "My mistake. It eventually has cost me my legs and my manhood. Better that I had shot her in a ditch.

"I married her but I was not successful in my business life. She became discontented because I could not give her the things she wanted. We were happy – for a time, yes. But it did not last.

"The end came a few months ago. She wanted a divorce so that she could marry this wealthy old man who could leave her a fortune.

"But I refused. I refused, and do you know what she did? She tried to nail me with the war criminal tribunal by saying I had committed atrocities in the war. Imagine that, after sparing her life!"

Cooper watched Dietz. He felt completely numbed and deflated. He knew instinctively that Dietz was telling the truth.

Dietz stared reflectively at the green linoleum floor. He said, "Yet, despite everything, I suppose I still love her. One cannot help, despite whatever she does, loving a girl like Suzanne."

Cooper nodded glumly. He wondered about Dietz, and he wondered about the bayonet. Should he try and talk the German out of committing suicide? He thought not. He thought that, in similar circumstances, he would wish to be left alone with a bayonet himself.

Dietz said, "One last favour, Cooper. Should you ever meet Suzanne – should you ever go seeking her – don't tell her I died like this. Don't tell her I was made useless and committed suicide in a hospital bed. Tell her I died out there at Bloody Summit."

"I'll do that," Cooper said. "I'll do it not for a German but for a fellow Para. I'll tell her about the summit, and I'll tell her about Markusson's Peak. Only, in my version to her, it will be called Dietz's Peak."

Dietz's right hand stretched out from beneath the blanket.

Cooper shook hands with the German and then he walked away.

Marion Lister had begun to know the pulsating terror of coming home and putting the key in her own doorlock . . . the concentrating fear that one evening the flat wouldn't be empty when she went in . . .

Bill Knox

THE SERVICE FLAT

When Bill Knox ventured into crime fiction writing in 1957, he already had a comprehensive education in the ways of both police and criminals. Born in Glasgow in 1928, he had entered journalism while still in his teens and in later years had specialised in crime reporting.

His current score is twelve books, the latest published title being "The Scavengers" (John Long). Novels by Bill Knox have been published in several languages, and his work also includes television and radio scripts.

MARION LISTER was thirty, brunette, attractive rather than good-looking, and lived alone in her small, top-floor service flat, one of three situated within the house in Garroway Court, a quiet, still reasonably fashionable part of Glasgow. She worked nine till five, five days a week, as private secretary to an advertising consultant.

That meant that from nine till five the flat should have been locked and empty . . . Marion Lister did her own housework.

Yet it was three weeks now since the small things had suddenly begun to show. The trace of cigarette ash, the telephone receiver replaced the wrong way round, a cushion ruffled, all the other minute, personal details which shrieked only one message.

Someone was using her flat while she was out. Nothing taken, nothing damaged . . . but Marion Lister had begun to know the pulsating terror of coming home and putting the key in her own doorlock, the concentrating fear that one evening the flat wouldn't be empty when she went in.

"All right, so you say you can't call the police." Her friend Vi Taylor shrugged as they turned off the rain-puddled road and walked up the short driveway to the house. "Ever

thought of staying off work for a day and just waiting to see if anyone comes in? Now, don't look at me like that - I'm just joking. Trying to, anyway!"

"I tried that." Marion Lister's voice was quiet, resigned. "I waited, all day. Nothing happened. That's why I invited you home tonight - to talk about it to somebody who'd listen.

"Vi, I went to work as usual the next day. When I came home at night, it had happened again."

They went into the big gloomy hall with its old-fashioned wallpaper and dark-stained woodwork. An elderly woman gave a curt, barely friendly nod of recognition as they went past, then turned back to talk to the stockily-built young man by her side.

"Neighbours?" Vi Taylor glanced back as they climbed the stairs. The younger man had gone out, the woman was returning to her task of polishing the heavy brass palm-pots which decorated the entrance area.

