

EDGAR WALLACE

mystery magazine

A
MICRON
PUBLICATION

VOL. 2 No. 4

2/6

NOVEMBER

**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

★

**ALL
COMPLETE
STORIES**





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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Cover by *Chacopino*

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EDGAR WALLACE MYSTERY MAGAZINE is published by arrangement with Edgar Wallace Ltd. on the fifteenth of each month by Micron Publications Ltd., Micron House, Gorrington Park Avenue, Mitcham, Surrey. Printed in England at The Philips Park Press, Manchester. Distributed by G. M. Smith Publishing Co. Ltd. Sole agents: Australasia, Messrs. Gordon & Gotch Ltd.; South Africa, Central News Agency Ltd.; Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Messrs. Kingstons Ltd. © 1964 Micron Publications Ltd.

A beautiful woman thwarted in love, the theft of a gem-studded heirloom, and an innocent girl trapped in a cruel web of deceit and suspicion . . .

Edgar Wallace

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA'S BELT

This novelette appeared in 1929 in the same Reader's Library volume as *The Ghost of Down Hill* - featured in our first number. Knowledgeable Wallace readers will recognise that it is a much earlier work than *Down Hill*, with which it makes an interesting comparison. The theme of the story - a woman's viciousness - is similar to that which Edgar Wallace later used in *The Calendar*.

The Lady Who Lost

"I SUPPOSE there's nothing more to be said."

The woman rose slowly from the deep chair and with a shiver drew the lace stole about her shoulders.

The terrace before Wensley Hall was deserted. There floated out to the couple the soft strains of a waltz, and there was a harmony between the soft mist of sound and the solemn splendour of the moonlit path, sloping down from their feet.

The man had risen with her. He was a tall, good-looking man in his late twenties. Now his fine face was hardened by the pain which he had occasioned, and which he would willingly have spared this beautiful woman.

She looked unusually pale in the moonlight; a beautiful creature with long dark hair, and imperious and haughty - you saw that in the almost insolent droop of the eyelash, in the strength of the chin.

But she was humble enough now.

"No, I don't think there's much to be gained by talking it over," said the man. "I wonder at myself, that I can discuss it so dispassionately, but it's only because I want to be fair to you, Anna."

As though actuated by a common desire to get as far from the house as possible, they walked to the edge of the terrace.

"You think I've treated you badly?" she said, leaning over the balustrade by his side.

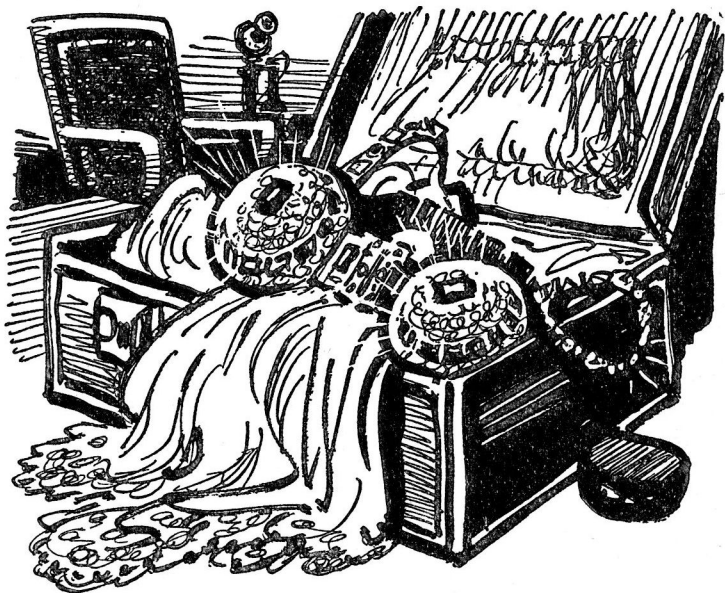
She spoke quickly, for she knew that their time together would be all too brief for her purpose.

"I don't think you were quite straight with me," he said. "I want to be fair with you. I know now that you wanted to marry money, but you might have given me some indication before."

Yet, she noticed wonderingly, there was no reproach in his voice.

"The first news I had of your marriage came by the very post by which I expected to receive your views about the marriage settlement. You had given me no hint that you had changed your mind. Why, you were married by the time the letter reached India. It was a pretty hard and bitter blow for me," he said gravely.

"You've survived it very well, Robert," she said with a smile.



He turned his head. His face was stern; there was no reflection of the amusement she had shown.

"God gives men strength in the hour of their necessity," he said soberly. "Do you remember your *Vanity Fair*? You remember that chap who would have been the hero of the story, if Thackeray could have tolerated a hero; and you remember what he said to the girl whose whims and fancies he had endured for so long? You probably don't. He said, 'You are unworthy of me.' It was after I'd read your letter for the second time that that blessed phrase came to me. Trite, wasn't it?" he said with a short laugh. "Yet, like most trite things, it was very comforting."

She hung her head.

"You're very hard; you don't understand."

"I confess I don't. At least, I didn't then," said the man.

"You don't know what it is to be poor," she said in a low voice.

He laughed again.

"I've hardly ever known what it is to be anything else," he said with a chuckle of genuine amusement.

"And now it's all over, and you've forgotten?"

"Yes, it is all over," he agreed.

"And you've forgotten?"

"No!"

"You think women are – horrible?"

There was an inquiring tilt to her eyebrows as she raised her face to his with the question.

"I do not think that women are horrible," he said, "though I'm perfectly sure, by whatever standard one judges, that you were not as fair as you might have been. Let it go at that."

He turned as if to re-enter the house, but she laid her hand on his arm.

"One moment, Robert," she said. "Suppose – suppose . . ."

She stopped. Her breath came quickly; there was a strange fire in her eyes.

"Suppose I've regretted all that I did, and that I see now, clearly, my folly and its fruits? Suppose," she dropped her voice to an eager whisper, "that I count love above all things? Listen to me!"

She caught his arm, for he would have moved away from her in his embarrassment.

"Money isn't everything, Robert. It was wicked of me, and cruel of me, I know, to do what I did; but I wanted something more than love and now I want love more than everything."

The diamond star upon her white bosom rose and fell quickly;

her shining eyes were uplifted to his.

He shook his head slowly. There was pity in the face turned to hers.

"It's too late," he said gently. "I couldn't love you as a man should -"

She stepped back with a cry. She had never doubted his love for her. His words were like a blow; harder to endure.

"There's someone else?"

He found himself talking a little hoarsely and cleared his throat.

"There is someone else," he said. "At last I think I've found the real thing."

* * *

Through the french window which opened from the ballroom to the terrace, there came a tall, broad-shouldered man. The light from the room touched his white hair, and gave the pair a momentary glimpse of a red, jovial face.

"Hullo! Is that you, Anna?" he called.

He saw her standing apart on the terrace, and hastened towards her.

"Come along, my dear, the Rajah was asking for you. Hullo, Grey!" he said genially to Robert. "Come inside, my boy. You'll find, when you reach my age, that a sentimental passion for moonlight effects will be tempered by a natural fear of rheumatism. Brrrr-r!" He shivered.

"I'll come in a minute, John," said the woman. "Captain Grey was just telling me about his adventures in India and you've interrupted at the most exciting part."

"I'm sorry," said her husband with a quick laugh.

He turned his kindly blue eyes upon the younger man.

"You fellows who have adventures to tell," he said ruefully, "have a tremendous advantage over us poor stay-at-homes. Yet the Rajah has promised a glimpse of that treasure of his. There's adventure enough there - even for you, Grey!" he said.

"I'll come in."

"One moment, Captain Grey," said Lady Wensley, desperately. "I wanted to ask you just one thing."

Her husband stood for a moment irresolutely, and then he made a graceful retreat.

"Don't stay too long, the air is chilly," he called over his shoulder.

She waited until his big form had disappeared into the brilliantly

illuminated room, then turned to her companion.

"What's her name?" she asked quietly.

Robert Grey hesitated.

"It would be hardly fair . . ." he said.

"Are you engaged to her or aren't you?" she asked, almost roughly.

"I am engaged," he said simply.

She laughed; it was not a laugh that was good to hear. It told of the disappointment, chagrin, humiliation and thwarted designs of the woman. It told, too, of the reawakened love - perhaps of its very birth, since she had never felt so deeply as now.

"Who is she?" she asked again.

Before he could reply, a slim, attractive girl stepped out on to the terrace, and came towards them.

"Robert," she cried, "we're waiting for you!"

She stepped up to him and laid her hand on his arm.

There was no need for Anna Wensley to ask any further. The man's silence was eloquent. He had wished to spare her the humiliation of knowing that Marjorie Douglas had supplanted her in his heart.

Marjorie was Anna Wensley's cousin - a beautiful child who had blossomed, as it seemed, in a day to womanhood. She was fairer than Lady Wensley; as tall, as graceful and, of her colouring, more beautiful. Her eyes sparkled with laughter as she spoke. She was all excitement.

"Oh Anna!" she cried. "Aren't you longing to see this wonderful belt of the Rajah's?"

The woman pulled herself together with a great effort.

"I'm not particularly interested," she said.

She knew that the conversation was finished. What further need was there for any talk between them? She knew the worst; she had offered something and that something had been rejected.

She fell in naturally by Robert's side, and walked back with him into the room.

2

Premonition Of Evil

THE dancing had ceased. The guests were gathered in one corner of the room about the swarthy figure of the Rajah of Jhiopore.

Sir John Wensley had met the Rajah when he had been on a

shooting expedition and he welcomed the opportunity to repay some of the hospitality he had received from this stout and kindly Easterner. The Rajah had been up at Oxford and he was at once a pleasing and an accommodating guest.

As the little party entered the room, his Highness was talking to a tall man of distinguished appearance. The hair about his temples was grey, and there was a certain strength in the set of his jaw. But humour shone in the grey eyes that looked out upon the world from under shaggy black eyebrows.

The Rajah's deep laugh sounded high above the babel of talk.

"This will amuse you, Sir John," he called, as he caught sight of the figure of his host.

"What's that?" asked Sir John with a smile. "Anything Claude Trennion says is calculated to amuse me."

"I don't know that it's particularly amusing," drawled Trennion, "though I suppose even a policeman is entitled to his joke. I was telling the Rajah that he ought to be careful of that belt in the house of an antiquarian like you, Sir John, of such enthusiastic tastes."

"Well, the Rajah hasn't corrupted me yet," smiled Sir John, "though possibly after I've seen this wonderful belt of his, I shall be filled with greed and envy!"

"You shall see it now."

The Rajah got up from his chair and beckoned a servant.

"Will you tell my secretary that I wish to see him," he said.

Then, turning to the throng about him, he said seriously:

"It is rather a business seeing the Queen of Sheba's belt. You see, it is one of my family heirlooms. I brought it to London with me because the British Museum people were most keen on preparing a replica, and because though my faithful subjects tell me from time to time that I am the most admirable of men – that I am the very light of the heavens, and the rich soil beneath their feet – I have not the same child-like faith in their integrity as I have in the staid gentlemen at your great national museum."

With a swift glance he looked around. His eye lighted on Marjorie, and he nodded.

"You, Miss Douglas, shall wear this belt. It looks its best upon somebody. You can have no idea of the fascination of the jewel until you see it worn by a beautiful woman."

The words of the Indian sent a quick flush to the girl's face, though the compliment had been kindly meant. Whatever embarrassment she may have felt was relieved at that moment by

the arrival of the dark-skinned secretary of the Rajah.

They exchanged a few words in Hindustani, and then with a deep salaam the secretary left.

Trennion watched the scene curiously. He had come down from London that day at the invitation of Sir John. He had welcomed the change. Too much of Scotland Yard is not good for the health of an Assistant Commissioner, and work had been very heavy during the past few months.

He took an idle interest in people; they were his chief and solitary 'subject'. Human nature he found more engrossing than any other kind of activity.

He fell in at the rear of the little party which trailed behind the Rajah and his henchmen. They made their way through the long corridor of Wensley Hall, and up the broad stairway to the Rajah's suite. There was nothing in the furnishing or decoration of the apartment to suggest the abiding place of one of India's richest men; for Sir John knew the Rajah's tastes sufficiently well to avoid ostentation, and indeed, the stout little man who ruled the Province of Jhiopore neither desired Eastern luxury nor missed it.

There were two rooms communicating. The inner was his Highness's sleeping apartment; the outer his sitting-room, and, for the time being, his state office.

He bade them wait a little while and disappeared into the bedroom. A few minutes later he came out carrying a long, flat case of red morocco. He laid it upon the table in the centre of the room, under the branching lights of a chandelier and opened it.

The party gathered round the table uttered cries of surprise and delight.

There, upon its blue velvet cushion, lay the Queen of Sheba's belt. It was a great breast-plate of dull gold set about with uncut diamonds and emeralds; on either side were two bosses thickly encrusted with pearls and emeralds.

He lifted it gingerly from its case and weighed it reflectively in his hands.

"This weighs nearly seven pounds," he said, "which rather disproves the theory that the new woman is stronger than was her sister of olden days."

He nodded to Marjorie and she stepped forward, a little uncomfortably, but smiling.

"May I be your lady's maid?" he said, and with his deft hands he fastened the great belt about her waist.

It fitted her perfectly. The ancient fasteners, working as truly as

they did in the days of Solomon's queen, snapped into their places; the jewelled shoulder-straps fitted true into the little slots, which the dead and gone workmen of Babylon had fashioned.

She made a gorgeous figure standing there in the full glare of the light.

Robert, watching her, felt a glow of pride in her loveliness, and their eyes met in one understanding and happy glance.

Lady Wensley had intercepted that glance, and something gripped at her heart. With a superhuman effort she retained control of herself.

"Very pretty, Marjorie," she drawled. "You look as if you had just stepped off the stage of a musical, or," with an almost imperceptible shrug, "from the floor of a Covent Garden ball. What is the value of this wonderful thing, Rajah?"

The little man looked up, showing his white teeth in a smile.

"It would be difficult to value it from the point of view of an antiquarian." He glanced at Sir John and the baronet nodded. "But taking a purely material view, if one weighed the gold and valued the gems according to the standard of Hatton Garden, that belt is worth £200,000."

There was a gasp of astonishment.

"Oh, take it off, please!" said Marjorie nervously. "I don't like to wear anything so valuable, even for a few moments. One of the emeralds may drop out."

The Rajah shook his head.

"Enjoy the sensation for a moment," he said. "Remember as you stand there that Sheba's queen wore that belt, probably before the great Solomon himself."

"Please take it off!" she said.

The girl had gone suddenly white. An involuntary shiver ran through her, and she was conscious of a strange premonition of evil – of disquiet and foreboding.

Simultaneously, Trennion, on whom no sign was lost, caught a glimpse of the face of his hostess, and wondered what Marjorie Douglas had done to earn the brief and fleeting malevolence which gleamed exultantly from the older woman's eyes.

With deft fingers the Rajah released the belt, and the girl, still looking a little white, smoothed out the creases in her crumpled dress with a hand that trembled.

"It gave me quite an uncanny feeling," she said, smiling nervously. "Wasn't it absurd of me?"

"Other people have had that feeling," said the Rajah drily.

"People with stronger nerves than you, Miss Douglas."

He replaced the belt in its case and disappeared into the bedroom with it.

When he returned, he asked Sir John what he had thought of the treasure.

"It's a magnificent piece of work," said the antiquarian, shaking his head in admiration. "I didn't have the opportunity I should have liked to examine it."

"You shall have that tomorrow," said the Rajah. "To tell the truth, I am as chary of showing it as most people are of wearing it. It wasn't fair, really, that I should ask Miss Douglas to put it on. It was only because I myself have no faith in these ridiculous superstitions" – he shrugged his shoulders contemptuously – "but I should not have asked other people to share my scepticism."

"Is there a legend?" asked Trennion.

"There is an obscure and rambling legend to the effect that anyone wearing it is liable to bad luck, or something of the sort. It is not a particularly powerful talisman, either for good or evil."

They made their way back to the ballroom.

3

The Eavesdroppers

IT was a small house-party that had gathered at Wensley Hall. This restriction as to the number of guests had been necessary, since Sir John had been in some doubt as to the retinue the Rajah would bring.

The Rajah of Jhiopore, with his big round body and his big round face, was a pleasant surprise to most people with whom he was brought into contact. He was a good fellow by all standards.

Claude Trennion was thinking this as he strolled to the library. The policeman was no dancing man, and his idea of rest took the very commonplace and intelligent shape of a book, a pipe, and an easy chair. And that was all he asked of the world just then.

He found a comfortable chair in one of the window spaces. Sir John was no antiquarian so far as his domestic comfort was concerned, and those nooks, which in ordinary country houses are breeding places of pneumonia and influenza, were at Wensley Hall the cosiest of corners.

The room was empty when he came in. One light was burning and he did not trouble to switch on the remainder. He had no wish

to read: he lit his pipe, and stretched himself on the big settee, looking through the window at the soft vista of parkland mysteriously illuminated by the yellow moon.

He was a tired man. He had come to Wensley Hall because he was tired. His head nodded, the pipe in his mouth fell with a thud on to the carpeted floor, and he dozed . . .

He could hardly have fallen asleep before he was awakened by the sound of voices.

* * *

Trennion opened his eyes. Marjorie Douglas stood in the centre of the room – an agitated Marjorie with her hands clasped. She faced a small bald-headed man with a melancholy moustache.

“I can’t pay you yet, Mr. Callit,” she was saying. “I had no idea you would want paying so soon.”

“Well, miss,” said the man, “I’m sorry to bother you, but I really must get money in. I’ve had some big demands, otherwise I shouldn’t have bothered you. I’ve come down specially from London, tonight, to see you.”

“But I can’t pay you,” said the girl in despair. “I can’t! I should never have had those things if I’d thought you were going to bother so soon. My dividends aren’t due for another two months and I just can’t pay you.”

The little man shook his head helplessly.

As for Trennion lying there, an unwilling eavesdropper, he was in an unenviable position, and would have given no little sum to have been well out of the room beyond earshot.

He knew exactly what the girl would feel if she found him there, or if he were to make his presence known.

“Can’t you get the money anywhere, miss?” asked the man desperately. “You don’t know what a hole I’m in. Eighty pounds won’t be anything to a lady like you.”

“Oh, you ought never to have come!” said the girl. “I wish to Heaven I’d never bought clothes at your wretched place! It’s abominable of you!”

“Can’t you borrow the money?”

“How dare you!” she flamed. “How dare you suggest that I should borrow money! Whom do you imagine I could borrow money from? You’ll have to wait.”

“I can’t wait, Miss,” whined the man, wringing his hands. “I tell you I’m in a pretty bad position. What about Captain Grey?”

She drew herself up and looked down at the man coldly.

"You had better go," she said. "You're behaving disgracefully. You've no right to mention anybody's name to me."

"I must have the money," said the man in a panic. "That's what I came for, and I'm not going away till I get some."

Trennion thought he heard a slight noise near the door. His ears were unusually sensitive, and they caught that which the girl had evidently missed.

He looked up quickly and bit his lip to suppress an exclamation. In the shadow of the portière he saw a woman, and that woman was Lady Wensley.

From where she stood she could have seen him had she turned her head, but her attention was too closely occupied by the scene she was witnessing.

Trennion guessed that she had been there all the time. He had no illusions as to the motive of human beings. His police work had destroyed much of his faith in the common honesty of humanity. She had followed the girl, he guessed, with intent to discover the meaning of what must have seemed to her a suspicious visit. And now she stood there, listening intently.