"Mrs. Johns, the caretaker. And her son Danny - he's an engineer, on night shift. They live in the basement." Marion Lister searched her bag for her key as they reached the last flight of steps and neared her door.

"He's too young for me." Her friend gave a chuckle, then followed her in as the door was opened. "Well, what do we do? Try under the bed?" She sighed, touched her companion lightly on the arm, and shook her head. "Sorry. That wasn't funny."

"Just stay here." Swiftly, systematically, Marion Lister checked through the flat - the tiny kitchenette and bathroom, the bedroom, the combined living-room and lounge. When she finished, she trembled a little as she showed her friend a small blue china ashtray.

"This morning, last thing before I went out, I stubbed a cigarette in this. Now it's clean."

"You're sure?" Vi Taylor frowned. "Maybe somebody had a reason for being in. Or maybe you made a mistake."

"Nobody had a reason. And the stub was there."

"Who's got a passkey? Mrs. Johns?"

"Just Mrs. Johns."

"Then let's talk to her," decided her friend.

* * *

Mrs. Johns was still polishing when they reached the foot of the stairs. She listened, her face growing stonier by the moment.

"You told me this once before, Miss Lister." She gave a sniff of sheer disbelief. "I told you then - nobody's been in your place. Unless you're suggestin' that Danny or me -"

"I'm just trying to find out -"

"And I'm just tellin' you!" Hands on hips, Mrs. Johns glared back at her. "Nobody calls me a thief - not me or my son."

She broke off as the main door opened. The woman who came in first was in her late sixties, grey-haired, walking slowly with the aid of a stick. She gave them a vacant smile, and headed towards the door at the end of the corridor. The blonde, plain-faced girl who followed swept them with young, sullen eyes as she passed.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Johns. Perhaps there's a mistake," Marion Lister broke off the incipient battle.

"Huh." Mrs. Johns gave another sniff.

"What about these two?" As they turned away, Vi nudged her companion and nodded towards the women going into the ground floor flat. "Asked them?"

Marion Lister nodded. "Miss Congreave couldn't climb the stairs on her own. The girl is her niece, Anna - Anna Lewis. She's stupid or lazy, I don't know which. They said they knew nothing."

"That just leaves the flat on the middle floor."

"I haven't spoken to them yet." Marion Lister pursed her lips. "But I will. Now. They're a man called Rowan and his wife. He's a violinist - plays in a theatre orchestra. She says she's an invalid - floats around most of the time in a kimono."

Mrs. Rowan answered the doorbell. Thin, middle-aged, blonde hair dark at the roots, she wrapped her bright yellow silk kimono around her while Marion Lister repeated her story.

"Well, I haven't heard anything." She gave a faint smirk of disbelief. "Charlie . . .!"

Charlie Rowan was in his forties. He came to the door dressed in dinner jacket and black tie, ready to leave for work.

"The show starts in half an hour," he explained. "No, I'm like Jean. Can't help you. Haven't heard or seen anything."

They thanked him and headed back up the stairs. From below, Jean Rowan's stage whisper to her husband reached their ears.

"Time she got married and had something more to occupy her mind."

* * *

"I'm not saying she's right," said Vi Taylor later, as they washed up after a gloomy meal. "But Marion, you could be

imagining it. If you had a holiday, got away from work for a spell . . . ”

“Vi, I’m not going mad. It’s really happening.” Marion Lister drained the last of the washing-up water from the sink, and lit a cigarette with shaking hands.

Her friend shrugged. “Well, then, it must be somebody who is able to watch every morning and make sure you’ve left for work. Look, what about the old trick of gumming a piece of thread across the bottom of your door when you go out? If the thread’s broken when you come back, you’ll know you’ve had a visitor.”

For Marion Lister, any idea was better than none. Next morning, as she left for work, she gummed a small piece of dark thread across her door, low down.

She came home that evening, the thread paramount in her mind. But Mrs. Johns blocked her way in the ill-lit hallway, a bewildered Miss Congreave by her side.

“It’s a disgrace, that’s what it is,” declared the caretaker, the previous evening’s clash forgotten in her excitement. “You’ll never guess! That girl Anna just upped and left poor old Miss Congreave. Packed her case and nipped off while the poor old soul was out for a walk. Nipped off without a soul seein’ her!”

“You’ve no idea where she’s gone, Miss Congreave?” Marion Lister tried to muster suitable sympathy.

“No note, no warnin’ just nipped off . . . ” Mrs. Johns broke off as, feet loud on the stairway, Charlie Rowan clattered down from the first floor. Halfway towards them he turned and waved up towards the stairs. “Bye, Jean.”

They caught a brief glimpse of the yellow kimono flicking back into the flat above, then heard the door close.

“Heard about Anna Lewis, Mr. Rowan?” demanded Mrs. Johns.

“You told me yourself,” reminded Rowan. “Terribly sorry – I’m late. Conductor doesn’t like it.”

He dashed out of the building.

When Marion Lister finally reached her top-floor flat, the thread across the door was broken. Her visitor had been back – but she felt a sudden, savage joy at the sight. This was her proof – proof beyond denial.

Or was it? Couldn’t others say she’d faked it all? Psychiatrists had a name for that kind of behaviour . . .

The next morning, Marion Lister rose at her usual hour. She dressed, made breakfast, washed up, and then, as usual, went

downstairs and out of the building, heading in the direction of the local bus stop.

But, just short of the stop, she turned off the main road. Five minutes later she walked along the lane which ran behind Garroway Court, sneaked in through the back entrance to the house, crept on stockinged feet through the empty hall and up the stairs and, moments later, was inside her flat.

After an hour, the telephone rang.

She ignored it.

Ten minutes later, she heard the sound of a key in the lock, and darted behind the shelter of the floor-length window drapes.

Cautiously, Danny Johns entered the room, closed the door behind him, and began to look around.

"Danny?" She stepped into view when he was only a few feet away.

"Heck!" The caretaker's son gulped. "You're home, then?"

"Something you didn't expect." Marion Lister eyed him warily. He stood between her and the telephone, and somehow she was beginning to doubt the wisdom of what she'd accomplished. "Has it been you, Danny - all along, I mean?"

Danny Johns flushed. "Me? You mean, me pokin' my nose in while you're -" he gave a growl. "Look, I'm here because my ma sent me up. She thought she heard a noise, and what with the fuss you've been makin' she told me to check. Wait a minute."

He opened the door and gave a shout. In a moment, Mrs. Johns had joined him.

"You!" The caretaker's eyebrows formed twin question marks. "Hidin' behind the curtains, ma," grunted her son. "Popped out like a ruddy jack-in-the-box and started off at me."

"I didn't know -" Marion Lister wasn't allowed to finish.

"Hidin' and spyin' and makin' trouble! I've heard of women like you!" Mrs. Johns was furious in her rage. But, disgust on his face, her son pulled her away. They went out, the door banged shut, and Marion Lister collapsed into a chair, close to tears.

Moments later, she rose again as the doorbell chimed.

"Mr. Rowan!"

Charlie Rowan, in off-duty sports shirt and corduroy slacks, shifted awkwardly. "I . . . that is, I heard the noise from down below. Came up to see if you were all right." He frowned. "You need a drink. Any brandy in the flat?"

She shook her head.

"No? Well, I'll bring a bottle up. Sorry I can't invite you to my

place, but Jean's resting. You know how it is - she needs her rest."

He went out, leaving the door open. Marion crossed to the couch, and lifted her cigarettes and lighter. She fumbled, the lighter dropped, and then slid down between the back of the couch and the loose seat-cushions. Shaking her head, she reached into the space, retrieved the lighter, then, puzzled, reached back in again and pulled out the other object her fingers had brushed against.

It was a button. A large, gaudy button with an ornamental metal centre. A button she'd never seen before.

"Miss Lister . . ."