"I will send you something tomorrow," said Marjorie at last. "I can do no more than that."

The man hesitated.

"Are you sure, miss - ?" he began.

"I tell you I'll send you money tomorrow!" said the girl angrily. "And you must be content with that."

"Well - " he rubbed his hat irresolutely on his sleeve, "that will have to satisfy me, miss, I suppose," he said dubiously. "I'll trust you. If you can let me have it before twelve o'clock tomorrow, it'll make all the difference in the world to me."

She said no more. The interview was finished.

Trennion saw the figure by the portière slip through the door. He saw, too, the puzzled look which came into the girl's face at the sight of the open door - a bewilderment which was succeeded by a look of apprehension. Without a word she threw the door wide open and passed through; and the man followed, closing the door behind him.

Trennion sat up, picked up his pipe from the carpet, and walked into the middle of the room.

An Assistant Commissioner of Police is not usually perturbed by the frailties or the unexpected impecuniosities of his fellows. That Marjorie Douglas should be dunned neither shocked nor

amused him. At first he thought he had come upon a surprising streak of extravagance in the girl, but the words of the agitated tradesman had dismissed that idea from his mind. He saw exactly her position – a position in which any woman might find herself.

He wondered whether he should offer her the money. Eighty pounds was not a great sum, but to make the offer would be to make the admission of knowledge. It was a delicate situation. He was pondering the matter, his chin on his palm, when the door opened hurriedly, and Anna Wensley came in.

She stopped dead when she saw him.

“Mr. Trennion!” she said, and then, with a nervous jerk of her shoulders, came farther into the room. “I wanted a book; these dancing people are boring me. How long have you been here?”

She spoke quickly and jerkily.

“I’ve just come in,” replied Trennion untruthfully.

“Did you meet – anybody?” she asked.

“No! I saw your cousin, Marjorie. Who was the strange old gentleman with her?”

“Oh! He’s a man who has come down from town.” She shrugged her shoulders. “I’m afraid poor Marjorie is rather extravagant. You won’t tell anybody, will you?” she asked pleadingly.

“You may be sure I shall tell nobody,” he said.

He wondered exactly what her object was in telling him this – and how much of the secret she was prepared to divulge.

“You see, Marjorie has been spending a tremendous amount of money on jewellery and things.” Her gestures spoke her disapproval more admirably than words could have conveyed it. “I think the young girls of today are tremendously foolish. It’s so easy to get credit, and then ” – another shrug – “to find a method of raising money on the jewels. I don’t say,” she said quickly, “that that is what Marjorie has done – but so many girls do it. It’s rather shocking, isn’t it?” she cooed.

He nodded.

“It’s very shocking indeed,” he said gravely. “In fact, it’s an offence under the law in certain cases.”

“I know. But you’re not going to arrest dear Marjorie and take her away?” she smiled. “Are you? No! The man you saw was from Stangs, the jeweller. One oughtn’t to talk about it, but I know I can trust you, dear Mr. Trennion.”

“Oh yes,” he said with a smile, “you can trust me.”

What object could she have, he wondered, in lying to him? He

did not doubt that the man was from a firm of dressmakers. Why should she wish to represent her cousin so blackly? Why had she come in so hurriedly and shown such evidence of dismay at finding him there?

These were the problems which helped to keep Trennion awake longer than he desired that night. And they occupied him at spare moments on his journey back to London the next day.

4

Marjorie In Distress

ONCE back at Scotland Yard Claude Trennion's engrossing work was sufficient to take his mind from the little comedy which he had seen enacted at Wensley Hall. He was an enthusiast in the pursuit of criminal research. He found his work already defined for him on his first day back, and spent a fascinating twelve hours taking the measurements and the weights of a number of known criminals, who had been transported in closed vans to his office at Scotland Yard for that purpose.

The work took him a further day. It was two days of minute measurements, two days of patient recording.

On the second day he had finished his work and had gone back to his club for dinner. In the middle of the meal a waiter brought him a telegram, and he opened it.

His eyebrows rose as he read the message it contained:

"Queen of Sheba's Belt has been stolen from Wensley Hall. Can you come along and help us investigate?"

"John Wensley."

He laid the telegram down by his plate and whistled softly to himself.

* * *

Marjorie Douglas stood facing her cousin in the dusk of the drawing-room. The girl's face was tense and white, but about the thin lips of Anna Wensley flickered a faint satirical smile.

"I really cannot understand what you're driving at, Anna," said the girl.

"I didn't suppose you would," said the older woman drily. "Yet I thought you might have saved me the embarrassment of putting what I have to say into plain words."

"They cannot be too plain for me," said the girl coldly. "I'm tired of innuendoes – these hints and suggestions."

Lady Wensley had dropped her eyes, and was viewing with apparent interest the gathers she was making in her scarf.

"I suppose you are," she said, without looking up. "As for me, I'm more than tired of other things."

The girl looked at her with a puzzled expression.

She said gently: "I can understand your being upset by this dreadful robbery, Anna . . . but your hints worry me. Can't you say exactly what you mean? Do you suspect anybody? And do you think – ?"

She stopped dead.

"You don't think that I know who took it?" she asked.

Lady Wensley raised her insolent eyes to her and stared unwinkingly.

"I wonder why you say that," she said softly. "Now, can't you offer me any hint that would help me when it comes to giving dear Mr. Trennion information?"

"Hint?" gasped the girl. "Why, surely –"

"I simply hate to say it, Marjorie . . ." said Anna.

She walked to the window and looked out upon the gathering gloom, her hands behind her; the figure of a woman with an unpleasant task before her. Yet the straight line of the shoulders and the poise of the head told the girl that her cousin would not shrink from the performance of her duty, however painful it might be.

"Of course, dear," she said, in her cooing voice, "everybody knows you are hard up."

The girl flushed.

"I don't know what you mean," she said steadily.

Lady Wensley shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, after all, if you don't know, you are the only person here that doesn't. Isn't it a fact that you are being dunned by a man who came all the way from London?"

"That's true," said the girl hotly, "but it's wicked of you to suggest that the fact I need money can in any way be associated with the loss of the Rajah's jewel. It is infamous of you!"

Lady Wensley turned swiftly.

"Did you pay the man the money?" she asked pointedly.

"I did," said the girl.

"Where did you get the money from?"

With an effort the girl mastered her growing anger.

"The money came to me . . . I found the money . . ."

She stopped. It seemed such an impossible explanation.

"I received the money on Thursday."

"The day after the robbery," said Lady Wensley meaningly.

"How did it come?"

"It came by post, in bank notes."

"But from whom did it come?"

The growing terror in the girl's eyes was pitiable.

"I don't know," she said.

She forgot to be indignant or angry. All she realized was that there was piling up against her a monstrous mountain of suspicion, and that she could give no explanation which would satisfy her inexorable cousin.

"It came by post," she said again, "on Thursday morning. There was just a hundred pounds in bank notes. I don't know who it came from" – she shook her head helplessly – "but I had written to one or two people, and I thought that one of these had sent it."

"To whom did you write?"

"I thought it was from one of these," she went on quickly without answering; "but there was no name on the envelope. I should have written to them to find out, but by the next post came a letter from both of them. One of them sent me the money, which I returned; the other was not able to help me. That's the truth," she said defiantly. "You've pried into my private affairs; you've put the worst constructions upon my actions. You surely don't for one minute imagine that I had anything whatever to do with this robbery?"

Again the shrug.

"I want to settle this matter without any bother," said Lady Wensley. "After all, my dear girl, it isn't so much a question of what I think, as what the world will think . . ."

She hesitated a moment, eyeing the girl closely.

"What will Robert Grey think?" she said slowly.

The girl's face was white now. She stood a moment staring at the other, as though she could not fully grasp her meaning. Then she turned, and without another word left the room.

She went straight to the library, expecting to find Robert there. He looked up as she came in. He was sitting at the writing-table, surrounded by papers. His smile left his lips when he saw the girl's distress.

"Why, what's the matter?" he asked, rising.

In a voice rendered almost incoherent by grief and anger she told him the story, and he listened. And as he listened his eyes

opened wide in astonishment.

"But surely, you're joking?"

"I'm not," she said.

"But Anna would never dare to say that to you! Not seriously?"

For reply, the girl burst into tears.

He held her in his arms and tried to calm her.

It was unthinkable; it was monstrous that such a suggestion as this should be made. He had shared in the household's worry when the discovery of the Rajah's loss was made. It had hurt him to see Sir John Wensley so grieved. The old antiquarian had taken the matter much to heart; and although the Rajah, with oriental philosophy, had made light of the matter, and had sought to ease the shock of the discovery, yet nothing that the Indian could say or do could relieve Sir John of the sense of his own responsibility.

The Rajah had gone. He had taken leave of his host and hostess with the urbanity and geniality which characterized all his movements. One might have thought, from his florid little speech, and from the gay good humour in which he left that, so far from having lost a jewel which was worth a king's ransom, he had acquired one.

Two of the best men from Scotland Yard had come down to investigate the matter, without arriving at any result that was satisfactory either to Sir John or to themselves.

Sir John Wensley had been somewhat disappointed that Trennion could not come himself.

Trennion had a reputation through two continents for the detection of such crimes as these.

Scotland Yard's opinion, as represented by the two detective officers who came, was that the burglary was the work of a gang of international criminals whose activities had, for the past year or so, tried the patience – and called into play all the vigilance – that Scotland Yard possessed.

This theory was not supported by the fact that their enquiries in the neighbourhood failed to elicit any news of strangers, nor did systematic investigation in the villages about Wensley produce any other evidence which might connect outsiders with the crime.

The accusation against Marjorie Douglas was, of course, absurd. Robert himself did not take it seriously. He was disturbed by a belief, which amounted almost to a certainty, that the robber or robbers had operated from within the house; and that whoever had taken this wonderful jewel had not, so far, succeeded in removing it from the precincts of Wensley Hall.

This view he had communicated to Sir John, but a very stringent

search of the servants' quarters had not revealed any clue.

When Marjorie had sufficiently recovered, Robert suggested she should rest in her room and he went in search of Anna Wensley. She was not in the drawing-room, nor was she in her study.

Robert hesitated. Should he send to her room? Sir John was away; he had gone to London to see Trennion.

His hand was on the bell when Lady Wensley came in.

5

Wicked Work

ANNA WENSLEY had utilized the period which had elapsed between the departure of the girl and the coming of Robert, to change. She looked her best in the blacky-blue close-fitting dress which she wore. She had just the touch of colour which she sometimes lacked, and the glitter of diamonds at her fingers offered the only relief to the svelte and sombre figure. Her eyes were bright as with some unwonted excitement.

To his surprise she came forward with a smile.

"I suppose that girl of yours has been telling you that I suspect her?" she asked.

"I think -" he began.

"Don't think," she said lightly. "Just come along and sit over here." She indicated a big settee. "Now, Robert," she said with almost matronly assurance, laying her hand on his arm, "I want you to take a sensible view of things. I know it sounds dreadful, but remember this - that Marjorie has been in great difficulties. She is being dunned, and when a young girl is being dunned, you never know exactly what she is going to do."

"But surely," he said, looking at her in astonishment, "you don't really mean that you think Marjorie is a thief?"

"What am I to think?" asked Lady Wensley in resigned despair. "Somebody has taken the belt - somebody inside the house."

"But it's preposterous, Anna," he said sternly. "You don't really mean it?"

"Mean it? Indeed I mean it," she said earnestly.

He rose quietly to his feet.

"If you mean that," he said, "then you and I are no longer friends."

"But -"

He raised his hand.

"Wait until I've finished. You know as well as I that your cousin would never do such a thing."

"When a girl buys jewellery – " murmured Lady Wensley.

"It was not jewellery," cried Robert indignantly. "She has told me everything. It was a paltry eighty pound with a wretched little tailor who was on the verge of bankruptcy. He came up here in a panic. As a matter of fact, his petition's filed in this morning's papers."

Lady Wensley smiled.

"How clever of Marjorie!" she said admiringly. "Of course, she saw that in the paper and jumped at the idea."

He turned from her abruptly.

"I won't stay in this house another day!" he said, standing at the door. "Nor will Marjorie! I see something behind all this – something wicked and malicious."

Anna Wensley laughed, but it was a little artificial, and more than a little shrill. "What melodrama we talk in these days! If you must go, of course you must. I'll have your bag packed, and as to Marjorie" – she shrugged her shoulders – "I suppose you have the right to say that she shall go, too. I won't stop you. Go to London, and let me know where you are staying. More important," she said carefully, and looked at him with a speculative eye which maddened him, "you had better let me know where Marjorie is staying. There may, of course, be developments."

She lingered on the last word with significance.

"Developments," she repeated. "I think I can do no less than go to Scotland Yard and lay my view before dear Claude Trennon. It's a shocking thing of course, but what am I to do? I must protect our guests."

His calm grey eyes were fixed upon her face.

"I don't know what you can do," he said quietly. "I only know this – that I'm either to believe that Marjorie is a thief who has committed a most terrible crime, or I'm to believe that you are a jealous, disappointed and malignant woman!"

Every word was a clean cut; every word flicked the woman like the cruel end of a lash.

Yet she showed no sign, save the tightening of her lips, and an almost imperceptible stiffening, that she felt his anger. She did not attempt to reply, and there she was wise. She controlled all outward evidence of distress; to speak would have been to betray her weakness.

"I choose to believe," Robert went on, "in the goodness and in the honesty of Marjorie. If I do you an injustice I'm not doing you so cruel a one as you've done my future wife."

He paused before the last three words, and, seeing her wince, was momentarily sorry.

"You may offer Sir John any explanation you wish. You may tell him that I'm Marjorie's accomplice if you like," he said. "I'm leaving by the six o'clock train and Marjorie goes with me to London."

* * *

After Robert Grey had left her, Lady Wensley had stood motionless for a few minutes, and then she had walked slowly out and mounted the stairs to her bedroom.

She stood before her glass, as though communing with herself. Then she turned swiftly and rang the bell.

A French maid came in a few minutes.

"Celeste," she said, "tell me, where is Miss Douglas?"

"She is going, milady," said the girl.

They were speaking in French, for Celeste knew very little English.

"Where is her luggage?"

"In the hall, milady."

"All of it?"

"*Oui*, milady. Thomas brought down the last bag before your ladyship rang."

Anna considered a moment.

"Go quickly, and if there is nobody there, bring up Miss Douglas's bag - the green one."

The girl went out of the room, and Anna paced the floor feverishly. It was a desperate thing to do. She was in a panic before the girl had half descended the stairs. She would have run down and called her back - in fact, she went to the door with that object, but heard footsteps and stopped. It might be only a servant, but then, it might be Robert; he was on the same floor. What a fool she was; what a careless, blundering fool, first to precipitate this crisis and then to take advantage of it with such unpardonable *gaucherie*! But the green bag would be an easy matter for her - if Celeste could get it.

Then a thought struck her; she walked swiftly to her dressing-table and pulled open a drawer.

She heard a tap at the door and her heart froze within her.

"Come in," she said faintly.

It was Celeste, and she was carrying a small green case.

"Did anybody see you? Answer me quickly - did anybody see you?"

"No, milady," said the girl.

Anna could trust Celeste. The girl was devoted to her - owed, in fact, her life to this strange woman who could be so cold and so fiery, so heartless and so tender even to her dependants. Anna had nursed this French maid of hers through a bad attack of diphtheria, when a trained nurse could have been found for her and she could still have claimed something of credit for the girl's recovery. But with that perverseness which was at once her charm and her undoing, she had chosen rather to attend the girl herself. Now she was to put her adoring servant's loyalty to the test.

"You will not say a word of this to anybody," she said, fumbling with the clasps of the bag. "Go out of the room and see if there is anybody in the corridor."

The girl went out, and came back to find her mistress, white of face, tugging unavailingly. The bag was locked. She was mad to expect anything else.

"Take it back to the hall," she said, "quickly."

She had a key which would open it, for the green bag had been her own till she had given it to her cousin. But her keys were not there. They were in her study downstairs. She had realized this the moment she had opened the drawer of her dressing-table.

She followed the girl out as she carried the bag along the corridor, and stood at the head of the stairs until she had disappeared from view. There Anna waited until she returned.

"Did anyone see you?"

"No, milady," said the French girl, wonderingly.

"*Bien!*" said my lady with a heartfelt sigh of relief.

There must be some other way. She must find it. The fortune of chance might serve her in good stead.

* * *

She walked steadily down to the hall and saw Marjorie and Robert come from the study. A servant stood at the door; there was nothing to be said but conventionalities.

"I am sorry you have to go," she said politely.

Robert took her extended hand. "Goodbye," he said stiffly.

Marjorie said nothing. She was too shocked by the amazing

charge which had been brought against her to find either the will or the inclination to play a part.

To cover the awkwardness of the situation she turned to the waiting chauffeur.

"I want you to register that bag." She pointed to the green case. "Book it to the cloakroom at King's Cross, until called for."

"Yes, madam," said the man.

To the cloakroom at King's Cross, repeated Anna mentally. She saw a way.

She watched the car which carried the two to the station until it was lost to sight in a turn of the long avenue, then she slowly retraced her steps to the house and to her room.

To the cloakroom at King's Cross!

Then Marjorie was not going home. She would go to Plymouth, to her aunt's, and would pick the bag up on her return.

Marjorie lived with her widowed mother in Chelsea, but Anna knew that her mother was at that moment wintering in Italy, and was not due back for a week.

Yes. It would be Marjorie's Plymouth relative who would entertain the girl for the next week.

A week. Sufficiently long! Here was her opportunity.

She went into her study to work out a plan. Her luck was in; how much so she realized when the evening brought a wire from Sir John to say that he was accompanying the Rajah to Paris, and would not be back for eight days.

6

Seeds Of Suspicion

CLAUDE TRENNION came swinging through the archway of Scotland Yard. He was tall enough to indulge himself in the luxury of a stoop. One hand was everlastingly thrust into his pocket; the other grasped a furled umbrella.

He returned the salute of the policeman on duty at the door, went up the broad stairway two steps at a time, and came to his big office as the uniformed clerk was laying his papers on his desk.

Trennion looked round as he entered the office. A weighing machine stood under the window. This he had been using for a report on the Bertillon system.

"Get that away today, Cole," he said, nodding toward the machine. "Anybody waiting to see me?"

"A lady, sir."

"Oh yes, Lady Wensley." He nodded, this time to himself and, unlocking the drawer of his desk, took out a large envelope. "Ask her to come in," he said.

Trennion was silently reviewing the events of the previous week when the door opened and Anna Wensley came in.

"I am so sorry to bother you, dear Mr. Trennion," she said as they shook hands. "I've come about the belt, of course. I do so want to clear this matter up without any delay, and it was so kind of you to give me this appointment."

He smiled.

"Won't you sit down and tell me exactly what your views are?"

Trennion placed a chair for his visitor.

Lady Wensley deposited her handbag on the Assistant Commissioner's table, and settled herself comfortably in the chair Trennion offered. She was a trifle irritated by his office manner – and how absurd of him to pretend that he did not know her views after her letters and telegrams.

"I'm afraid I can tell you very little," she said easily. "The belt has disappeared and we must get it back. It's considered by the Rajah, literally, as priceless. He's beside himself with anxiety, and till it's found neither Sir John nor I can know any peace."

"The belt is particularly heavy, I remember, is it not?" Trennion put the question almost indifferently.

"It weighs six pounds four ounces," Anna replied promptly. "That's one of the facts I thought you knew. By the way, you have a list of my guests, have you not, Mr. Trennion?" she added carelessly.

"Yes. I have the list you sent me – here it is."

Trennion took the slip of paper from his desk.

"It was hardly necessary to be so explicit," he smiled, "remembering that I shared your hospitality for two whole days. I see you've included Marjorie Douglas" – he looked up sharply – "and you say," he read from the letter, "she is very poor, very pretty, very clever and ambitious, and she was seen coming out of the Rajah's room on the day the belt was stolen. I always understood that Marjorie is a cousin and a great friend of yours?"

Anna's short upper lip curved slightly, but she avoided the inquiring gaze of the other.

"Not exactly," she said carelessly. "She's certainly a cousin; but as for the other – she's a friend of a friend – Robert Grey, whom you know." Trennion nodded. "She's pretty, certainly . . . I should

not call her beautiful . . . a very fascinating girl and he's a susceptible man."

"They're engaged?" Trennion put the question as one who was merely making conversation.

Lady Wensley stiffened a little and answered, as it seemed, reluctantly.

"Yes; there is some entanglement. She's - well, of course, dear Mr. Trennion, I don't care to say anything unkind, but - " she lifted one shoulder deprecatingly, "I think you remember a certain episode in the library at Wensley - the dunning jeweller?"

Trennion nodded. He maintained his attitude of polite attention.

"You've known Robert for some time, have you not?"

"Oh, for quite a long time," said Anna easily, though under the inconsequent examination of the man she was experiencing a tinge of exasperation. "I shouldn't have asked Marjorie if he hadn't insisted."

"Insisted?" echoed the attentive Commissioner. "He must be rather a close friend - a very close friend - to insist upon your inviting a girl you do not care for."

"Perhaps 'insisted' was not quite the right word - I express myself badly, I'm afraid."

Lady Wensley's tone was languidly impatient.

"He has some right perhaps . . ." Trennion paused.

Anna rose from her chair. Her movement was full of dignity and grace. Only the steely glitter in the narrowed beautiful eyes betrayed her anger.

"What do you mean?" she demanded coldly.

"Don't be offended, Lady Wensley, please. Friendship is a big matter. Surely if it has obligations, it has rights."

Anna sat down. She had lost something of her indolent serenity. The interview was going the wrong way. She felt herself losing grasp of the situation.

There was a knock on the door and, in response to Trennion's summons, a policeman appeared with a card. The Assistant Commissioner glanced at it thoughtfully and put it on his desk.

"In a moment, Cole," he said. "I'll ring; ask them to wait."

"We policemen, Lady Wensley," he continued when the man had left, "are inclined to be brusque, you understand? Well, this affair of the belt is a very serious matter. The Government doesn't want the matter to go into court, but we must get the belt back."

"Of course, we must get the belt," said Anna, in her most confidential manner, "but - " there was a slight change of tone, a

drop in its temperature, "do you mean that there will be no prosecution?"

"Not if we can get the belt without," said the other decidedly. The woman bit her lips and moved a trifle restlessly.

"You'll hush it up - I didn't think they did that sort of thing at Scotland Yard!"

Trennion made a little grimace.

"Oh, we do many things at Scotland Yard besides finding lost umbrellas," he said a trifle flippantly.

She was obviously disturbed.

"I must insist - dear Mr. Trennion, how can I allow this matter to be hushed up? Think of my position. It's extremely awkward. I am afraid - indeed, I am convinced - it is impossible in this case to let the guilty go free. I am very sorry for her, of course" - she gave a shrug - "besides, she was my guest. It's all very embarrassing. I wish Robert would be more careful in his choice of friends. You see, I know the branch of the family rather well, and they are - well - just a little - oh, how I hate - !" She checked herself again, and resumed in calmer tones. "How I hate being concerned in an affair of this kind!"

Trennion had been regarding his visitor attentively. He remembered that night in the library; it was a vivid memory. And her present distress was not lost upon him. He adopted a properly sympathetic tone as he replied:

"I'm awfully sorry for you, but I must tell you that unless we discover the belt actually in Miss Douglas's possession we shall not prosecute."

The lady's lips tightened.

"How do you mean 'in her possession'?"

"Well, unless, for example, she has it on her person, or we find it in here." He tapped a green leather bag which lay on his desk.

"But why should it be in there?"

The question was put in all artlessness and Trennion stifled a smile.

"Because this is her bag," he said patiently, "and because I acted on your information and secured it from the cloakroom at King's Cross. Curiously enough, somebody else had been trying to get it."

"Marjorie herself, no doubt?"

"I shouldn't think so. If she had tried she would have got it. Besides, she left for Devonshire immediately after the robbery. She wrote to you from London, you remember, telling you that

she had gone on in a hurry, leaving her bag at the cloakroom. At least," he said carefully, "that is what you told me. Oh no, the lady who was trying to secure this bag was a veiled, mysterious person – so mysterious that the attendants refused to hand it to her without the ticket. I learnt as much only this morning. I got the bag today in order that it might be opened in the presence of interested persons."

7

Questions And Answers

TRENNION pressed the bell on his desk.

"I think we'd better try and clear this up. You're pretty confident that the belt's in this bag?"

A shadow crossed Anna Wensley's face, but it passed in a moment. She could hear the *thump-thump* of her own heart, could feel the process of age that drew the skin of her face tighter, and deepened the shadows beneath her eyes. Yet she was apparently her easy, nonchalant self again as she drawled:

"Dear Mr. Trennion, how can I be confident? I only tell you of my suspicions – all that I wish to do is to assist justice."

"I think you may be able to do much in that direction," Trennion assured her, as he turned to the man who answered his ring. "Ask that lady and gentleman who are waiting to see me to come in, please."

"Very good, sir."

Anna started up from her seat suddenly and crossed the room to where Trennion sat. She laid her hand on his arm. She had not expected this.

"Mr. Trennion," she said, "I don't want –"

But whatever she had in her mind to say was not spoken, for at that moment two people were shown into the room.

The first was Marjorie. She was very pale, and her deep blue eyes were wide with distress. Her pretty mouth had a downward droop, like that of a tired child, and her lips were not quite steady, though she pressed them bravely together. Trennion, with his quick smile, welcomed her and pushed forward a chair. She certainly did not look a thief, nor did she bear the stamp of infamy, which as Anna had hinted was part of her family heritage.

Robert Grey, more angry than distressed, followed her. He paused abruptly as he caught sight of Lady Wensley.

"Anna!" he said. "You here!" His voice was charged with contempt.

The fleeting expression of sullen rage which had marred her beautiful face a moment earlier as the two had entered the room vanished like birds before a storm. She smiled sweetly at him and utterly ignored the girl.

"Yes, of course I'm here - where did you expect me to be?"

He looked at her impatiently.

"Why have you come?" he said sternly. "Surely not to repeat the lies you pretended to believe at Wensley?"

Marjorie laid a pleading hand upon her lover's arm.

"Bob, please! Please say no more."

The girl's words and actions seemed to fan to flame some smouldering passion in the beautiful woman as she turned her eyes angrily on the girl.

"Please, please!" she mocked. "Oh, don't beg his forbearance, I pray you. Let him say what he wishes. There was a time, Robert, when - but do I need to remind you of that time? I see you remember!"

The man's eyes involuntarily sought those of the young girl, and as he answered the elder woman he pleaded to his fiancée.

"I remember a good deal I wish I could forget," he said very gravely.

But Lady Wensley had no intention of accepting the rebuff.

"How like a man!" she said almost gaily. "Isn't it, Mr. Trennion? Men wish to forget their own follies, and women find their chief joy in remembering them!"

Marjorie's eyes were fixed on her cousin's face.

"Anna," she said, "I've come here to answer the charge you've brought against me - "

Anna stared at her.

"I - my dear girl, I bring no charge."

The girl's face went a trifle paler under the insult of the older woman's manner.

"Why! that's my bag," she exclaimed suddenly.

Trennion nodded, and his voice was gentle and reassuring as he replied:

"Yes, it is your bag. I've taken the liberty of exercising certain embarrassing powers which I possess to claim it."

Robert, who had listened impatiently to the exchange between the two women, could no longer control himself.

"But this is monstrous - it's an outrage!" he broke out. Then

he looked across at Lady Wensley, who stood all the time with a half-smile upon her face. "This is a plot," he accused her.

"If it is a plot," said Trennion soothingly, "I shall find out all about it, you know. I've got quite a reputation for finding things out. The Commissioner says I'm more like a magazine detective than a policeman! Now let's get to facts. The belt was stolen – the Queen of Sheba's belt. I'm sure, Lady Wensley" – Trennion favoured her with his most friendly smile – "that dear lady would turn in her grave if she knew that her golden corsets were the subject of an inquiry at Scotland Yard. It was stolen, there's no doubt about that. And on the morning it was stolen" – he turned again to Marjorie – "a maid saw you, Miss Douglas, leaving the Rajah's rooms."

"I can explain," said Marjorie quietly.

"One moment." Trennion's voice was as gentle as ever. "The explanation given is that you had the room immediately above the Rajah's and which corresponds to it in every way; that you mistook the floor, entered the Rajah's sitting-room by mistake, and came out immediately."

"That's the truth – a simple explanation," Marjorie answered him.

"Oh, very!" The words were from Lady Wensley, and her tone implied all that her words left unspoken.

"Anna, your tone is insulting," said Marjorie, rising indignantly, with tears of anger in her eyes.

Again Trennion interposed, but Robert interrupted roughly.

"The whole thing is absurd. Suppose Marjorie had stolen it – where on earth could she dispose of it? How could she smuggle –?"

Trennion's smiling protest interrupted his anger.

"I think it best, don't you, if we have no interruptions?" he said smoothly. "Now, Miss Douglas, did you ever see this belt except on the occasion when I was present?"

"Never," said the girl decidedly.

"Or handle it – except on that occasion?"

"Never – even then I didn't touch it."

"You did not by any chance carry it away inadvertently, caught it in your wrap or something?"

"Oh no, that would be quite impossible."

"Why?"

Trennion spoke almost sharply.

"Because I wasn't wearing a wrap," the girl returned.

"How absurd, Mr. Trennion," Lady Wensley interrupted

impatently. "How could she carry it away in her wrap – why, it weighs over six pounds!"

"Miss Douglas apparently does not retain a sufficiently vivid impression of the fact to realize this," said Trennion very quietly; then to the girl, "Who packed your bag?"

"I packed this bag."

"What's in it?"

"Nothing of importance, that's why I left it at the cloakroom."

"It's pretty heavy." Trennion lifted the bag gingerly.

"There are some books in it."

The girl showed signs of weariness at the apparently useless questions and Robert came to her aid.

"Marjorie has been perfectly open and straightforward, Trennion," he said hotly. "It's disgraceful that such a charge should be levelled at an innocent girl."

Lady Wensley looked at him scornfully.

"If you're going to be heroic, I shall be bored," she said. "May I look at your pictures, Mr. Trennion – do you mind?"

"Please do, Lady Wensley," said Trennion politely. "But you'll find very little to amuse you, I'm afraid."

"I assure you it takes very little to amuse me – isn't that so, Robert?" She was fast losing all sense of caution. Only she knew that she had thrown something away with both hands; had been prodigal of love – of happiness, of life.

Robert Grey looked at her smiling face almost sorrowfully, and made no reply. The smile died from her lips and she turned her back on him abruptly.

"You have no objection to my examining this bag?"

Trennion put the question almost deferentially.

"None whatever," said Marjorie. "But I'm afraid I've no keys with me. I left them behind at Plymouth."

"Oh!" Trennion's tone was non-committal.

"Of course she wouldn't have the keys, Mr. Trennion." Anna Wensley turned from her inspection of the pictures to make the remark. "And of course they would be at Plymouth – two hundred miles away!"

Robert faced round towards her.

"Your malignity is pitiable," he said.

"You grow more and more like the hero of melodrama every minute," she retorted calmly, and then, as though dismissing him from her thoughts, she pointed to the weighing machine. "Why do you have that weighing machine here, Mr. Trennion?"

He started.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Lady Wensley. I've been conducting some experiments."

"Really, how interesting. I wish you would weigh me."

Her enthusiasm was almost childish, and as Trennion hesitated, she stepped on to the weighing plate and repeated her request. It was the desperate expedient of one who desired time. The very freakishness of it took the Commissioner off his guard, and he crossed the room obediently.

"This is not business, you know," he said reproachfully, as he carefully adjusted the weights.

Robert took advantage of the interruption to lay his arm gently upon his fiancée's shoulders. He spoke reassuringly, caressingly, but there was infinite pain in the man's clear grey eyes.

"Marjorie, don't worry, you've nothing to fear."

She slipped her hand into one of his and moved a little nearer to him.

"You don't doubt me?"

"If I doubted you, life wouldn't be worth living."

There was no doubting his earnestness and the girl smiled up at him gratefully. The smile faded as the thought of Anna Wensley intruded itself.

"But I'm so afraid of her, Robert. There's something sinister in her assurance. She behaves as though she had me in a trap. There's a triumph in her voice, in her look. Oh, Bob, I'm afraid!"

"Nine stone twelve-and-a-half pounds," the Assistant Commissioner's voice broke in on them.

"Is that good or bad?"

"It can be nothing but good in your case, Lady Wensley," said the courteous Trennion.

"I don't know what that means, but I'm sure it is meant to be nice."

She played with the weights of the machine as Robert claimed the other's attention.

"Trennion, Miss Douglas is quite willing that you should cut open the bag."

"That's good of you, but it's not at all necessary," replied Trennion with a smile, taking off the telephone receiver. "We are always prepared for - hullo - hullo - give me 16-X. Yes, is that 16-X? A.C. speaking. Sergeant, send me up some keys, a lady's overnight case. Very ordinary type. Thank you. I shan't keep you a minute."

He hung up the receiver and turned to find Lady Wensley at his elbow.

"Mr. Trennion" – she spoke very softly – "there is something I feel I ought to tell you."

"Yes," said Trennion in a matter-of-fact tone.

She looked significantly at the others.

Marjorie rose immediately and turned to the door, and Robert Grey went to follow her.

Lady Wensley moved towards him.

"You don't mind, Robert, do you?" she said plaintively. "I shan't tell him a word about – us."

Robert apparently did not hear her. He held the door open for the girl and they passed out of the room.

Trennion was consumed by a strangely sudden interest in the papers on his desk. It was well that he did so, for Lady Wensley's face at that instant was not good to see.

The next moment a stifled cry caused him to look up.

8

Trennion's Justice

LADY WENSLEY had both hands at her throat. She swayed a little. Trennion was beside her in an instant.

"Are you ill?" He reached for the bell.

"No – no, don't ring! I'll be better in a moment – a little water, just a little water!"

"Let me ring, Lady Wensley."

"Please don't, it will pass. I'm ashamed of such weakness."

"Can I leave you – I'll go myself for the water – are you sure you'll be all right?"

"Yes, yes."

"I won't be a moment." Trennion went hurriedly from the room. He was really concerned. A woman, unless she was absolutely normal, invariably troubled him.

The closing of the door had an extraordinary effect upon Anna Wensley. She stood suddenly erect.

"Queen of Sheba's belt," she murmured.

She walked swiftly to the door to be certain it was shut, and then came as swiftly to the table. She spoke breathlessly now, as though the low-spoken words urged her on to complete the work she had to do.

"Did she hate a woman and pray for her death? I wonder? A woman who had stolen her love from her? Answer that, my Queen of Sheba's belt!"

Her fingers fluttered rapidly down the buttons of her loose jacket. As it fell back, something glittering showed against the dark of her blouse - something that shone and sparkled as it clasped her waist with its setting of gold. Round her neck a key hung on a long chain and with this she hastily unlocked the bag on the table.

In an instant the glittering thing from her waist was in the bag, and she snapped the fastening down. Trennion, entering the next moment, found her still in the drooping attitude in which he had left her and he hurried to her side with the water.

"Are you better? Do drink this."

She took the glass from his hand and murmured some words of thanks.

"I'm so sorry, but you know I'm not very strong. Thank you so much, I have been an awful nuisance to you."

"Not at all. Do you feel well enough to tell me - ?"

She put up her hand to stop him.

"I think I won't if you don't mind. After all, it is hardly fair. I've only my suspicions, you know. The girl can't help being poor, can she - ?"

He looked at her sharply.

"Well, as you please," he said. Then a light knock sounded on the door. "Come in! Ah, Cole, with the keys. Please ask Captain Grey and Miss Douglas if they would kindly come in again."

Trennion stood jangling the keys together till the man had gone, then looking at the bag, he asked Lady Wensley:

"You think she stole it?"

"Well, what am I to think? I hate to be uncharitable, but these sort of things happen, as you must know, dear Mr. Trennion."

She paused as Marjorie, followed by Robert, entered the room again, then went on in her drawling tone:

"I hope you won't keep me very much longer. I've three calls to make and I must leave by the 12.45."

Trennion answered her. "I don't think you need wait at all, Lady Wensley," he said.

She frowned. She was being taken too literally. Nor did she like the way Trennion spoke.

"I can spare another ten minutes or so. I'll wait till then anyhow," she said.

He selected one from the bunch of keys the man had brought him.

"I think this is a likely one, Miss Douglas. Will you open it, or shall I?"

"You open it, please."

Trennion tried the key he held in his hand.

"This fits. Hullo!" He looked up with a frown.

"Doesn't it open?" asked Marjorie.

"I can't tell yet." Trennion put his hand to the bell. "Yes, it is open. One moment before we look into it. I want to ask my man a question." Then to the man, who had just come in, "You brought this bag from King's Cross yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you had charge of it ever since?"

"Yes, sir," repeated the man.

"Did you notice if it was locked when you received it from the cloakroom?"

"It was, sir."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly certain, sir. I brought it straight to the Divisional Superintendent and he tried it."

"Thank you, Cole; that's all."

"I only wanted to find out," said Trennion to the astonished three, "to - well, just to make sure."

He looked at the bag again but made no move to open it.

"Well!" the impatient exclamation came from Anna Wensley.

Trennion looked at her as if he was thinking of something else.

"Well! I hope it is well," he said at last, and he opened the bag.

Just inside was a filmy lace stole and in silence he lifted it. The Queen of Sheba's belt lay shimmering between the folds of lace.

* * *

"My God!" Robert Grey turned, horrified, to the woman he loved.

"Bob, I know nothing - nothing about it!"

As for Trennion, this scene might have been enacted a thousand miles away for all the notice he took.

"I don't think I want this bag any more," he said calmly.

Anna looked towards him eagerly. "What are you going to do - your duty, I hope?"

"You never can tell," said Trennion vaguely.

"You will arrest her – you must, you will?"

Trennion did not answer her directly; instead:

"Ten stone -twelve-and-a-half pounds," he said lightly. "That's a respectable weight for so dainty a person, Lady Wensley."

"It wasn't ten stone twelve, Mr. Trennion," said Anna, adopting his tone. "It was nine twelve, you know."

"Ten twelve, I think," said Claude.

"Don't be so stupid, Mr. Trennion, I can prove it – come here."

She stepped on the weighing machine and Trennion slid the weight upon the steel arm.

He put his hand on the bell.