She looked up. Mrs. Johns stood in the doorway, eyeing her awkwardly. "Eh . . . c'n I come in?"

She nodded.

"Maybe I was a wee bit hasty." Mrs. Johns bit her lip. "About what I said, I mean -"

"Let's forget it, Mrs. Johns." Marion Lister was quietly earnest. "This button . . . ever seen it before?"

"Anna Lewis has a costume wi' buttons like that." Mrs. Johns' interest flared. "Where'd you find it?"

"In the couch." Marion Lister stopped, uncertain, as Rowan re-entered the flat, carrying the promised brandy bottle.

"Spot of this'll buck you up," he said. "Now, glasses."

She watched as he crossed the room, opened the small cupboard beneath the upright desk in the far corner, and produced three of the wine glasses she kept there.

"Mr. Rowan - how did you know where the glasses were?"

"Glasses? Well . . ." Rowan flustered.

"You've never seen them produced before, Mr. Rowan. Not when I've been here." In the doorway, she saw Danny Johns. He stopped and waited, listening. "Is the reason this button? Anna Lewis's button? That's how you know, isn't it? Because you've been here - with her?"

"Nonsense!" Rowan snapped the word. "I came here to help and . . . and . . . I'm going!" He turned.

Mrs. Johns gave an aggressive sniff. "Danny."

Her son leaned across the doorway. "Stay a moment, mate," he said. "Till we hear what ma has to say, anyway."

"It's about the passkey." Mrs. Johns stroked the tip of her nose. "I just remembered. Anna Lewis did borrow it once. Said she'd forgotten her own, and that her aunt was out."

"She could have had it copied." Marion Lister looked at the button in her hand. "I took the cushions off the couch three days ago, when I was cleaning. The button wasn't there then."

"I'm not staying." Rowan shoved against the younger man in the doorway, was pushed back, swung angrily with the bottle, and next second was sent flying wildly back across the room, crashing to the floor and bringing down the telephone with him.

"Where's Anna, Mr. Rowan?" insisted Marion Lister. "Nobody saw her go. Do you know where she is - or what happened to her?"

He picked himself up from the floor, blood flowing from a cut on his forehead. "All right - " he shook his head in dazed fashion, took out his handkerchief, and held it to the wound. "We were using your flat. It was - well, it made things easier."

"And yesterday?"

"We were here. Then we had a quarrel, and she walked out." He glanced from one face to another, in growing agitation. "I know where she is. If you want, I'll arrange for her to . . . to telephone you this afternoon."

They were still unconvinced.

"I mean it." Rowan's voice changed to a pleading note. "Look, my wife doesn't know. I - the shock would be bad for her. You know she's got a weak heart. Anyway, we're leaving in a week or so. I've got a new job, another orchestra, out of town. That's what caused the quarrel. I told Anna we were leaving, and that was the finish as far as we were concerned."

Marion Lister lifted the telephone from the floor, replaced it on the stand, and shook her head. "I'll believe you - if you call the girl right now and I speak to her."

Rowan hesitated, lifted the receiver, then slowly lowered it again. "It isn't working. It - it must have been damaged when it fell."

"He's right." Danny Johns tried the instrument for himself. "No dialling tone."

"You've got a 'phone, Mr. Rowan." Marion Lister inspected him with the cold anger engendered by weeks of fear and uncertainty. "Use it. We'll come with you."

"But my wife . . ." Rowan's protests died as Danny Johns gripped him by the arm. They went downstairs together.

"I'll use the passkey." Mrs. Johns opened the Rowans' door.

The telephone was on a small table just inside the little hallway. But they stopped short as the inner door of the flat opened.

"Charlie . . ." Anna Lewis's voice turned to a strangled gasp of fear. And she was wearing Mrs. Rowan's yellow silk kimono.

"It's another question now, Mr. Rowan," said Danny Johns softly. "What happened to your wife?"

Rowan looked at Anna Lewis. Neither of them spoke. Slowly, carefully, Marion Lister lifted the telephone.