Robert Grey was as white as the girl by his side.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

For answer Trennion took the girl's hand in his and said, "I'm so sorry to have given you so much bother. Go and finish your holiday in Devonshire. It's a delightful place!"

"Why – aren't you – aren't you arresting me?" said the startled girl.

Trennion smiled.

"No; why? Do you want to be arrested?"

"But the belt – I must be cleared of that dreadful charge."

"Oh, you're cleared all right."

"Cleared!"

"Yes, you don't suppose I should send you off if I thought you were guilty?"

Marjorie reeled and would have fallen but for Trennion's arm. She pulled herself together and said, "I'm all right – only it was a little sudden. How can I thank you, Mr. Trennion?"

"Please don't – go off and thoroughly enjoy Devonshire."

But Lady Wensley had found her voice.

"Mr. Trennion – what does this mean? I will not be a party to this perversion of justice!"

The Assistant Commissioner smiled crookedly.

"Don't bother, Lady Wensley, you're not. Marjorie, I'm sure your cab is waiting. Don't let us keep you."

He almost hustled them from the room and turned to meet the fierce stare of the woman.

"You shall hear of this, Mr. Trennion." She was speaking quickly, painfully. She saw the undoing of a plan which, hateful as it was, was dear to her.

She walked swiftly to the door and would have passed through, but he stood before her.

"Don't go for a minute, please, Lady Wensley." His voice was smooth and persuasive.

"You won't stop me!" she raged. "I'll go straight to the nearest newspaper office and tell the story."

"Ah, then you'd lose your train," said the imperturbable Commissioner. "Be advised by me, go straight to Wensley and forget this miserable affair."

"How dare you offer me advice!" She was almost incoherent in her anger. "Of course, I see your object. You've good reason for wishing the matter forgotten. But if there's a law in England, she shall suffer. You shan't hush up this affair!"

"As a matter of fact, I'm not really keen on hushing up ordinary crime, but this is no ordinary crime."

He picked up the belt from the table and weighed it thoughtfully in one hand.

"Here is the belt," he pursued. "A nice heavy belt – you must have found it very heavy."

"I – I? Why, what do you mean?"

"You wore it this morning, you know, when you came here with it round your waist. You knew that Marjorie's bag was here, because you wired me to secure it, and because all other means having failed you, you hoped for an opportunity to put the belt in it."

"How dare you!"

But the Assistant Commissioner went on as though she had not spoken.

"The opportunity came when I went to get you a glass of water. You made one mistake. You didn't lock the bag after you!"

"Oh, this is infamous!" gasped the enraged woman. "Prove it; prove it! You cannot!"

"I can prove everything; but there are some things we don't want to prove."

"You shall pay for this insult."

"Lady Wensley, listen to me." His voice was firm; he had dropped his light tone. "For your innocent amusement, and at your request, I weighed you when you came in – you weighed nine stone twelve-and-a-half. For my own information I induced you to be weighed again – after the belt was found."

A look of terror came into the beautiful, insolent eyes, and he continued:

"You weighed nine stone six. You had lost six and a half pounds in less than a quarter of an hour! Lady Wensley, this belt

weighs six and a half pounds.”

“What a fool – oh, what a fool!” The words were whispered rather than spoken, and the fear in her eyes deepened.

“It’s very simple, isn’t it?” said Claude Trennion suavely. “But I repeat, there are some things one does not want to prove. You wish to catch the 12.45, I think, Lady Wensley. Well, you’ll find your way out – you needn’t wait for Cole. The stairs are at the end of the corridor. Goodbye, so glad we’ve been able to arrange things. Hope you’ll have a pleasant journey – charming day, isn’t it?”

He watched the unsteady figure till it had turned into the side corridor which led to the stairs. Then he came back to his desk and stood looking down at the belt.

“Rum things, women,” he said. “Queen of Sheba – Anna Wensley – all rum!”

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NINE-TWENTY on a warm summer evening, with the grey bulk of St. Bardolph's Hospital lying somnolent under a serene blue sky . . .

The silence was broken by the sudden patter of hurried footsteps, as round the corner of the alley from the Nurses' Home, a blonde girl in a light frock turned right into the brighter public thoroughfare. She swerved quickly to avoid a collision with a fair young man, who murmured an automatic apology. Putting out a hand to steady her, he gave a delighted grin of recognition.

"Pam! I've been wanting a word with you . . ." His grasp on her arm tightened.

Twisting his fingers loose, Nurse Pam Wakefield gave a smile that was faintly mocking.

"No doubt, Phillikins. But the word you're getting is still 'no'. Now let me pass. I've got a date –"

Alan Phillips, third-year medical student at present on Mr. Locke's surgical 'firm', frowned resentfully.

"Date! Who is it this time?"

"A big, grown-up man, my lad –"

"And in his duty time, eh?"

The humour in his tone just failed to conceal its thread of

malice. "A policeman's lot *can* be a happy one . . ."

"So you're a little spy!" she commented. "I doubt whether you'll grow up even when you've qualified!"

His instant flush brought a smile to her face.

"Pam - don't be like that!" he pleaded, with an abrupt change of manner. "You don't know -"

"And you don't know when a thing's over! It was never really on. I've got the real thing now, Phillikins, so do be sensible."

By-passing him, she hurried on.

Pacing slowly along the dusky tradesman's alley parallel to that of the Nurses' Home was a tall man in police uniform. At the sound of her approaching footsteps he turned, then came to meet her. As she ran up to him, the constable caught at her shoulders, then slipped an arm about her waist.

"Thought you were never coming!" he grumbled.

"Worked late. Dressings to finish before the hand-over," she explained. She wriggled within the encircling blue sleeve.

"And stopped to talk to that student fellow!" he added sourly.

"You saw! But what's the matter, Vic - not jealous of Alan Phillips?" With affected levity she looked up into the face shadowed by the helmet.

"Pam, you know what I think of you. And you know I'm not like those other clowns you've played around with. I'm a one-girl man, and you've got to be a one-man girl, or -"

"Or?" she challenged.

His expression darkened. "D'you wonder at me being jealous? You working all day in a ward full of male patients and male nurses and orderlies and doctors and students and . . . But you've had your fun, my girl, and now you've got to be serious. Understand?"

"Vicky - you're delicious when you're angry!" she confided, with a pretence of naive delight which had no effect on his sardonic scowl. "Come on - smile! Those student boys mean nothing to me - their ears are still wet!" Her fingers slid along his biceps and she gasped as he responded with a crushing hug. His mouth met hers.

When he loosened his grip, her soft giggle brought a slow grin to lighten his sombre passion.

"You'll be seeing me again in the morning?" he insisted. "I'm on duty till five, so if -"

"You've a nerve to grouse!" she commented, brushing a lock of blonde hair back from her flushed face. "The things I do for you,

constable!" Relaxing in the crook of his arm, she gazed up at him with a proprietary inspection.

"All right, I'll be good," he grinned. "Can't stay long - I've my patrol to do." Again his arms tightened about her. "But there's time for -"

"Hey, Vic, for Pete's sake! D'you want me to end up in Casualty . . .?"

* * *

St. Bardolph's Hospital, at six-fifty next morning. The 'C' Ward kitchen, situated between sister's room and the linen room . . .

A walking patient, the burly Farmer Reed, in a long woollen dressing-gown, was working at the stove, stirring porridge for first breakfast. In came 'Paddy' Coyne, also wearing pyjamas and dressing-gown; a haggard-faced patient carrying a small slip of paper and a pencil.

"These are the people who want eggs, Farmer," he said, showing the list. "No grub for me today, yet here's me looking after that lot of greedy beggars!"

"Yeh - your operation this mornin', Paddy," Reed said sympathetically. "Still, you've seen other blokes come back all right, so don't worry about it."

"I'm not worrying," Paddy said seriously. "But I'll be glad when it's over." He was counting out eggs from a wire basket. "I'll give you your purse after breakfast, Farmer. I'll just have time to finish the thonging before I have to get back in bed for my pre-med."

Farmer grinned. "Andy bloke with the old occupational therapy, eh?"

"It's helped to pass the time -"

The door swung open and in came night nurse Shaw. Brightly she said: "Everything all right, boys? Good job I can rely on you two to help me out!"

Farmer Reed grunted. "'Ave to rely on me an' Mister 'Odes tomorrow. 'E'll be up tomorrow mornin', an' I'll nab 'im to take over from Paddy -"

"As long as he realises it's entirely voluntary!" Nurse Shaw walked out briskly, smiling.

There was the usual morning rush of dressings, temperature and pulse checks, injections, washing-water for the bed patients, and second breakfast at eight o'clock for gastric ulcer patients on Witt's diet.

At eight-thirty Nurse Shaw, senior of the three night nurses, was sitting at sister's desk in the ward, going through the routine hand-over talk with Staff Nurse Latimer of the newly-arrived day staff.

Suddenly, they were interrupted by student nurse Mackenzie, of the day staff.

Mackenzie said urgently: "Will you come out to the linen room?"

"Why - what's - ?" Something in the tension of Mackenzie's attitude prevented Shaw from saying more. She and Latimer followed the Scots girl to the little end room on the ward entrance corridor.

Mackenzie pushed the door open. There was an instant of stunned silence. Then from Shaw and Latimer burst choked exclamations of shock and horror.

"I - I came for bed linen . . ." Mackenzie murmured mechanically. Her voice tailed off unheard. Her two colleagues were staring past her.

Lying face downward on the floor of the room was the still figure of a young woman in S.R.N.'s uniform. From high between her shoulder-blades protruded the white bone handle of a knife.

Stepping into the little room, Staff Nurse Latimer knelt beside the prone girl.

It was Nurse Pamela Wakefield.

After the routine confirmation of feeling the outflung wrist, Latimer looked up.

"Yes," she said bleakly. "She's dead!"

2

Who Knows What?

SISTER'S room, situated between the ward and the kitchen . . . Here Detective Superintendent 'Birdy' Avery, from New Scotland Yard's Central Office, listened in growing gloom as one by one they came and gave their testimonies. Most of them were young women, trim and immaculate in white caps and in white aprons worn over uniform frocks; in two instances the pale blue frocks of State Registered Nurses, in the others the light grey frocks of student nurses. They were supervised by Sister Foster, in royal blue.

Sister Foster stood by while Nurse Shaw, young, slight and dark, faced the tall man with greying hair and a fresh complexion.

Shaw said: “. . . And that’s all I know. Just that Mackenzie found her and fetched Staff Nurse Latimer and me!”

Avery said slowly: “Medical evidence is that Nurse Wakefield died about ten minutes before the arrival of the day staff and the immediate discovery of her body. That is, at approximately eighty-two and during your spell of night duty, Nurse – by a ten-minute margin. All right. Now you and your night duty colleagues can go and get your sleep. I’ll see Nurse er – Mackenzie – the one who found the body.” He glanced at the ward sister.

“Of course, Superintendent.” Sister Foster rustled out behind Nurse Shaw.

While waiting for the Scots nurse to arrive, Avery looked out into the corridor. Just leaving the house telephone was a thin-featured, black-haired girl whom he recognised. She was the staff nurse who, with Shaw, had first been informed of the murder.

Genially he accosted her. “Er – excuse me, Nurse. Would it be convenient for you to answer some questions now?”

Nodding, Staff Nurse Latimer stepped past him into the sister’s room.

“You knew Nurse Wakefield well?” he asked.

“Yes. We were very good friends.” Despite her professional self-control, the girl’s distress was obvious.

“Nurse, it’s evident that the murderer took advantage of the only time there’s anything like a lull in the vicinity of the ward during daytime. That’s the period between second breakfast and the arrival of the day staff. And today Nurse Wakefield must have arrived here at least ten minutes before the rest of the day staff – alone! Was that usual?”

“No – certainly not! I can’t remember her ever doing so before.”

“Any idea why she did so today?”

“No . . . unless –” Nurse Latimer gave a wan little smile. “But that hardly seems likely, knowing her . . .”

“What?” The detective’s gaze was keen.

“Oh – today she was wearing her S.R.N.’s uniform for the first time. She’d just qualified, you know. It just occurred to me that she might have come up in advance of the rest of us so as to avoid leg-pulling about her new er – status. I wouldn’t have thought she was the kind to be afraid of that, but –”

“Wouldn’t she have got the same sort of leg-pulling on duty with the others?”

Nurse Latimer shrugged. “Well, there’d be a limit to it on duty on the ward. But on the way over from the Nurses’ Home she

could have been teased unmercifully. I had it myself, I remember. Anyway, it was only an idea . . .”

“I understand. Question is, could anyone have *foreseen* her coming over early for such a reason? Have planned the murder with that in mind, and lain in wait for her?”

Nurse Latimer gave a helpless shrug.

The superintendent frowned thoughtfully. “It’s a fact, at least, that her early arrival today was exceptional!”

“Yes. Normally we come over from the Nurses’ Home together, through the subway, and sign on together down in the porters’ lodge, then come up in the lift together. This morning I wondered where she’d got to, and put it down to her keeping out of the way for a bit because of her ‘promotion’. She’d have been out early, I knew – ” Abruptly Latimer stopped, as though regretting an unintended revelation.

Avery pounced on the slip. “Out early? Out of the hospital, you mean? What d’you call ‘early’?”

“Oh – about half-past four . . .” Nurse Latimer’s answer was reluctant and embarrassed.

“Half-past four! How d’you know that? Did you see her go out?”

“I – no, she mentioned . . . I mean – ”

The police officer looked up at a knock on the door. Sister Foster entered. Seeing Latimer there, she gestured to the nurse behind her to wait outside. Superintendent Avery addressed Latimer again.

“Now, Nurse. You didn’t see Nurse Wakefield go out early – but she mentioned it. When?”

“Last week. Her intention, I mean. So we know she’s been going out early in the morning this week, starting yesterday. It was a good time for meeting a – a friend of hers . . .”

Sudden enlightenment came to the detective. “A man friend, you mean? Her fiancé?”

“They weren’t actually engaged.”

“Mm . . .” Avery tried to lighten the depressing atmosphere. “What is he – night watchman, early morning milkman or burglar?”

Nurse Latimer said briefly: “He’s a policeman!”

It was the detective’s turn to look embarrassed. “A policeman! Know his name?”

“It’s Ferris. Victor Ferris. He’s on night duty this week.”

Avery was entering the name in his notebook. “Police constable

on night duty in this Division. Happen to know him personally?"

"I - I've seen him. He's been to our staff dances. He used to come to first-aid classes in the hospital. That was how she first met him."

"I see. This ward is accessible from the street, of course - "

Sister Foster interposed. "But everyone entering has to pass through the porters' lodge!"

"I'll be speaking to the porters. Nurse Latimer, do you know of any trouble between Nurse Wakefield and her er - friend?"

"She was very fond of him, and she's told me he was passionately fond of her."

"Passionately." Avery's tone was impersonal. "You know of no cause for - jealousy?"

After a perceptible hesitation, Latimer said distinctly: "I know of no cause for jealousy - no!"

"No situation which might even be misconstrued to give rise to jealousy?"

"I know of no cause for jealousy, Superintendent."

"You said that before, Nurse." Avery's eyes slitted. "I'll accept it, then, that there's been no emotional triangle, as far as you're aware . . ." His tone now cut with a sudden edge. ". . . Or that there *has* been such a situation - involving somebody your professional loyalties make you reluctant to mention!"

* * *

Nurse Latimer flinched. Sister Foster stiffened with resentment.

"All right," Avery said formally. "That'll be all for the moment, Nurse."

With an indistinct murmur, Staff Nurse Latimer turned and walked erectly from the room. At Sister Foster's beckoning gesture, the waiting Scots girl came in.

Her evidence, crisply delivered, was scant and unilluminating. As a member of the two bed-making couples of day nurses, she had gone to the linen room soon after her arrival on the ward, to fetch clean bed linen. On opening the door she had made the shocking discovery of the prone figure in bloodstained uniform. Finding no pulse in the outflung arm, she had reclosed the door and hurried to report the tragedy. From that point her evidence was a corroboration of that already given.

"Has any feasible motive occurred to you?" the police officer inquired. "Any idea that could account for what has happened?"

Uneasily, Nurse Mackenzie glanced up at Sister Foster's inscrutable features.

"Any ill-feeling?" Avery amplified.

"I - no! I can't think of anything like that."

Over the superintendent's pink face flitted a sardonic smile. He sighed.

"Very well, Nurse. You can go. Next member of your staff, Sister?"

Sister Foster's departing glance left him ruefully tapping his teeth with his ball-point pen.

After a moment's thought in solitude, the C.I.D. man moved to step out into the corridor after her, to exercise his legs and his eyes while waiting. But he jumped back hastily to avoid the silent, rubber-tyred trolley just emerging from the ward with a white-coated man in charge at either end. As the trolley sped on towards the bend in the corridor leading to the lift gates, the detective was able to see that its passenger, blanketed up to the chin, was a fairly young man. Gazing curiously after the vehicle, Avery watched it disappear round the corner.

"Poor devil!" he muttered, and turned to find Sister Foster awaiting his attention, accompanied by a grey-eyed, fair-haired girl in S.R.N.'s uniform.

"One of your patients!" he commented, with a jerk of his head in the direction taken by the trolley.

Sister Foster nodded. "Mr. Coyne - gone up for his operation."

"What's wrong with him?"

"If you must know, Mr. Coyne is to have an exploratory laparotomy, which will include the excision of a lymphoma. Later today Mr. Jenkins, in the side ward here" - she pointed across the corridor - "will be having a prostatectomy. So -"

"So I'll keep out of your way as much as possible!"

The detective followed the two women into the sister's room. With the door closed, Sister Foster said: "This is Nurse Bingham, a part-time member of my staff."

Avery smiled down at the girl. "Does that mean you don't live in - at the Nurses' Home?"

"That's right." Nurse Bingham's voice was soft and pleasant. "I'm married, so I'm not residential, but come in every week-day morning for half a day."

"At the same time as the others?"

"Well - same time as most of them. They aren't all due on at eight-thirty, you know. But I'm due on at that time with the

majority, and I usually arrive in time to sign on and come up with them."

"You did so this morning?"

"Oh, yes!"

"You knew Nurse Wakefield quite well?"

"Certainly."

"On good terms?"

"Of course! She was very jolly, and most people liked her."

"So I've gathered!" Avery admitted drily. "What I want to know is who *didn't* like her! Who disliked her enough to . . ."

Nurse Bingham looked distressed, but was of no help in providing an answer to that problem. Avery dismissed her.

"Who's next?" he inquired.

Sister Foster said: "There's male nurse Jordan, who also lives out. He came on duty at nine o'clock."

"Right. And after the staff, I'd like a few words with the patients who are fit to be questioned."

"Patients!" Sister Foster looked as though about to make a very tart comment. But after a pause she said: "If you really must, you'd better talk to the walking patients on the sun balcony at the other end of the ward. As for the bed patients - one of them you'll have to see this morning if you're going to bother him at all. That's Mr. Jenkins, who'll be having his operation this afternoon."

Avery asked: "And the fellow who went up just now - he hadn't been in a position to see anything, I suppose?"

"Mr. Coyne? He was a walking patient till this morning. That's quite common with even serious operations, which are performed as soon as the necessity is known. Without surgical treatment, of course, some of them, like Mr. Coyne, wouldn't continue to walk about for long. You won't be able to question either him or Mr. Jenkins for some days after their operations. Not on my responsibility, at least. And there are several other bed patients who are too seriously ill to be questioned."

Avery faced her outraged frown. "In those cases it won't be necessary, Sister. But I've two reasons for wanting to talk to as many patients as possible. First, to ask whether they saw anything at all suspicious this morning. Second, to try to find out more about your hospital politics from them than I've been able to from the staff. Professional ethics shouldn't worry the patients - and even bed patients may occasionally hear things they're not supposed to!"

The destruction of Sister Foster's normal serenity was now complete. After an eloquent glance, but without a further word, she again marched out.

Avery rubbed a hand across his perplexed brow.

3

Second Opinion

LATE evening. The small chrome name-plate on the door of the Sackville Street flat was inscribed: "R. Dimond, M.D., B.Ch." Superintendent Avery pressed the bell-button.

The door was opened by a man in his mid-thirties - tall, slim, dark-haired and with a small moustache. He was both surprised and pleased to see the C.I.D. man. He gave a grin of welcome and asked his visitor in.

Avery led the way as one familiar with his surroundings. In the lounge a young woman rose to meet him from a low settee near a baby grand piano. She was as elegant as the décor, but her smile of greeting was spontaneous and human. Through the open windows sounded the subdued hum of traffic down in Piccadilly.

"Sally," Rex Dimond suggested, "the superintendent shows all the signs of a peevisish thirst. Give him some lemon squash! Sit down, Birdy."

Avery settled himself in an easy chair. His apprehension at his host's suggestion as to refreshment was dispelled when he saw that the drink Sally Dimond brought him had no relationship to lemons. After a preliminary sip, he told immediately the purpose of his visit.

"Fact is, Dimond, I've been landed with a job that's right up your street. In the medical world . . ."

Sally had resumed her seat on the settee. Her husband had perched himself on the adjacent arm, his faint smile and slanting brows slightly wry.

"That's what I like about Birdy, Sally. No social chit-chat before the shop talk! You're referring to the St. Bardolph's murder, Birdy?"

"What else! As a layman among hospital types I seem to be at a disadvantage. As a police surgeon you're more interested in deliberate crime than in testing drunken drivers, and the 'C' Assistant Commissioner agrees with me that you could lend a useful hand in this case. You might spot something that would

hardly be noticed by a layman – ”

“However gifted!” Dimond grinned. He leaned forward on his insecure perch. “Make with the details, Birdy. The weapon, for a start.”

“It’s an ordinary table-knife, but ground to a sharp point. That makes it look like a planned murder with the weapon specially prepared. It’s not hospital cutlery, which is stamped with a monogram and checked at every hand-over. No knives reported missing during the last couple of months anyway.”

“And the wound?”

“The knife was driven in between the spine and the left shoulder-blade, and skidded off the scapula to sever the arch of the aorta. It was so deep in the body that the handle prevented the full escape of blood there’d have been had the weapon been withdrawn – though there was some as it was.”

“Professional proficiency?” Dimond asked softly.

Avery hunched his shoulders. “I wouldn’t care to say. There were contusions of the mouth and right cheek, where the killer’s left hand had gripped to stifle any outcry. No prints on the knife – but if the murder was planned, as the grinding of the blade suggests, there wouldn’t be. Looks as if the girl was taken by surprise by a sudden attack from the rear, which threw her down on her face, as she was found.”

Dimond said thoughtfully: “Which raises questions. Did the killer enter the room silently while she had her back to the door – or did she knowingly lead him into the room? Did he creep up behind her as she entered the room – or was she expecting him to join her there?”

“That’s yet to be learned,” Avery admitted. “But the linen room would seem to be a very unlikely place in which she’d choose to meet anybody in her off-duty time – and she was officially off-duty till eight-thirty.”

“An unlikely place,” Dimond suggested, “unless that person was someone she could not meet off duty elsewhere! And that could apply only to – ”

Avery looked startled. “Only to a patient, I suppose! But – ”

“Exactly. There’s a big but. Such a meeting place would be necessary only with someone confined to the vicinity of the ward. But she wouldn’t need to come up to the linen room early to talk to a patient of her own ward, whom she could talk to later in the ordinary course of duty. So, unless she had a rendezvous there with a patient from a neighbouring ward, it’s highly unlikely that

she had a prearranged meeting in the linen room with anyone at all."

Avery nodded in agreement. "There could be no guarantee of privacy there anyway – nor even that she herself would be able to get into the room unseen."

"Which leaves the far more plausible theory that she was followed into the linen room unknown to herself, and attacked before she realised the presence of her assailant. Is that your own theory?"

"More or less. It's been suggested that she went to the linen room to avoid teasing over her promotion – she'd just qualified. But –"

"But even to avoid teasing it wasn't the only place she could have gone to, so her arrival in that room at that time could hardly have been foreseen. So we're left with a choice between the two likeliest possibilities. First – that the killer followed her there from the ground floor. Second – that he found her there quite by chance and seized an unexpected opportunity."

Sally turned her hazel eyes towards her husband. "But Rex – doesn't the grinding of the knife show premeditation?"

"Possibly, but not necessarily. And even though the *act* of murder could have been premeditated, the time and place could have been left to a favourable opportunity."

Avery slumped back in his chair. "I told you it was a teaser! About someone following her up there. Her boy friend, a constable, was off duty from five o'clock that morning and admits having met her before going off. He denies that they'd quarrelled and certainly seems completely shattered by her death. What he can't do though, is to produce any absolute proof of his whereabouts between seven-thirty and nine-thirty. He says he went home to his digs as usual but that, instead of going to bed, he changed, had breakfast and went out again."

"But wouldn't he have been seen if he'd entered the hospital at the time of the murder?"

"The fellow who was on duty in the porters' lodge claims that no unauthorised person could have entered from the street and gone up to the wards. But I'm not so sure. There are so many possibilities, Dimond. There's no evidence of even the sex of the killer . . ."

"And quite a large number of potential suspects!" With the spectre of a smile glimmering in his dark eyes, the medical man studied his guest's frowning face. "And you've been considering

the impact of surgical and nursing psychology on homicidal potentialities?"

"Well – even those young student nurses are far more familiar with death and bloodshed than the ordinary woman. They haven't the squeamishness . . ."

"They have to develop a shell of immunity, Birdy, but familiarity with death doesn't make one a potential murderer. After all, there's been only one killer in the hospital – and even he may turn out to be a policeman! Motive now. Any possibility of a financial one?"

"None. The dead girl's parents, down in Havant, say that no one stands to gain a penny by her death." Avery drained his drink. "Which leaves motives revolving around her boy friend, P.C. Ferris. He used to attend first-aid classes at the hospital, so it's possible –"

"That another of those intimidating young women of yours formed a passion for him, Birdy!"

"Could well be a motive there," the detective agreed. "But the darn' hospital – staff and patients – seems like a secret society as far as an outsider's concerned. And I don't mind admitting it's giving me a headache."

Dimond stood up, his eyes alight with the anticipatory zest the C.I.D. man and the girl had come to know.

Dimond commented: "Judging from her unusual silence, it's not without effect on Sally here! Okay, Birdy. Tomorrow, if the hospital authorities agree, the inhabitants of 'C' Ward shall have the pleasure of describing their symptoms and suspicions to a new initiate in a white coat!"

4

Who Was Where?

EIGHT o'clock next morning, warm and sunny. Along the 'C' Ward entrance corridor came Superintendent Avery, carrying a brief-case and accompanied by Rex Dimond. Dimond was wearing a long white coat, in its breast-pocket a folded stethoscope. The two men went into the linen room and the door closed on them.

There was only the one door, and the single window faced the blank wall of an adjacent wing. After a quick glance at his surroundings, Dimond sat on a convenient shelf of sheets.

Birdy began: "We've got the usual photographs and diagrams, and a thorough examination of the room has produced nothing of any value, so we haven't thought it necessary to seal the door."

From his brief-case he brought out a buff foolscap folder. Then a perspex container, similar to a toothbrush case but larger. The medical man took the container between his hands and studied the object it held. A thing of steel and synthetic bone. The knife was obviously old, and its blade had the shape of a long and narrow triangle.

"Blade wiped almost clean by the lips of the wound as it was withdrawn?" Dimond suggested. "Except near the handle. What have the lab people discovered?"

"Very little. Caught in the crack between the handle and the blade they found a microscopic fibre which they've identified as a strand from cotton gauze. That explains why there were no fingerprints on the handle. The killer either gripped the knife with a wad of gauze, which he took away with him - or he used gauze to wipe his dabs off the handle before leaving, and the thread got caught that way. But it's of no help. Gauze is in constant use here."

Dimond gave back the perspex container and took the buff file.

Opening it, he turned over the folios, murmuring: "Flashlight photographs of the girl . . . scale drawing of this room with position of the body . . . Summary of ward routine and list of personnel on duty at time of the murder . . ." He paused. Turning a further page, he scanned it quickly. "Statement by Police Constable Victor Ferris. So . . . ! He claims that between seven-thirty and nine-thirty yesterday morning he went for an aimless walk. After walking the beat all night!"

"Huh!" Avery scowled. "Says he was walking around town, but has no proof at all of his movements. Unless some other suspect materialises, that young fellow is going to be of special interest. He's pretty vicious about the affair, and hints that we'll get at the truth here, not by questioning him. There was something in the way he said that . . ."

"You think he knows something?"

"Or pretends to!"

"Mm. I'd like to see the night staff before they go off duty. Who are they?"

"On this ward there's a male orderly named Billings, and three female student nurses. Their names are Pryor, Vernon and Shaw. The senior one, Shaw, is in charge of the ward - under the supervision of a night sister who is in over-all charge of several wards,

visiting them in turn at intervals. The night sister is clear of suspicion, because at the time of the murder she was in Matron's office, making her reports to the day sisters. That fact also gives the day sisters an alibi, of course – including Sister Foster, of this ward."

Avery returned the container and folder to his brief-case. "You'd better see the night staff in the sister's room. I'll arrange it, and leave you to it."

* * *

The door of the 'C' Ward sister's room opened and in came a large and muscular man in orderly's uniform.

"Good morning!" Dimond greeted. "You're Billings!"

"Sright, sir." Billings spoke with the affability of his gregarious type.

"You'll know why I'm here," Dimond said with equal amiability. "I've already talked with the other members of the night staff. The position is this. The patients and night staff and day staff of 'D' Ward are absolved from suspicion, their whereabouts at the time of the murder being accounted for. The night sister has an alibi, and the girls on night duty on this ward have alibis."

Billings nodded. "Lucky for them!"

Dimond said specifically: "At the time of the murder, Nurse Shaw was working at the sister's desk in the ward, making out her report for the eight-thirty hand-over. Unfortunately that means her back was turned towards the entrance corridor, so she would have seen nothing suspicious. Nurse Vernon was scrubbing-up at the corner wash-basin and then giving a patient a sterile dressing. Nurse Pryor was checking instruments in the middle of the ward and then helping Nurse Vernon by holding the tin of gauze she was using. Before that, Nurse Pryor had taken out the Witts breakfast dishes to the kitchen. That was her last visit to the entrance corridor before the hand-over. She'd been to the linen room twice. Once during the night and again during first breakfast. Nurse Vernon hadn't been to the linen room at all. So the three girls are clear of suspicion, and none of them saw anything suspicious."

Again Billings nodded. "And now you want to know where Billings was at the time!"

"I do. You must have known Nurse Wakefield pretty well. You're on day duty two weeks in every three."

“Sright. Nine to five or one to nine. Night duty for me is ten to eight-thirty. So two weeks in three I’ve been on day duty with Nurse Wakefield, if that’s what you mean.”

“Friends?”

“Friendly enough.”

“How friendly was that?”

Billings shot Dimond a look of quick suspicion, then grinned. “Well, I’m a friendly sort o’ bloke.”

“Off duty, too?”

Billings hesitated. “We did go to the dogs together once or twice, a while back. No harm in that – both single and unattached, as you might say. And if you want the full loorid details of our association, sir, you can have ’em. I did kiss her under the mistletoe last Christmas. But only in a friendly sort o’ way. We were good pals, but – ”

“But really no more than colleagues?”

“Wouldn’t put it quite like that, sir!” Billings said scrupulously. “After all, it isn’t every colleague I’d take to the dogs or snog wiv under the mistletoe! I liked her company and she liked mine – but there was no passionate stuff between us.”

“So when her ‘official’ boy friend arrived on the scene, it didn’t worry you?”

“Sright, sir. Pulled her leg abaht it, and stopped taking her out when I knew he was the one-and-only. But we were still pals as far as working time went.”

“Know of anyone else who’d taken her out?”

“Not among the blokes I’ve been chummy wiv. Her girl friends would know more abaht any uvvers.”

“Possibly,” Dimond agreed. “Any ideas of your own about the murder?”

“Me, sir?” Billings gave a rugged, deprecatory grin. “I’ve thought abaht it, o’ course – but no brainwaves. I’m as flummoxed as you – as the police are!” he amended hastily, with massive tact.

“For that kind thought – many thanks!” Dimond smiled. “Now,” he added, suddenly serious again, “what were your own activities from eight to eight-thirty yesterday morning?”

* * *

“Let’s see . . .” Billings gazed up at the ceiling, his square jaw moving ruminatively. “I was down in the staff canteen, of course, while the Witt’s breakfast was on – having me usual cup o’ char. That got me back to the ward abaht five or ten past – ”

“Not later than ten past?” Dimond queried sharply.

"No, sir. Earlier, if anything. Nearer five than ten."

"And then?"

"Then I went down into the sluice at the uvver end o' the ward, to check the Ins-and-Outs. There two or three minutes, I s'pose. After that I came up to the sluice at this end. On the way I looked into the bathroom and had a word or two wiv a couple o' patients in there."

"Who were they?"

"Mr. Reed and Mr. Withers. I must have been in there for two or three minutes, too."

"Then you went into the sluice next-door to this room. For how long?"

"Till knockin'-off time, half-past eight."

"Doing what?"

"Officially I had a few bottles and a couple o' receivers to clean. Unofficially I also had a look at the paper I'd brought up from the canteen. And a couple of minutes before the half-hour I changed out o' this gear so as to be ready to scarper on the dot."

"Oh, yes - you live out. Did anyone else come into the sluice while you were there?"

"No."

"And you left as soon as the day staff arrived? Before the murder was discovered?"

"Yes, sir. Don't hang abaht after a long shift like that."

Dimond switched to another point. "Coming back from the canteen, did you use the lift or the stairs?"

"Lift, sir."

"But you'd have seen anyone who was at the bottom of the stairs or at the top of the stairs?"

Billings frowned. "Sure, I s'pose! But I didn't see anybody. Should I have seen somebody?"

Dimond was looking at him steadily. "According to present information, if you saw no one at all it must have been very soon after eight when you came back from the canteen. Because soon after eight Nurse Wakefield must have come up by the stairs or the lift. And her killer could not have been a tremendous distance away!"

5

Balcony Scene

ESCORTED by Sister Foster, Dimond strolled past the empty bed of Mr. Withers. In the next bed was a young boy, sitting

up at a bed-table littered with materials for leather-work and constructional model toys, completed and nearly completed.

"This is Roy Dickens," Sister Foster introduced. "With his occupational therapy factory!"

"Glad to see output's going up!" Dimond remarked, inspecting a purse and an embryo shopping bag.

"You'd like a wallet, sir?" Roy asked, his pale young cheeks curving.

"Er - certainly! You can make me one. How much?"

"Have to work that out when it's finished." Roy pushed aside the leather-punch and a heap of plastic thongs so that Dimond could see the purse better. "Whaddy think o' that thongin', Doctor?" He dragged his pyjama jacket open. "Neater than the stitches they put in my -"

"Roy!" Sister Foster reproved, with a half-smile.

"See you later, young fellow!" Dimond grinned. He resumed his tour of the ward, past patients too ill to be considered as either potential witnesses or suspects.

Sister Foster murmured: "I know you're going to see the walking patients on the sun balcony. But why see Roy again?"

Dimond gave her a whimsical side-glance. "Because he's young enough to be inquisitive and to have no social inhibitions. At the perfect age of indiscretion!"

Five minutes later Dimond was leaning with his back against the stone balustrade of the sunlit balcony, while Farmer Reed lowered his bulk into an easy chair.

"Yesterday mornin'?" Reed said in his rich growl. "Well, I 'ad Witt's breakfast with the other ulcer patients as usual - that's second breakfast at eight o'clock. Then I was in the bathroom, shavin'."

"The bathroom being at the same end of the ward as sister's room, the kitchen and the linen room," Dimond commented. "Any other patients there at the time?"

"Mr. Withers. 'E was at the next basin to me. As usual, 'e was talkin' about when 'e was in the Middlesex 'Ospital. But I 'eard the day staff arrive while 'e was natterin'."

"And the walking patients who weren't there?"

"Only Paddy. Paddy Coyne. 'E's in the side ward now, with Mr. Jenkins. In a pretty bad way after 'is op, but up to yesterday 'e 'elped me with first breakfast at seven o'clock, collectin' egg orders while I was cookin' the porridge. Yesterday was the last time Paddy could 'elp, 'cause 'e 'ad 'is op later in the mornin'. 'E

shaved while first breakfast was on, not 'avin' any 'imself."

"Happen to know where he was while you were in the bathroom after second breakfast?"

"Just before I went in 'e gave me the purse 'e'd been makin' for me. An' when I came out again 'e was in bed, waiting for 'is pre-med."

"I see. Did anyone look into the bathroom while you were there?"

"Oh, yes! Billin's, the orderly. 'E looked in for a few minutes."

"Nurse Wakefield had no enemy that you know of?"

Mr. Reed shook his massive head in scorn. "Patients thought the world of 'er. She was a warm-blooded bit o' goods. Say things a young maid in my day would've kep' quiet about. But jolly an' friendly. 'Eart o' gold. As for the staff, she seemed on good terms . . ." Mr. Reed dried up.

"Many thanks! Ask Mr. Withers to see me, will you?"

Mr. Reed departed like a light-footed mastodon. Two minutes later he had been replaced by the ward bore, Mr. Withers. He was the only other walking patient of yesterday now available for questioning.

* * *

"When I was in the Middlesex Hospital - " began Mr. Withers.

"There was a murder?" Mildly surprised, Dimond elevated his eyebrows a millimetre.

"No - but there could have been!" Mr. Wither's thin lips pursed in prim disapproval.

"No doubt. There could be almost anywhere. But why at the Middlesex?"

Patently Mr. Withers tried to explain the frailties of human nature, as perceptible to such an acute observer as himself.

"Well - everyone isn't reasonable and well-balanced, you know. People don't always take the broad view . . ."

"How true!" Dimond acknowledged. "After second breakfast yesterday, you were in the bathroom with Mr. Reed?"

"I was."

"And Billings, the orderly, looked in for a chat?"

"He did." Mr. Withers showed signs of irritation. "But, as I was saying . . . There are a hundred-and-one things in a hospital, you know, that could lead to murder."

"Such as?"

"Oh - jealousy, dislike. Plain hate, even."

"At St. Bardolph's?"

"Oh, I don't know. Even at the Middlesex -"

"But *here*, Mr. Withers. Here at St. Bardolph's! Has any such ill-feeling existed as -"

"Oh, I don't know. Everything looks all right, I admit. But I wouldn't be surprised if, under the surface -"

"You know of something?"

Mr. Withers waxed cautious. "Well, I wouldn't say I actually know . . ."

"Suspect, then?" Dimond was losing some of his urbane patience. It was very pleasant here in the open air and sunshine, but he could think of more rewarding companions for a balcony scene than Mr. Withers.