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Next month in **EWMM**

EDGAR WALLACE

"The Queen of Sheba's Belt"

MARTIN THOMAS

"Killed with a Loving Kiss"

WILLIAM SHAND

"The Swinging Man"

TRUE CRIME

"The Monster of Dusseldorf"



EDGAR WALLACE MYSTERY MAGAZINE No. 4
will be on sale Thursday, 15th October. Readers
are advised to order in advance.

He knew he'd made a bad mistake . . . he was in a blind alley, short and narrow, with high walls and no exit . . .

Sydney J. Bounds

KNIFE FOR A CANARY

Sydney J. Bounds is a prolific full-time writer of popular fiction of all kinds: crime, western, science fiction, war, confession, boys' stories, nursery scripts. He was co-author of the novels "Countdown for Murder", "White Mercenary" and "The Girl who Saw Too Much". He is unmarried, smokes a pipe, is interested in painting and reads widely.

IT was only the third time he had used the knife. The first two occasions had been strictly business - this time it was a pleasure.

Johnny Quinn thrust the tip of his tongue between nicotined teeth. His slight figure nestled in a raincoat and his eyes, set in a pale thin face under a derby hat, glittered viciously. Damp fog eddied and swirled around him, blotting out the lamps of Soho.

He crouched to wipe the blade on her dress. "Two-timing bitch," he slurred, tongue still between his teeth.

She was petite, with an hour-glass figure in a crimson gown. As she sprawled on the pavement at his feet, blonde hair tangled and awry, Stella looked an innocent - no longer the sex-kitten of the *Club Roma*.

"The canary will sing no more," Johnny Quinn murmured.

He pushed a cigarette between his lips and listened to the tinny, far-off traffic noises filtering through the fog. Suddenly, he straightened, ears alert. He grew wary, sensing the presence of someone close by.

The toe-caps of his sharply-pointed Italian shoes nudged her briefly as a whisper of sound rolled out of the fog: "Johnny . . . Johnny Quinn."

He jerked the cigarette from his lips, tearing sensitive skin, and crushed it. There was no mistaking the menace in that voice, nor the voice itself. Fat Reuben. Johnny took two nervous steps to his left, avoiding the spreading pool of blood, and pressed his back against the wall, knife extended horizontally before him. It was a heavy blade, and broad, curving to a point.

He checked his breathing, peered into the fog. Fear gnawed like a rat at his spine. This was worse than the cops . . . he'd once seen Fat Reuben at work.

"I'm coming for you, Johnny."

Johnny Quinn shivered, imagining that gross figure, bloated, enormous, working a bicycle chain through fingers encased in chamois leather gloves. Reuben was an artist with the chain. It did Johnny no good at all to recall the face of a victim, ribbons of flesh hanging like macaroni.

He moved off, a silent shadow. The grey-white shroud hanging over the street was a clammy thing, clammy as fear itself. He lunged with his blade, meeting no resistance, and a fat chuckle echoed eerily.

"Nervous, Johnny?"

Hell, he must be close! Johnny Quinn whirled round, striving to suppress the rasping sound of his own breathing. His heart hammered like an overworked engine. And he could not see a damn thing.

All this, he thought bitterly, because of Stella . . .

Stella Marguerite she had called herself when first she appeared at the club. Johnny remembered the night clearly. He had taken one look at the figure under a brief, tight-fitting gown, and wanted her - and she had smiled back as she circled the close-packed tables, vocalizing a hot number.

The canary was new, the regulars dazzled, and Johnny got in fast. When she finished her act, he called, "That was the real thing, baby. How about joining me for a drink?"

He remembered, her eyes had been just a shade calculating as she answered: "Don't mind if I do, mister."

As they drank together, he slid a hand over bare shoulders. She brushed it casually away. Very casually. He hadn't stayed brushed off for long, and word soon passed around that Stella was Johnny's girl.

Life became very pleasant for Johnny . . . until the night Fat Reuben lumbered across the room and splayed soft white hands over their table. He stared into the vee of her gown and licked

pudgy lips. He didn't bother looking at Johnny.

He said, "Three's a crowd," and pulled up a chair.

Johnny's protest was half-hearted. He was small-time, and knew it. Reuben was Mr. Big. He moistened his lips, mumbled, "Stella's my girl."

Through cigar smoke and muted chatter, the beat of a Mersey combo, he glanced at her. And Stella, cool as ice, parroted, "He's right, Johnny, three's a crowd. Why don't you take a walk?"

There was nothing he could do about it, not then . . . but as he stumbled away, his knuckles whitened round the haft of his knife.

Reuben was huge, a good six feet and nearly as wide. Gland trouble made him that way, and the sheer weight put an enormous load on his heart. It was common talk at the *Roma* that he took pills for the least exertion. He was going to need a lot of pills to cope with Stella . . .

Johnny wished he'd drop dead right now.

He soft-shoed away from the door porch, smelling the spicy tang of Cypriot cooking, and hit a dustbin. The galvanized-iron lid clattered to the pavement, reverberating. He froze.

"You shouldn't have knifed her, Johnny," purred the voice of Fat Reuben. "You shouldn't have done that."

The voice was without direction. It could have come from anywhere. Johnny Quinn hesitated, terrified by thoughts of Reuben's chain. His salvia, when he swallowed, tasted sour.

The fog thinned a little. Now he saw a gargantuan bulk emerge from swirling white wreaths. He ran, sobbing, into the next dense patch.

A quiet laugh followed him. "Think I can't see you, Johnny? That knife of yours is a dead give-away - flashes like a beacon!"

Johnny Quinn hurled the heavy blade from him, and immediately regretted his impulse. He heard it ring metallically as it hit the road, heard a fat chuckle behind him.

There was no jealousy in him now, only fear that gripped like a vice. He ran blindly, in a panic, unable to face Reuben's chain.

He halted abruptly. The fog was thicker and he was uncertain of his bearings. He reached out a hand, fumbled at old brickwork. He knew he'd made a bad mistake . . . he was in a blind alley, short and narrow, with high walls and no exit.

He turned on flat heels, desperate, waiting.

"This is it," Fat Reuben whispered. "The end of everything."

Johnny Quinn slid his back along the wall, shrinking from that

whiplike voice. He came to a dead-end, stopped. There was nowhere to go.

And out of the curling grey mist shuffled a monstrous figure. He saw a moon face, yellow chamois gloves and an arm upraised to strike. He heard the frightening downward *swish* of the chain and covered his face with his hands. Pain lanced up his arms, and he flung them away. Again the steel chain lashed down and he screamed, tasting blood and grease . . . then a great weight fell against him, bearing him to the ground.

Half-buried, pinned by twenty stone of fat, he listened to the wheezing gasp of Reuben's breathing.

A tortured voice came: "The pills, Johnny . . . my heart . . . in my pocket . . ."

Johnny wriggled free, dipped a hand into Fat Reuben's coat pocket. He found a flat, round box, pulled it out - and hurled it far into the fog.

"The end of you," he said, and laughed.

He kicked Reuben in the face and stepped past. Maybe this was his lucky night after all, if he could find the knife again and press Fat Reuben's prints to it.

Carefully, he retraced his steps. His hands dripped blood and he wound his handkerchief round them, ignoring the pain. The knife first; later, he would see a doctor.

He was almost to the end of the alley when car noises pierced the fog, a slamming of doors and pounding of feet. A whistle blasted close by.

Johnny Quinn ducked into a doorway as orange headlamps swung by, shivered at a passing voice. The voice of the law.

" . . . the bastard can't be far off. Spread out and keep looking. She was on special duty at the *Roma*, trying for evidence to convict Reuben. The first time ever a police-woman's been killed . . ."

"There'll be no let-up on this one!"