"Well - not really suspect . . ."

Dimond gathered his strength. "Mr. Withers!" he pleaded. "You have some faint glimmering, a subtle instinct, a *soupeçon* of inspiration, the inkling of an intuition, the shadow of a breath of suspicion -?"

"Hardly that -"

"Thank you, Mr. Withers. I hope you'll keep better. Good morning." Dimond dismissed his man from the balcony and sank weakly on to an arm of the nearest chair.

He was just recuperating from Mr. Withers when from the ward rolled an easy chair. It was propelled between the french doors by Nurse Mackenzie and occupied by a small figure in a red flannel dressing-gown.

With Roy Dickens safely delivered, the nurse left the two alone.

* * *

"Feeling fit to talk?" Dimond asked pleasantly, again propped against the balcony.

"Sure thing!" Roy grinned. "I'll be gettin' up prop'ly tomorrow!"

"Good. Now, I'm not going to talk about your op, but about something even more interesting."

"You mean - the murder?" The boy's voice sank conspiratorially. "But you're a doctor!" He looked at Dimond's white coat and stethoscope. "Or - are you just pretendin'?" he asked in a whisper.

"No, I'm a doctor, all right."

Roy's blue eyes were sparkling. "Whaddy want to know?"

"You're a bright young fellow. You must have learned a great deal about the people on 'C' Ward - patients and staff. Is there anything you can think of which could possibly have a bearing on the death of Nurse Wakefield? Or anything that happened yesterday morning which you haven't mentioned to the police officer who was here? Anything at any time, in fact, which seemed at all unusual?"

"Oh - I dunno . . ." Impressed with the gravity of the situation, Roy became suitably ponderous.

"You liked Nurse Wakefield?"

"Oh, yeah! She was with it. Good at givin' penicillin, too!" Roy wriggled in recollection of hypodermic punctures. "Nice bird, she was. But unless ol' Withers killed her - "

"Withers?"

"Well, I did hear him gousin' because she cut him off short when he was natterin' about the Middlesex Hospital."

Dimond's smile was rueful. "If that would make him murderous, there'd be a massacre! So there's nothing . . ."

"Well, of course," Roy said casually, "there's Nurse Pleasance. She hated Nurse Wakefield."

"Hated?" Dimond gave a quick frown.

Roy grinned with glee. "Yes - hated! Jealous, see? All the blokes liked Nurse Wakefield, but Pleasance . . ." He made a grimace. "Couple of days ago, when Wakefield and Pleasance were makin' Mr. Withers's empty bed, next to mine here, they were havin' a real how-de-do. Whisperin', of course, but I could hear it. Real bitchy, it was! Pleasance sneerin' about Wakefield goin' out in the mornin' to meet a boy friend, an' Wakefield sayin' Pleasance would have to go out in a fog to get a man! Pleasance looked as if she could have murdered her right then!"

"And that's all you know?"

Despite his eagerness to help, Roy had to admit that it was. So Dimond took hold of his chair and pushed it, on squeaking castors, back into the ward.

6

The Sour Lady

AFTER being relieved of Roy Dickens by Nurse Mackenzie, Dimond strolled towards the ward entrance. Beside her desk there, Sister Foster stood talking with Mr. Locke, consultant surgeon. At Dimond's approach they turned to face him.

"Dimond!" the surgeon greeted, a smile relieving the previous austerity of his expression.

"Pleased to see you again, Locke," Dimond said cordially, grasping the outstretched hand. The two men had physical resemblances. Both were tall, slim and dark, though Locke was several years older and of a more solemn cast of feature.

"Sister Foster has been warning me about the fifth-columnist among us!" he remarked. At which Dimond grinned.

"There's a possibility the police may come to regard me as a fifth-columnist in *their* ranks - there's a policeman among the suspects! But I can count on your co-operation?"

"Of course."

"You knew the murdered girl, Locke?"

"Mm - remotely. As a very efficient nurse who'd been on the staff for some time."

"For her three years' training," Sister Foster confirmed. "Though she'd been on this particular ward for only the last eleven months."

"Which brings me to something I have to ask you, Sister," Dimond said. "I want to know if any patient on this ward has been in contact with Nurse Wakefield before as a patient."

"But why?" Locke asked, with his characteristic quietness.

Dimond said: "The fatal weapon is not hospital property, and for a patient to have such a knife with him might suggest that he brought it into the hospital with the murder in view. Implying that he expected to find his victim here - and had a previous acquaintanceship with her. Admittedly the previous acquaintanceship could have been a social one outside the hospital, but the possibility that her killer was an old patient of hers can't be ignored without a check."

Sister Foster was frowning uneasily. "I can tell you now that only two of my present patients have been patients in this hospital before. Mr. Reed and Mr. Withers."

Dimond's brows slanted. "And both of them were up and about at the time of the murder!"

Sister Foster looked startled. "Why, yes! But -"

Dimond said evenly: "There were only three walking patients yesterday morning. Reed and Withers claim a mutual alibi, and at present Coyne can't be asked whether he has an alibi, or if he saw anything suspicious before his operation yesterday morning. Sister, will you check the records of Reed and Withers and find out if either of them, when in this hospital before, was on the same

ward as Nurse Wakefield?"

"Certainly, if you wish, Dr. Dimond. But - "

"Now, regarding your staff. I understand that all the day staff present yesterday morning are on duty here now. But, if my counting's accurate, there's an extra nurse here this morning!"

For a moment Sister Foster looked puzzled. Then she smiled. "Oh - Nurse Pleasance is here now. She was off duty yesterday."

"I see." Dimond's eyes narrowed very slightly. "So we don't know where she was when the others came on duty together yesterday morning!"

* * *

During the ensuing half-hour several pairs of feminine legs and feet paraded into the sister's office and out again. The last of them belonged to Nurse Pleasance.

She was considerably older than the other student nurses, and Dimond thought of her as a woman because she had none of the girlish bloom which characterised the others. But she was not womanly in the best sense.

"I don't know why you want to see me," she began tartly. "I was off duty - "

"I know," Dimond said, with the same geniality he had shown to those previously questioned. "But you'd worked with Nurse Wakefield for some time?"

"About five months. She was on the ward when I arrived. I'm in my second year, and she was a third-year."

"So I understand. She was popular?"

From her stiff position on the hard chair, with her hands folded in her lap, Nurse Pleasance gave a thin smile. "She was of the type that's always popular."

"With both men and women, I believe?"

"With everybody. Staff, patients and - "

"And?"

"Oh - just everybody."

"You liked her?"

Pleasance looked up quickly. "It would hardly be wise for anyone to say now that they disliked her!" Her tone expressed a certain contempt for masculine intelligence.

"You think, then, that the murder was motivated by personal dislike? Not by too much liking for her?" Dimond studied the

seated figure. "Passion unrequited can be a terrible thing, Nurse Pleasance!"

"Can it?" She looked nettled. "I shouldn't think that could apply in this case, anyway!"

Dimond gave her a bright smile. "You mean that a man's passion for Nurse Wakefield was not likely to go unrequited?"

"I didn't say that."

He ignored the evasion. "Jealousy, too, can be a terrible thing . . ." he mused aloud. "You were off duty when she died. At home, Nurse Pleasance?"

Acidulously she said: "Away from the hospital. Dr. Dimond!"

"When did you go home? The previous evening?"

"No. I was too tired to fancy travelling at that time of night. My home's in Reading, and I did some shopping in Oxford Street before going home. That took till about half-past eleven."

"And at what time did you leave the hospital?"

Her eyes were now hard with resentment. "At about seven-thirty, Dr. Dimond."

"Early shopper, eh? Where was your first call?" He made no attempt to camouflage the trend of his questions.

"If you must know, on a relative of mine in Earl's Court. Now I suppose you'll want her address? After a cup of tea at her home, we went shopping together, and we parted at Marble Arch Tube. At about half-past eleven, as I told you. I went on to Paddington and she went back to Earl's Court."

"Thanks! And I'll have that address, since you offer it." He waited while she scribbled the address on a scrap of paper, which he then slipped into his wallet.

"That's all, Dr. Dimond?" Her dudgeon was high, her estimation of masculine judgment clearly lower than ever.

He smiled. "For the present. Thanks again!"

Finally came the day male nurse, Jordan. He was of middle height and dapper appearance.

"I live out," he said, "and I wasn't due on duty till nine."

"And Nurse Wakefield died at eight-twenty. You arrived at the hospital yesterday just in time to sign in?"

Jordan's gaze was steady. "That's right, Dr. Dimond. Gone eight-thirty when I left home, as my wife will tell you. Got out of the bus here at about six minutes to the hour, as I always do on this turn. That just gives me time to sign in and get up here."

"Do you know of anyone at all unfriendly towards Nurse Wakefield?"

Before the reply there was a perceptible hesitation. "No. Some were closer friends than others, of course."

"You're probably on more confidential terms with male patients than Sister Foster would be. D'you know of any patient here now who knew Nurse Wakefield before coming here? Either outside or as a former patient?"

"I've never heard of any outside contact – and I'm pretty sure none of the present patients could've known her before as patients, either. Mr. Reed has been a patient on this ward before, I know – but that was before Nurse Wakefield came to the ward. Mr. Withers has been in this hospital before, but that was on a medical ward, not this one. Records could tell you whether she was on the same ward at the time."

"Of course. If anything should occur to you that seems at all helpful, you'll let me know?"

Jordan smiled. "I'll let you know if it does, Dr. Dimond, but I don't think it's likely."

After a glance at his watch, Dimond followed the male nurse from the room and returned his borrowed white coat to Sister Foster. Then he left 'C' Ward, walked through the fatal entrance corridor and turned right into the main corridor. Not bothering to use the lift, he went swiftly down the spiral staircase which coiled around the lift-shaft. He emerged in the ground-floor exit corridor which, after opening on the left to the Nurses' Home subway, continued a few yards to debouch on the public entrance-hall, which contained the porters' lodge.

Slowing his stride, Dimond went up to the counter round the dozen square yards of space comprising the 'lodge', and addressed the uniformed man in charge. Simultaneously he presented his professional card.

7

Oh, Mister Porter!

CRISPLY Dimond said: "I'm authorised to ask you a few questions concerning yesterday's murder. You were on duty here at the time?"

"Why – yes!" The man seemed somewhat flustered. "I came on at six – relieved the night porter. We do eight-hour shifts. But –"

"I notice you can't see as far along that corridor as the Nurses' Home subway. But you could see anyone coming in from the street. Right?"

"That's right, sir. But -"

"Did you see anyone come in between eight and eight-thirty yesterday morning?"

Resentfully: "I've already been asked that, sir - and I've told them - no!"

"But you've had further time to recollect."

"And I still say no, sir! You can take it from me" - the tone was definitely sullen - "that no unauthorised person came through that door during the time you mention."

"And no *authorised* person?"

"No one at all, sir!"

"Quite sure of that?"

"Positive, sir!" This time the reply was frankly impatient.

"You were here all that time?"

"All the time."

Dimond's smile was pregnant with suave innuendo. "Then if it should transpire that Nurse Wakefield's murderer *must* have come through this entrance-hall - the only way a member of the public could get in - you'll admit to either blindness or . . . collusion?"

The porter's mouth opened but no words came.

Dimond added: "You didn't go up to the wards yourself?"

Glowering, the porter turned to gesture towards the P.B.X. switchboard behind him.

"Yes, I realise you'd have to attend to that." Dimond eyed him speculatively. "And it will be easy to find out whether all calls passing through the switchboard received prompt attention -"

With an effort which obviously suppressed an inexpressible fury, the porter found his voice. "Will you please understand this, sir! I was here, and nobody passed through, and I attended to the 'phone when required, and -"

"And no one passed through while you were attending to the 'phone?" Dimond's gaze was a calculated provocation.

"I - I -"

"To pass a call, you'd have to sit or stand at the switchboard, listen, speak and manipulate the plugs. And no one could possibly have passed in or out while you were doing those things? Have you eyes in the back of your head - and a spare pair of ears, too?"

As it was now the slack lunch-hour, the entrance-hall was deserted except for the two men. Dimond waited with sardonic patience for the porter's reply. At last it came.

"Well, now you - now you -"

"Now I put it like that, you're not so positive? My dear chap – why, oh why, had you to be so positive? You'd a perfectly reasonable excuse, so why couldn't you admit the possibility of someone having slipped past you? I'll tell you why. For the simple reason that you knew someone *had* passed through!"

On the counter the porter's large hands were clenching and unclenching. Dimond's voice went on incisively.

"Someone passed through to your knowledge and, because you couldn't admit that knowledge, you denied that anyone at all could have got past you! Your guilty conscience was afraid to admit what an innocent man could have admitted without blame. Well – get it off your chest now!"

After a series of facial contortions, the porter disposed of something that had been regurgitating in his gullet, and stammered: "You – you – I –"

"Hardly informative!" Dimond's attitude was now patient and inviting. "Now – who came through, to your knowledge? Speak up. He may not have been the murderer!"

"He – couldn't be –"

Dimond's brows slanted. "Couldn't be? An angel, then?"

"No, damn you – a policeman!"

* * *

"So . . .!" Dimond exhaled a slow breath. "A policeman off duty? A night-duty policeman in plain clothes, say? Police Constable Ferris?"

"Yes, you –"

"Watch it, lad! So P.C. Ferris came through – at what time?"

"About eight o'clock."

"To your knowledge, with your permission – and by pre-arrangement!"

"Yes, if you must know!" The admission was sibilant with sullen spite.

But Dimond smiled. "Yes, I must know."

"There was no harm . . ."

"That remains to be proved. But there was certainly harm in your suppression of the fact!"

"Well, a fellow can arrange to see his girl –"

"Ferris had arranged to see Nurse Wakefield before she went on duty? And she arranged with you –"

"She asked me to let him through."

"But I understand that the amorous constable had already had a date with her very early in the morning – while he was on duty and she was off duty. Yet they arranged another meeting for a few hours later, when he was off duty and she was about to go on!"

"No harm in it. She'd just got her S.R.N., and wanted him to see her in her new uniform. She chose that time because the liftman's at breakfast from eight to half-past."

With a light laugh, Dimond relaxed.

"So that's why she came over from the Nurses' Home earlier than usual! But why," Dimond asked, with caustic quietness, "did you keep it to yourself, instead of making a frank statement to the police?"

"I . . ."

"It was because you realised what the police would realise. That by letting Ferris through here you might have co-operated in murder! That when he came to meet Nurse Wakefield for the second time that morning, he might have brought the murder weapon with him. What time did he leave here after meeting her?"

"Couldn't say to a minute. About twenty past eight, I should think."

"He looked quite normal?"

"Bit flushed, I s'pose. But that'd be normal enough, wouldn't it? Will that be all, sir?"

"That I can't guarantee. Your importance in the matter will depend on the policeman's. But if you now communicate with him, you'll be an accessory to anything he may have done. Clear?"

Ignoring the glare of humiliation and venom, Dimond nodded pleasantly and strolled out through the hall, across the courtyard and into the street.

His car was parked in a nearby cul-de-sac. Sliding in, he carefully transferred the carnation from the facia flask to the buttonhole of his left lapel.

Then he drove to New Scotland Yard.

8

Send For A Policeman

"WELL?" Superintendent Avery invited, pushing aside a pile of paper-work on his desk.

Seating himself, Dimond hitched up a leg of his elegant trousers and said: "We've eliminated 'D' Ward, the only other ward on

that floor. So we're left with 'C' Ward – and P.C. Ferris!"

"Ferris! You've learned something?"

"I've learned that Ferris didn't go for an aimless walk after going home and changing, as he's claimed. I've learned that he went back to the hospital to meet the girl again. That he was with her, at the bottom of the stairs, just before she went up to her death!"

After a hard stare, Avery reached for his desk 'phone.

"Just a minute!" Dimond said. "It seems possible that Nurse Wakefield took him up to the linen room – or, more likely, that he followed her up unknown to her. That he killed her there and then got away without being seen by anyone but the lodge porter who'd let him in."

"That's what I'm thinking," Avery said grimly. "And he must have planned that murder, to have brought the knife with him. Not a pocket-knife, but a table-knife ground to a point!"

"Exactly!" Dimond agreed. "If he murdered her, he must have planned to do so when meeting her there. And that's where the objections come in!"

"Such as?"

"If he was planning murder, why choose that place for it? He couldn't be certain of being seen by no one but the porter. He couldn't even be certain of the porter's silence afterwards. And if Ferris planned to murder Nurse Wakefield, surely he was the person with far more private opportunities?"

"Uh . . ." Avery pondered. "True enough . . ."

"Again," Dimond said crisply, "of all possible suspects, Ferris would know that he would be the obvious culprit if seen near the linen room on the morning of the murder. If he was rash enough to commit murder in the hospital at all, why didn't he do it on the stairs? Why go up to the linen room, with all the extra risk?"

"Perhaps he thought a murder on the stairs would point to him, if the porter should talk, while a murder in the linen room wouldn't . . ." Realising the weakness of that suggestion, Avery scowled. "Oh, hang it – suppose he *did* stab her on the stairs, and she managed to get up to the linen room before she died?"

Dimond slowly shook his head. "No, Birdy. The medical evidence is quite definite that after receiving that wound she couldn't have gone anywhere under her own power."

"Suppose he –"

"Carried her up? No man in his right mind was going to hang around after stabbing her to death, much less carry her upstairs

and multiply the risk of being caught red-handed. Unless Ferris is completely stupid or insanely reckless, circumstances seem to point to his innocence."

Avery said positively: "All the same, I'm going to fetch him out of bed and hear his explanation of his false statement!"

"Keep him for after lunch, will you, so that I can hear it, too?"

Birdy nodded. "Make it two o'clock then . . . What's this?" In surprise, he accepted the scrap of paper Dimond handed to him.

Dimond said: "I've heard that there was bad blood between Nurse Wakefield and Nurse Pleasance, of the 'C' Ward day staff. Pleasance was off duty yesterday and claims to have left the hospital at seven-thirty." He explained the alibi Pleasance had given, and suggested: "One of your men could check the time she actually reached that Earl's Court address. See if it allows time for the murder before she left the hospital!"

"Of course. Funny - I hadn't heard of any bad blood between her and the murdered girl! But I'm checking the alibis of male nurse Jordan, who came on duty at nine yesterday morning, and the part-time nurse, the girl Bingham, who came on at eight-thirty with the other girls. Making sure they didn't come by earlier buses than usual, to allow time for the murder!"

Dimond smiled in appreciation, and told him of the check Sister Foster was making for him regarding the walking patients of the fatal morning. "Though they seem very unlikely suspects, Birdy," he admitted. "Coyne had only been in the hospital for four days before the murder - hardly time enough for a murder motive to arise - and never before. Reed and Withers have been patients in the hospital before and have had several weeks on 'C' Ward with Nurse Wakefield this time - but they have an apparently genuine mutual alibi for the time of the murder yesterday. So . . ."

"So we'll keep digging," Avery said doggedly. "And I'll see you at two o'clock!"

When Dimond arrived back at his Sackville Street flat, Sally was waiting for him. So was lunch, prepared with the assistance of young Dot Flinders, their general 'help' from Somerset. Taking his wife unawares as he strolled into the dining-room, he bent to whisper in her ear.

"Sally, do you believe in Ferris?"