NEW BOOKS

Inspector Tom Hutton and other policemen (too many?) carry out investigations in a Hampshire hamlet where people are not what they seem to be, and a bleak and forbidding house conceals the secrets of a dead blackmailer and the key to two murders.

The Hour of the Bishop by W. Murdoch Duncan is a very professional, routine mystery novel, but for a good part of the way proceeds in too leisurely a manner for my taste. Certainly not the "novel of pace" the publishers claim. (John Long, 13s. 6d.)

The Twisted Tongues, latest novel by film story editor, Jonathan Burke, is that rare book which successfully commentates on significant matters within the limited scope of a particular fiction genre.

Philip Sengall, a traitor who broadcast from Germany during the War, is released from prison and starts work on his memoirs for a newspaper. Others decide he must not be allowed to speak . . . There have been thrillers written with similar themes before. The secret that puts this one head and shoulders above all others, lies, I think, in the vivid characterisation.

The self-seeking, hypocritical men of power are exposed as both pathetic and frightening. The story is told in such convincing style that the reader finds himself not wondering just how true-to-life is Tenby as a leading politician or Downing and Robsart as newspaper magnates, but rather this in reverse.

A novel one goes on thinking about for a long time. (John Long, 15s.)

James Turner's new novel, **The Slate Landscape** scores top marks as an excellent piece of writing drawing fully upon the grim atmosphere of its setting.

A woman with a sick mind executes a murderous scheme of vengeance in a gaunt, desolate house by the edge of derelict slate quarries in Cornwall. Hero Rampion Savage comes close to fearing for his sanity as corpses disappear and old friends refuse to credit his reports of the terrible happenings at Quarry House.

This novel has all the suspense and shocks of a Hitchcock movie, and many thriller writers would do well to study the sheer quality of Mr. Turner's prose, too. (Cassell, 16s.)

Kevin O'Hara's **Don't Neglect the Body** would have been improved with a little more action and a little less chatter.

Argentinian private eye, Chico Brett, interviews a gallery of characters – some colourful, some not – in his investigations into the could-be

homicidal affairs of Charles Vincent Gill, small-time blackmailer and a man with mysterious friends.

One or two exciting sequences, but there have been better Chico Brett thrillers. (John Long, 13s. 6d.)

Much more readable, and bringing a lively gust of fresh air to the thriller scene despite tricky subject matter, is **The Grey Shepherds** by **Angus MacVicar**.

The inspiration for this novel – corruption in Government circles involving security leaks and “high class” prostitute – is not far to seek. The best chapters are to my mind those set in western Scotland. This clean, open-air setting counteracts the basic sordidness of the theme and the chapter which takes place in a London brothel for V.I.P.’s. But no doubt the latter will send the greater number rushing to buy. (John Long, 13s. 6d.)

Another fine thriller with a Scottish background is **Drifting Death** by **Bill Gaston**.

Roy MacLean, aqualung diver and journalist, finds a dying man in a deserted cabin cruiser drifting on the Firth of Clyde. The man whispers “Caber,” and MacLean is thrown headlong – in more senses than one – into an action-packed adventure involving a missing flyer who is Scotland’s “nearest thing to Hatton Garden”, valuable pearls of historic importance, and a fascist rebellion plot that has even more sinister depths. A beautiful damsel in distress cannot be overlooked, either.

I find it hard to believe that this is Mr. Gaston’s second novel only, and regret having missed his first. (Hammond, Hammond, 13s. 6d.)

Drop us a line . . .

We should like to hear from our readers. Comments, criticisms, queries, requests – please do not hesitate to write to *The Editor, Edgar Wallace Mystery Magazine, Micron House, Gorrington Park Avenue, Mitcham, Surrey, England*. It will be your letters that help us to plan ahead, featuring the most popular types of stories by your favourite authors.

LETTERS

FIRM OPINIONS

Dear Sir,

The idea of reviving some of Edgar Wallace's "long shorts" is a good one – provided you do not support them with a few items of complete rubbish.

The supporting cast of your first issue is good. It includes a number of former Sexton Blake authors – so many, in fact, that one suspects the magazine is the brain-child of a number of these gentlemen who thus will find scope for their energies now that Blake has been murdered!

I say "murdered" advisedly, not because Rex Dolphin, Martin Thomas and the rest of the team do not write good detective stories – they certainly do – but because the genius who thought of putting Blake into modern dress automatically made him as completely out of context as the Archbishop of Canterbury at a Black Magic festival. I happen to have a number of copies of *Union Jack* of pre-1914 vintage and *Sexton Blake Library* volumes from 1915 onwards, so I am not talking without knowledge. Do not, therefore, let us have any Blake stories in EWMM – please.

I think it is a mistake to preface each story in a magazine with a *précis* of its wonderful qualities. EWMM does this *ad nauseam*. The result is that they are not even read. I, the reader, judge the qualities of a story and whether I think it good. I care not for the opinion of this panel or that expert – or even Uncle Tom Cobley.

May I suggest you feature some of those grand Sanders stories in EWMM? The great Edgar never wrote anything better, and they bear re-reading many times.

You invite subscriptions to your magazine, and I am considering this. The quality of the first few issues may be high, but what about the issue for August, 1965? I have been caught before!

Please always keep in mind the fact that most of the paperback firms overlook – that the public wants something good for 2s. 6d. and that any price above "kills the pig". This is for the simple reason that across the road is a free library with shelves full of the latest in blood, crime and general mayhem.

Mr. John Goode, 34 South Side, London, S.W.4.

Thank you for letting us have your clear views on the magazine, Mr. Goode. I am sure many of our readers will care to read your opinions and enjoy making comparison with their own. – *Editor.*

STAYING POWER

Dear Sir,

The name of Edgar Wallace is an apt choice in title for your new

magazine. He was an old favourite of mine, and although more than thirty years have gone by since his death, I notice several publishers continually re-issue his stories. His style is by no means outdated in these strenuous days.

I wish you every success in your new venture.

Mr. S. Gordon Swan, 51 Beatty Avenue, Victoria Park East, Western Australia.

QUERIES

Dear Sir,

In *Harvest of Homicide* by Martin Thomas (EWMM No. 1) there is mention of the European settlement in Shanghai. Would I be correct in thinking this story was written before the Communist takeover in 1949?

Most of the Edgar Wallace films that Jack Greenwood has produced for Anglo Amalgamated have been extremely interesting. It would be very helpful if you could give a mention in the magazine whenever one of these films is put on general release. For some reason the original Wallace stories on which the films are based are not mentioned in the credit titles. Possibly you could persuade Mr. Greenwood to change this practice?

With regard to the film *Five to One*, do you know the title of the original story by Edgar Wallace?

Mr. J. Best, 131 Dane Road, Stoke, Coventry, Warwickshire.

Martin Thomas replies:

This story certainly was not written before the Chinese Communists' takeover in 1949. The words "European settlement" referred to a topographical location merely, and Mr. Best is mistaken in ascribing to them a political connotation.

Topographical and historical facts remain facts despite any political or legal changes. The citizens of New Orleans still refer to the slave market, which will always be associated with its historical site, though nary a slave is now seen there.

Woolwich will always be the Arsenal, Birmingham will always have its Bull Ring, London its Petty France and World's End - but not literally, Mr. Best. And not even Mao Tse-Tung can alter the fact that a particular part of Shanghai was settled by Europeans.

The Editor replies:

Except for the Wallace ones, all the stories appearing in EWMM are being published for the first time. Unlike other mystery magazines, EWMM does not consist largely of reprinted material. Even the Wallace stories featured, will invariably be rare "collectors' items", long unobtainable to the average reader.

In answer to your second query, Mr. Greenwood tells me that *Five to One* was based on a Wallace story called *Thief in the Night*.



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A scene from the Edgar
Wallace film, *WE SHALL SEE*,
an Anglo-Amalgamated
presentation, now on
general release.