Startled, she swung round, to find herself held firmly by the shoulders. When her lips were free again she asked: "What did you mean, Rex, by - ?"

Surveying the table with relish, he gestured to her chair.

"Sit down!" he commanded. "My hunger and your thirst for information can be satisfied at the same time."

* * *

"Those," said Dimond, as he neared the end of the meal, "are the facts as so far known. The killer's evasion of all the possible chances of discovery smacks more of luck than calculation. But the crux of the problem is this: how do we reconcile those two apparent contradictions – the unpredictable opportunity and the premeditation implied by possession of the knife?"

Sally's brow puckered. "You tell me!"

"As far as I can see, only by assuming that the linen room had no special significance. The place of death had to be somewhere on the route she took, and that route happened to take her into the linen room – which provided the last private opportunity for murder before she'd go on duty on the ward. But if we infer that the killer was following her, we're back to Ferris! Stupid as it seems on his part, in the absence of anyone else known to have followed her after he allegedly left her, he's bound to be the prime suspect. Sally – pass me a wet towel!"

Her gaze was wholly unsympathetic.

"If you think that's a teaser, you should try planning meals for a happy wanderer like you! I handle bigger problems every day of the week."

"Oh? Then please exercise your superior intellect on my trifling problem, will you? You're herewith appointed my collaborator –"

She smiled. "You say the nicest things, Rex. But don't try to call me your criminological collaborator, or you'll choke!"

"Sally, you're evading the issue, as the sociologist said to the old maid. From this moment I reserve the right to avail myself of your perspicacity." He got up.

"Where to now?"

"The Yard. But you're not going to collaborate there. Birdy wouldn't catechise a cop in the presence of a female. Neither" Dimond added carefully, "do I want you to dim my own lustre!"

* * *

"I *want* to help, sir!" Ferris declared, his voice hot with suppressed passion. "The swine who –"

"Whoever's responsible has got to be found," Superintendent

Avery broke in brusquely. He looked across his desk at the agitated constable. "Now, Ferris, the lodge porter at St. Bardolph's has admitted -"

"That I was there yesterday morning!" Ferris blurted, with an impetuosity Dimond now recognised as characteristic. "But don't you see, sir - after what happened -"

Dimond said: "You were afraid to mention that rendezvous, for fear of being suspected."

"Well, who wouldn't be? I tell you, I could kill the devil who . . . But it's the truth. When I left her, she was as lively and cheerful as - as . . ." At the recollection, Ferris's face tautened. "Look here," he said more calmly. "I'll tell you how it was."

"Go on!"

"Well, as you know, she'd just got her S.R.N., and she was as proud of her new uniform as a - as a -"

"Constable getting three stripes?" Dimond suggested, with a faint smile.

"Yes, that's how it was. Well, she was dy - itching for me to see her in her new uniform - wanted me to be the first. So we arranged for her to be at the foot of the stairs, where the public corridor joins the nurses' subway, and for me to get there before she went up on duty. Well, I went there, and we -" He flushed and looked down at the floor. "She was there when I arrived, and we were together for ten or fifteen minutes - I can't say exactly how long it was. But after we'd arranged to meet again last night, I left and she went up the stairs to the wards. She - she looked back on the first bend in the stairs to wave down to me, and - and that's the last . . ."

Dimond said quietly: "Ferris, do you know of any jealousy motive?"

"No! She and I only bothered with each other."

"But that itself might cause jealousy over either of you?"

The constable made no answer.

"All right, Ferris," Avery said impersonally. Getting to his feet, he crossed to the door and beckoned inside the divisional sergeant who had been waiting. "You can both go now," he said. "Let Ferris go back to bed, sergeant. I'll be speaking to your inspector on the phone."

When the two police officers had gone, Avery addressed the room at large. "Keep digging, I said. But where do we go from here?"

"I," Dimond told him, "am running down to Havant to see the

dead girl's parents."

"They know nothing," Avery said morosely. "To them even Ferris was only a name and a photograph. But I wish you luck!"

9

Assault And Battery

WHEN Nurse Mackenzie left the Nurses' Home that night, she was accosted in the alley by Alan Phillips.

"Can you spare a minute, Nurse?" the medical student began awkwardly.

She smiled with an unusual constraint. "I suppose so!"

He fell in beside her as she walked slowly down the alley towards the street. In her summer frock she looked attractively informal. But Alan Phillips was not seeing her as a person and he soon made it clear.

"It's - it's about Pam," he said hesitantly.

"What about her?"

"You knew I - we were friendly?"

"I knew you'd been pestering her for weeks!"

"Does that mean she gossiped about me - to anybody and everybody in your quarters?"

"No. She never mentioned you, to my knowledge, till the day before she . . . died. And that was only after I'd seen her snub you when you pestered her on the ward. Remember?"

"Oh, damn - of course I remember! What did she say to you?"

"She knew I'd seen her snub you, and when we went down to lunch she just grinned and said: 'I think I've given Phillikins the final flea in his ear!'"

"And I suppose you grinned too, then?" he said bitterly.

"No. Why should I?" Now that he came to return her attention, the expression in her face and voice puzzled him. "I felt sorry for a poor fool who had to moon about someone who didn't care tuppence for him, that's all!"

"That's not true. We *had* been on friendly terms at one time, you know!"

"You're prouder of it than she was. That's what makes you look such a fool. You carry on as if there was no one in the world like her! Even now -"

"Wait a minute! D'you think she talked about me to anyone else?"

"Boast of your interest?" Janet Mackenzie retorted cynically. "Too many keen on her for that. But she may have talked about you to Latimer. Latimer was even pallier with her than I was."

"Oh, hell! D'you think Latimer will have mentioned me to – to the police?"

Janet Mackenzie gave an abrupt laugh that was half nervous. "So that's what you've been getting at! But you didn't kill her, did you?"

"Don't be a damn fool!" His eyes blazed with sudden anger. "But that's what's been worrying me. Just because a girl turns a bloke down it doesn't mean – but you know what the police can build up out of nothing!"

"Against an innocent man?"

"Can't you see? I don't want to appear in the matter at all. I don't want an affair like this to come to my people's ears. I'm living at home, and they'd be – you don't know my father!"

"I don't!" Coolly now, she smiled at him. "But I can guess he's the heavy patriarch – you're such a ninny! So lover-boy kept his great passion a secret at home?"

"Shut up, will you! You're as bad as –"

"As Wakefield? I'm worse. But I can't see you've anything to worry about except a scolding from Daddy! Who could suspect *you* of murder? Besides, you come in from home every morning. You can prove the time you arrived."

"That's just the trouble." He avoided her eyes. "I – I can't prove an alibi! You see – I was in the hospital . . ."

Janet Mackenzie whistled. "You were? Well, just prove exactly where you were, then, and –"

"But I can't. That's just it. I came in early. I wanted to see her . . ."

"And did you?"

"No. I – I got up on the ward landing at eight twenty-five or thereabouts, hoping to catch her when she came on duty."

"Did you expect her to be on her own, then?" Mackenzie's tone had noticeably hardened.

"No – I – I just hoped to catch her eye when she came up with the rest of you, and that she'd slip back for a few words . . ."

"You did have it badly, didn't you!"

"Oh, it's all right for you to talk!"

"Isn't it!" Again she gazed at him oddly. "But go on. What did you hope to gain by that?"

"I hoped I'd get an understanding."

"My goodness, you certainly needed one, if you hadn't already understood that to her you were just a pain in the neck! I don't believe the penny's dropped yet. But if you got to the landing at eight twenty-five, she was already dead. Death was at eight-twenty, remember!" Mackenzie's eyes narrowed. "But if you were waiting to see her come on duty with the rest of us, why didn't we see you when we came up? You certainly weren't there when I arrived with the others."

"No - I - I lost my nerve and didn't wait, after all. Oh, you needn't look at me like that. It's the truth. I realised I'd look a fool if she should ignore me or make some stupid remark to set you all giggling. So after I'd waited a minute or two I went back downstairs and . . ." His voice faded under her derisive smile.

"Well, if that's your story, I don't wonder you're shy about telling it to the police!"

"It's the truth!"

"Maybe. But if the papers got hold of that explanation of yours, your parents would have kittens!"

"Look, the whole point is that if she didn't spread it about that I - that we'd been friends, the police will never connect me with her and I shan't be asked for an al - an explanation. You don't think Latimer will tell them about me?"

"Hardly think so, if she hadn't told them already. And she can't have done, or you'd already be on the carpet."

"And you won't tell?"

Her smile was queerly ironic. "No, I won't tell. I'm another strong female you can rely on. You really are the clinging vine type, aren't you - Phillikins!"

"Look, if you're just fooling . . ."

"I'm not. You'd be surprised. You couldn't have picked a better shoulder to lean on. Must be my maternal instinct, but I happen to have a soft spot for you. I'd like you even better with a backbone, of course, but this business may -"

"Oh - don't start preaching. Look, you're a good kid -"

Her eyes turned up to the evening sky. "Here it comes! I'm a good kid because I'm going to keep quiet about your lurid past. Hardly flattering to a girl, is it - even if she isn't as glamorous as Wakefield was?" She looked at him again, intently now. "But aren't you overlooking someone? Latimer and I may not be the only people who could talk about you!"

"Eh?" In quick fear he clutched at her arm. "Who else?"

"Who else but the boy in favour? The boy in blue!" Mackenzie

frowned. "But he can't have mentioned you either, so it looks as if . . ." Her frown cleared. "It looks as if you may be lucky after all. Sure you've nothing else to tell me? Right. Then I'm off." After a bright nod she turned away, to walk smartly on down the alley.

Behind her he stood still till she had passed from view. Then, too preoccupied to notice his surroundings, he paced slowly in the same direction.

It was with a start that he found himself at the exit of the cul-de-sac, and with a further slight shock that he found his way barred by the bulk of a tall figure. A tall figure in a blue uniform. Narrowly avoiding a collision, he looked up perfunctorily at the face under the helmet. His mouth opened mutely.

"Yes - it's me!" Constable Ferris confirmed sardonically. His broad hands lifted and came together. "I want a word with you!"

But within two minutes the word had erupted into violent blows.

* * *

Again Constable Ferris was standing sullenly in front of Superintendent Avery's desk when Rex Dimond was admitted to the C.I.D. man's office that night soon after ten o'clock.

Dimond said: "Sally and I had only just got back from Havant when you phoned, Superintendent. Drew a blank down there. What's been going on here?"

"You may well ask!" Avery said grimly. "Coming to something when a copper on duty starts a breach of the peace, eh?" He directed his cold gaze at the glowering constable. "Your D.I. has passed you on to me because tonight's rumpus seems to have had some connection with the girl whose murder I'm investigating. He's suspended you from duty, and you're going down on a Misconduct Form for discreditable conduct, whether the man you attacked proceeds with his charge or not -"

He nodded towards the fair young fellow standing by, who was still looking ruffled in dress, hair and expression.

"What exactly has happened?" Dimond interposed diplomatically. "Calm down, Ferris. You seemed reasonable enough this afternoon."

"I'm still reasonable!" Ferris spat out truculently.

"The facts are these, Dimond," Avery explained. "Ferris was on night duty patrol tonight when he happened to bump into this young man, Mr. Alan Phillips, a St. Bardolph's medical student.

By accident, Ferris says. But a woman dialled nine-nine-nine and complained hysterically that a constable had a young man by the throat, shaking him like a rat. She thought the constable was either bogus or mad – or both. As far as I can gather from Ferris's jabber and the version Mr. Phillips has given, the man attacked has also been a friend of Nurse Wakefield – ”

“It's a lie!” Ferris burst out savagely. “He was nothing to her! She told me so. He was just a little squirt pestering her, taking advantage of working in the same hospital – ”

Again Dimond broke in. “But if he meant nothing to her, why should you get so wild now?”

“Wild?” Avery exclaimed. “He was raving! Bawled when he was brought in that Phillips knows more than he ought to about the girl's death.”

“Oh?” Dimond turned to the constable with quick interest. “This afternoon, Ferris, you denied the possibility of a jealousy motive! Sudden change?”

The burly figure stiffened and the brows drew down over the smouldering eyes in a scowl. “I'm not the type to rely on official inquiries when I know – ”

“Then you're not fit to be a policeman!” Avery said acidly. “And this is the second time, Ferris, that information has come to light which you'd suppressed. First your visit to the hospital just before the murder; now your alleged suspicions about this medical student. What grounds – ”

“Why – only the night before she . . . died, I saw him badgering her. Previous day, she told me, she'd had to give him a final warning-off. Don't you think that's a good enough motive for what happened?” Ferris flared passionately. “He finally realised he was out, and was so mad with disappointment – so mad at her – that – ”

“What has Mr. Phillips himself to say?” Dimond inquired.

Avery gave a sardonic grin. “Oh – he was pretty excited, too. Brought an assault and battery charge against Ferris. And accused Ferris of trying to pin his own guilt on an innocent man!”

“It's true!” the medical student erupted shrilly. “If he wasn't a policeman, it would be obvious to you!”

“Why, you – !” Ferris almost choked with fury. “You mean if the hospital people hadn't covered up for you it would be as plain as a pikestaff – ”

“Quiet!” Avery blared. “Mr. Phillips – where were you at the material time? You may as well tell us, as it will now have to be

investigated. So if you can clear yourself - "

Phillips replied with a sneering smile. "It's this constable of yours you're anxious to clear, so if I admit I went up to the ward landing to see her, you'll immediately think - "

"You did go there?" Dimond inquired keenly.

"Yes. She'd told me she preferred this lout to me, but she liked to keep a fellow guessing. I went to the hospital earlier than usual. Had a coffee in the Refectory, then hung around in the Common Room, looking at a paper."

"People saw you?"

"The staff, of course. Though I wouldn't have let them see me if I'd murder in mind. Then, at about twenty past eight, I went over to the ward block, through the nurses' subway. Must have been about twenty-five past when I got up to the ward landing."

"If that's true," Dimond said, "Nurse Wakefield was already lying dead in the linen room before you got to the landing. And if Ferris's story is true he was already on his way home. Did you go up in the lift?"

"No - by the stairs."

"You saw no one?"

"No one."

"What did you do then?"

"I hung about in the main corridor in the hope of seeing Nurse Wakefield."

"You expected her to arrive alone?"

"Of course not. But I thought she'd stop for a few words with me. That I could reach an understanding with her. But while I was waiting I realised what a fool I'd look if she should ignore me in front of the other girls and set them giggling. So I went back downstairs."

"How far down? And did you see anyone?"

"I went down to the bottom and cut through to the Out Patients' Department. I didn't see anybody on the way."

"Then you couldn't have waited very long up on the main ward corridor, or you'd have met the nurses coming on duty at eight-thirty!"

"I - I suppose so!"

From Ferris came a soft, jeering laugh.

Dimond gave a tight smile. "So if you're innocent, Phillips, it's possible that Ferris followed Nurse Wakefield up to the linen room, murdered her and went down again before your arrival on the stairs. A narrow margin - but possible! And if he's innocent,

it's possible that Nurse Wakefield went upstairs as he left, found you waiting for her on the ward landing, was induced to take you into the linen room - for a few words to reach an understanding . . ."

Phillips's hands were suddenly clenched to stop their tremor.

"Which," Dimond summarised, "leaves us just about where we were! Because it's also possible that you are *both* telling the truth. Ferris could have left before the girl was murdered, and she could have been murdered before you, Phillips, arrived on the stairs and the ward landing. It's just feasible that even if you arrived there after she'd been murdered, you could have gone down again before the day staff came through the subway. But if you're both innocent, who's the killer? Would the time margins allow for somebody else to have gone up and down in the stairs or lift between Ferris' departure and your arrival?" He shrugged. "Hardly seems likely, does it? And as that remains in doubt, both of you must remain equally suspect!"

Avery said grimly: "But we've one definite fact to deal with. This assault charge you're bringing against P.C. Ferris, Mr. Phillips . . ."

Phillips's expression changed. "I - I want to drop that charge," he said awkwardly. "The - the publicity, at the start of my career - and my family . . ."

Avery said impersonally: "It's up to you, Mr. Phillips. We're not asking you to withdraw the charge, and the due disciplinary action will be taken anyway. But if you want to in your own interests -"

"Yes. I want to drop it."

"Very well. Ferris - this lets you out of the worst -"

"Lets me out of nothing, sir!" Ferris jeered loudly. "It lets *him* out, you mean! Do I need to tell you why? It's because he can't face the questions I'd bring out in Court. He wants to let sleeping dogs lie -"

"Here we go again!" Dimond grinned. "Good-night, Superintendent. I'll leave you to it!"

With a farewell lift of the hand, he beat a hasty retreat.

Decoy

“FOR the love o’ Mike!” Sally Dimond exclaimed at breakfast next morning. “How many suspects does that make now?”

Dot Flinders, the young ‘help’, was busy in the kitchen. Sally, wearing a diaphanous smoke-green negligé over her shortie pyjamas, was pouring her husband’s second cup of coffee. To any man less familiar than Dimond with her uncommon attractiveness she would have been a distracting table companion, but he managed to concentrate on her question.

“Count them for yourself, my girl!” he invited. “First – Ferris. Possible motive jealousy. Possible opportunity – following the nurse up to the linen room after their tryst on the stairs. Second suspect now – Phillips. Motive jealousy – the rancour of the rejected. If he went up to the ward landing earlier than he admits, it would explain why he didn’t meet the arriving day staff on his way down afterwards. Third suspect is Billings, the night male orderly. Motive unknown – possibly also the fury of a lover rejected. Opportunity possibly camouflaged by his story of having been occupied in the sluice. Rest of night staff too busy at the time to know his precise movements.”

“Mm . . . Hi!” Sally’s hazel eyes sparkled with sudden excitement. “What about the liftman? You say Ferris’s story and the switchboard job give the lodge porter an alibi. But suppose the liftman had some grudge against the nurse, and came back from breakfast early?”

Dimond smiled. “He didn’t! It’s proved that he actually came back from breakfast a little late. One of the nurses operated the lift herself to take the day staff up to ‘C’ Ward. You can take it as a fact that when the murder was committed the liftman was in the canteen.”

“Then the patients . . .”

“Fortunately only the three walking patients have to be considered. And if the motive’s logical it would seem to depend on the extent and nature of the killer’s acquaintance with the murdered girl. There’s no evidence that any of the three walking patients had known Nurse Wakefield outside the hospital, but we can’t rule out the possibility. Reed and Withers have been in the hospital before and had been on ‘C’ Ward this time with Nurse Wakefield for several weeks before the murder. But they claim a mutual alibi

for when it was committed. Coyne has never been in the hospital before and had been there for only four days before the murder. We haven't yet been able to question him regarding . . ."

Dimond drained his cup and stood up, his actions so deliberate, his attitude so tense, that Sally stared in surprise.

"What is it, Rex?"

His gaze abstracted, Dimond crossed to the sideboard, mechanically selected a carnation from the vase and adjusted it on the lapel of his jacket.

"This," he said softly. "We know of no motive or personal acquaintanceship involving Paddy Coyne – but it's plain fact that he's our last possible witness! The old man Jenkins, who had an operation the same day, has now been questioned and could tell us nothing. Not surprising. At the time of the murder he was a bed patient in the side ward. But before his own operation that morning, Paddy Coyne was a walking patient on the main ward – and could have seen something suspicious. He's the only person on the ward not yet questioned and is our last potential witness."

"But if he saw anything suspicious, wouldn't he have mentioned it before his operation?"

"He went up for his op before the patients were told of the murder and questioned. In ignorance of the murder, he may not have attached much importance to anything unusual that he saw – particularly with his critical operation on his mind. But when he recovers sufficiently to be told of the murder, anything he saw could become significant . . ." Again Dimond's voice tailed off.

"What are you thinking, Rex?" Sally asked seriously.

Dimond returned her steady gaze. "Answer this, Sally. Suppose the killer had reason to fear that Coyne does possess dangerous knowledge about the events of that morning. What would be his reaction?"

"Why – dread of Coyne speaking about it." With a dawning horror in her eyes, she added: "Perhaps even to – to try to silence him before he could speak about it!"

"Exactly. And the killer's mind is more likely to be anxious than confident! Very well, then –"

"Let's have it!" she invited, seeing that he had come to the crux of his idea.

"If Coyne should be treated as a likely source of incriminating information – and if the investigators were on the alert for the killer's reaction to that situation –"

"Rex!" The idea evidently made very little appeal to Sally.

"What a horrible suggestion! It would be better to fail than to use a sick man as – as live bait!"

"It's not a question of personal pride. There's a killer at large!"

"All the same, you can't risk the life of one person to avenge the death of another. You couldn't be sure the killer wouldn't succeed in getting at him. He's lying there at the mercy of people with access to drugs and – and implements and –"

"Steady!" Dimond broke in. "The plain fact is that it would hardly be risking a life anyway. Coyne's exploratory operation showed that his worst enemy is inside him, as deadly a one as any human killer could be. That's why he's so slow reviving. Nothing I might do could affect his prospects of survival."

"Still . . ."

"As for safeguards – they're fundamental to the plan. They're what should alarm the killer. A constant watch, to make sure that no one on the list of suspects gets to him unseen."

"Suppose the killer isn't on your list of suspects?"

Dimond was pacing the room. "If so, he'd have to be a stranger with no right on the ward, and couldn't get to Coyne unsuspected."

"Whom could you rely on to watch him? There's no one but Sister Foster you could be absolutely sure about!"

Beneath his dark moustache, Dimond's teeth gleamed in a faint grin. "I wasn't thinking of the hospital staff, darling. The obvious watchdog would be me!"

"But you don't even know whether the killer's among the patients, the day staff or the night staff – and you couldn't keep watch twenty-four hours in the twenty-four!"

Dimond brows slanted. "I couldn't. But *we* could! You're trained in pharmacy and first-aid. You'd be at least as capable as a student nurse –"

Sally got to her feet. "But what would you do to make the killer think Mr. Coyne is suspected of knowing something?"

"Nothing!" Dimond stated promptly. "Those safeguards would be enough to bait a guilty conscience. It'll be known that you're my wife and that a reliable, independent attendant is considered necessary. And there's this point I should stress!" Dimond's expression was grim. "If any patient did see anything suspicious, it would have to be Coyne, the only one yet to be questioned. Till that possibility has been checked and disproved, we've no logical or moral right to disregard it – for Coyne's own sake. Because the possibility may occur to the killer even if we do nothing! All I'm suggesting is that extra care be taken of Coyne – and, as the last

potential witness, he may well need it!"

"For how long?"

"Till he is able to talk. If no official action is taken soon after Coyne becomes fit to speak, it will be obvious to the killer that Coyne has nothing to reveal. And we shouldn't have to wait long, because Coyne should be able to talk within the next day or two, if he's ever going to talk at all."

"At all?"

"Yes. His operation disclosed a condition far more extensive than had been expected – and also pretty well exhausted his remaining vitality. Even if he does recover sufficiently to be able to talk lucidly, it can only be a temporary rallying."

"But if the killer's on the staff, won't he or she know that?"

"Presumably. If so, he'll also know that as long as Coyne's alive there's a chance of him speaking."

"In that case," Sally acknowledged reluctantly, "I suppose –"

She was interrupted by the clamour of the telephone in the lounge. With long strides Rex went to answer it. He was gone for a little over two minutes. When he came back his expression was bleak and resolute.

"Who was it?"

"It was Sister Foster." Hard-eyed, Dimond gripped his wife's arm and urged her towards the bedroom. "Get dressed – quickly. That watch on Coyne I've been suggesting is now definitely on!"

"But – why now . . .?"

His answer was terse. "Because the killer has got in first. This morning someone has tried to make sure that Paddy Coyne will never speak again!"

11

Silent Witness

WHEN the Dimonds arrived at St. Bardolph's Hospital, Superintendent Avery was already there, similarly summoned by Sister Foster. They found him with her in the little side ward.

The two beds in the room were separated by a screen. In one bed was old Mr. Jenkins, recovering satisfactorily from his operation. In the other lay Paddy Coyne, in a motionless stupor. Beside him on the top of his locker were the pathetic relics of his leather-work. From a stand at the other side of the bed was suspended an inverted 'drip' bottle of blood plasma, from which a red rubber

tube led down to the intravenous needle inserted in his splinted left forearm. The needle was kept in place by adhesive strapping.

Avery and the sister came over to meet the new arrivals at the doorway, out of earshot of old Jenkins. After introducing Sally to Sister Foster, Dimond inquired: "What exactly has happened?"

Sister Foster's face was pale and set. "When I came into this ward on coming on duty, Dr. Dimond, I found that the drip needle had been removed from Mr. Coyne's arm and the plasma was dripping away to waste on the floor. But I've been assured that the needle was perfectly in place at the morning change of staff."

"It couldn't have been jerked out accidentally, by the patient himself?" Avery asked.

"No. The needle had been securely strapped in place, and anyway Mr. Coyne is in no condition to move violently enough to dislodge it. It must have been taken out deliberately."

Avery said: "One wonders why the person responsible didn't merely shut the drip off without removing the needle from his arm. It wouldn't have been so noticeable."

Dimond suggested: "But it could have been more easily and quickly remedied! By leaving the plasma to drain away to waste, the culprit ensured that further time would be lost in getting another bottle here."

"That's right, Doctor," Sister Foster confirmed. "The needle was not only removed from Mr. Coyne's arm; it was also detached from the tube, and all the plasma had run out over the floor. Another bottle had to be fetched and another needle inserted in Mr. Coyne's arm. The replacement would have taken even longer had I made my round of the main ward first, as usual." She looked from Avery to Dimond. "But you see the difficulty in finding the person responsible?"

"We do!" Avery told her grimly. "We don't know whether it was done by one of the present walking patients - Reed, Withers and Hodges. And we don't know whether it was done by one of the night staff just before going off duty or by one of the day staff just coming on duty. It's the murder puzzle all over again!"

"One thing's certain," Dimond said crisply. "From now on Coyne has to be guarded. Someone wants to prevent him surviving to talk!"

"Would cutting off the drip have done that?" Sally asked.

Sister Foster said: "Even without interference, his prospects of talking again are slight. Any adverse effect on his condition could make all the difference -"

"And he's got to be given every chance!" Dimond stated. "I propose keeping an eye on him this morning and during the night, with my wife taking over during the afternoon. Any objections?"

"Certainly not. Not after this . . ."

"I agree, Dimond," Avery said. "I'll send a C.I.D. man along as well, but you're better qualified -"

"Right. And you, Sister, will personally administer any drugs he may be having. Be here after lunch, Sally!"

Sister Foster escorted Sally out, and Avery had a few private words with Dimond before leaving.

* * *

During the first half-hour of Dimond's self-imposed vigil the only sound in the room was the rustling of book leaves on the other side of the screen, where old Mr. Jenkins lay reading.

When Sister Foster came in again, she was accompanied by the consultant surgeon, Mr. Locke. Outside could be heard the murmur of his 'firm', a group of students of both sexes, and as the door was closing one of the students peered into the room. The one Dimond now knew to be named Alan Phillips. After a quick glance round the side ward, Phillips carefully avoided Dimond's eye before the door closed on him.

Locke scanned the patient's chart, then leaned over Coyne himself. During the brief examination Coyne's eyes opened slightly, but dully and without recognition or intelligence. His tongue licked at his dry and cracked lips.

"You can try him with sips of water, Sister," Locke said quietly. "Every half-hour, say." Turning to Dimond, he signified his opinion of the patient's condition with a slight shrug.

Dimond followed him back to the door.

"You know," Locke said, "there's a possibility he may never speak! The widespread metastases plus the surgical -"

"I know."

"Or it's quite possible he'll have periods of temporary lucidity. But that's something you may not know definitely for several days."

"I can wait. If he's going to be lucid for only a minute, I'm not going to miss it.

Locke shrugged again. "Hope you'll be successful, naturally. Ring for anything you want, won't you?"

Sister Foster remained behind when the surgeon had left. To her

Dimond said: "What staff have you on duty today?"

"Oh - Staff Nurse Latimer is off today, with Nurse Bingham deputising for her this morning. Orderly Billings is on day duty, male nurse Jordan now being on night duty. Nurses Mackenzie and Pleasance are on duty. So is Nurse Cherrill, who has come from 'A' Ward to replace Nurse Wakefield."

"Nurse Cherrill wasn't here when the murder was committed, so I can ignore her. But I want you to send the others to this room in turn to give Mr. Coyne his sips of water."

Without comment, Sister Foster fetched a glass jug of water and an invalid feeder, which she placed on a small table near the foot of Coyne's bed.

"I'll keep an eye on that!" Dimond assured her, with a faint and grim smile.

The first nurse to enter as a result of his request was the Scots girl, Mackenzie. Approaching the table, she cast a diffident but impersonal glance at the man sitting astride the bedside chair.

"I - I've come to give Mr. Coyne his drink."

"Just a moment!" Dimond himself poured a small quantity of water into the feeder, which he then handed to the nurse. He stood by to watch while she held it to the patient's lips.

Coyne was still in that listless stupor, but at the cool touch on his mouth his eyes opened a little, and in them there seemed to be some vague vestige of intelligence. His jaw dropped a little to accept the feeder; there was a weak, instinctive sip. The eyes closed again.

"Some more water, Mr. Coyne?" Nurse Mackenzie suggested gently. But though his eyelids opened a just perceptible fraction, he made no attempt to drink again, and the nurse handed the feeder back to Dimond.

He was deep in thought when the door opened again, to admit Sister Foster, escorting a burly man in plain clothes. Dimond recognised him as Sergeant Pearson of the C.I.D. If Coyne should speak there would be a detective present to make a verbatim record of anything he should say. Dimond gave Pearson the bedside chair and stood to watch Sister Foster administering an injection to the patient.

It may have been due to the slight twinge of pain penetrating a thinning curtain of stupor, but Coyne's eyes opened slightly again, and in them this time was something that might have been intelligent recognition of the sister. It was only fleeting, but it caused her to give Dimond a significant glance before leaving.

After a quiet interval, the next visitor was the part-time S.R.N., the quietly attractive Bingham. As before, Dimond half-filled the feeder with water and stood by while it was offered to the patient.

That Coyne was conscious and not entirely without some vague appreciation of circumstances was shown by the slack opening of his mouth at the touch of the feeder to his lips. But a little of the water dribbled down his unshaven chin as his head turned away. Flushing a little under Dimond's gaze, but with professional deftness, the nurse slid her left arm under the patient's head to hold it steady while she again brought the feeder up to his mouth. Again Dimond saw that feeble movement of the head to avoid it.

"Come along, Mr. Coyne - try to drink!" Nurse Bingham urged quietly. But again there was that weak attempt to avoid the feeder, and in the patient's dull eyes a look as of fear. Fear of what? What phantasms were passing through the bemused mind behind those muddy eyes?

At last Nurse Bingham managed to pour some of the water between the slack, dry lips. She returned the feeder to Dimond and went out.

The medical man was slowly pacing the room when Nurse Pleasance brought in a glass of milk for Mr. Jenkins, behind the screen. Then she came across to give Coyne his next sip of water. This time Dimond watched carefully for that look of fear in Coyne's eyes, but either his vitality had again sunk too low for such an emotion to be registered or the fear itself had passed. Although making no active attempt to co-operate, he remained quiescent while water was tipped into his mouth, and he swallowed enough of it to satisfy the sallow nurse.

As she was turning to leave after handing the feeder back to him, Dimond said quietly: "Nurse Pleasance! Superintendent Avery has informed me that the alibi you claimed has been checked. Your relative in Earl's Court confirms that you must have left the hospital nearly an hour before the murder."

The nurse's acknowledgment was a faintly-contemptuous single sour word. "Naturally!"

Superintendent Avery himself was the next to arrive, accompanied by Sister Foster.

"How do, Pearson," he greeted genially. "Jefferson will be relieving you for lunch and for night duty. Any of the staff acting suspiciously, Dimond?"

"Not that I've noticed. But Superintendent - will you ask the A.C. if I can borrow the fatal knife? If he agrees, I'll call at the

Yard for it on my way here this evening.”

“What d’you want it for?”

Dimond gave a slanting, enigmatic grin. “Just an experiment. Has anyone a better use for it?”

Avery commented: “Huh! I’ve a feeling you’re getting ready to wipe everybody’s eye. If so, make sure I’m present at the wiping, will you?”

Dimond’s glance was a lancing frown of speculation. “Yes, I’ll make sure of that . . .” he promised quietly. Then he stopped, at the soft whine of the distant lift.

The sound was followed soon after by the arrival of Sally. She came into the side ward carrying a large handbag.

“Oh – good girl!” Dimond smiled. He crossed to meet her at the doorway. “Make a mental note of how Coyne reacts to the sips of water he’ll be having every half-hour. Pour the water yourself and keep an eye on the jug. No sign of him speaking yet. If there should be, let me know at once. And if he actually does speak, don’t leave him till you’ve heard what he has to say. I’ll be back here at six.”

“What will you be doing till then?”

“Most of the time, sleeping! Before that, having some lunch and getting in touch with London Transport.”

Sally stared. “London Transport? Whatever for?”

“To see whether their buses are always on time!” Dimond answered laconically.

Avery had joined them at the door. Now he protested: “But I told you I’d checked those two people who came by bus on the morning of the murder – Nurse Bingham and male nurse Jordan. Both buses were right on time. The Bingham girl signed in and came up with the resident staff, and Jordan didn’t get here till nearly nine o’clock. Both of them have perfect alibis for the time of the murder.”

“So I understand!” Dimond said blandly. “I just want to know if the buses are *always* on time!”

“But why?” Avery looked bewildered. “What do other mornings matter?”

Already on the way out, Dimond ignored the question. “Be seeing you, Sally!” he said.

Patently piqued, Avery went with him as he left the hospital.

Night Vigil

AT just before five, Dimond sat down to tea. While ministering to him, Dot Flinders announced her intention of staying on to do the same for his wife on her return.

"Funny arrangement, sir!" the buxom blonde Somerset girl commented. "Known you to be out on a case often enough, but not Mrs. Dimond."

"An ominous trend, Dot!" he said gravely. "When you get married you'll take home your wages to find Choss in a neat apron, with a meal and slippers waiting for you. When's it going to be?"

"Why, sir - we'm not even engaged!" she protested, her colour high, as always when Dimond teased her about her boy friend Charles. "What time will you be home in the morning, sir?" she asked, with a transparently artful change of subject.

"That," he said seriously, getting up from the table, "is something I'd just like to know!"

The carnation on his lapel was a fresh one, and he was at his most alert when he stopped at New Scotland Yard.

Superintendent Avery handed him a sealed packet and at the same time asked a question.

"You were going to find out if Jordan's and Nurse Bingham's buses always arrive on time?"

Sadly Dimond shook his head. "There's no perfection in this world, Birdy!"

Despairingly Avery almost bleated: "But they *were* on time that morning - !"

"So you keep telling me. 'Bye-bye, Birdy . . ."

On leaving Scotland Yard, Dimond was accompanied by Sergeant Jefferson, who was to relieve Sergeant Pearson again. At the hospital Dimond passed the side ward in order to notify his arrival to Sister Foster, whom he could see at her desk in the main ward.

"Good evening, Sister," he greeted. "No call from my wife, so I suppose there's no news?"

"Not really, Dr. Dimond," she confirmed. "Mr. Coyne's pulse is slightly steadier, but whether he'll improve sufficiently to speak . . ."

Dimond returned her level gaze. "I can afford to wait a dozen hours or so. But I won't waste any more of your time now, Sister."

As he entered the side ward, Sally rose to her feet with a smile, but became serious again at once.

"Nothing much to report," she said quietly. "He's looked about a bit when he's been given his sips of water, but whether he was really seeing anything I don't know. He's taken a little black-currant juice from Sister Foster, too, but later he's just seemed to - to relapse again."

Dimond nodded.

"Drop Sergeant Pearson at the Yard on your way home. Whether I shall want you to take over again for a few hours tomorrow will depend on Coyne's condition in the morning. If he looks like speaking, I'll hang on here."

"Well - there's been no further attempt to prevent him speaking!"

"And you've nothing else to report?"

"No - except that Mr. Coyne's sister and her husband were here this afternoon and the husband's coming in again tomorrow morning on his way to work. And Mr. Locke's firm came in again this afternoon. What's in that packet, Rex?"

"The murder weapon. No more questions. I'll ring you in the morning at eight. 'Bye!"

He watched her go along the corridor with Sergeant Pearson. Then he went back across the side ward with Sergeant Jefferson at his heels. He took Paddy Coyne's thin outflung right wrist between his fingers and thumb and after a few moments laid it gently back on the coverlet.

"Long job in front of us, Sergeant!" he murmured to the C.I.D. man. "May as well have a couple of easy chairs in from the ward, eh?"

"Leave it to me, sir!" Jefferson said.

He reappeared a minute later pushing a chair, with Billings behind him propelling another one. This time Billings was not in uniform.

"Knocking off now, sir," he said to Dimond. "Should've finished at five, but we've had a couple of accident cases." He accepted a cigarette from Jefferson. "Thanks! Keep it for on the bus. Good-night, Dr. Dimond!"

"Good-night!" Dimond watched the orderly turn the corridor corner towards the stairs, then re-entered the side ward. Easing his chair to a position facing the foot of Coyne's bed, he sank down into its padded embrace.

Eight o'clock. Sister Foster's last visit to the side ward, to feel Coyne's pulse and study his composed features.

Eight-thirty. Sound of the day staff going past off duty and the night staff coming on. Then Nurse Shaw walking briskly into the side ward to fetch the temperature charts and drug sheets of the two patients.

Ten p.m. Through the half-open door Jordan, the male nurse, seen arriving on duty. Dusk settling on the room; Dimond leaning back in his chair, physically relaxed but mentally alert. Jefferson switching on a dim wall-light.

Time oozing sluggishly through the funnel of night. The deepening darkness lightening again with the rising of the moon in a cloudless summer sky. Faint night-staff whispers from the main ward.

Just after two a.m. The first faint mumbling moan from the direction of Paddy Coyne's pillow. Dimond instantly on his feet, in two strides beside the bed. The sound already dying away, but the lips still moving.

Now even the lip movements stopped. After testing the pulse in the exposed wrist, Dimond transferring to the bedside chair, its seat too hard to allow drowsiness.

Twenty-three minutes later. The sound again. With it a trace of facial animation. Sergeant Jefferson watching from across the room, in case required.

Shadows lightening with the approach of dawn. Dimond crouching forward, concentrating fixedly on the patient. He is motionless except when the working lips emit a muffled exclamation . . . meaningless, fading almost immediately to inaudibility. At intervals, more movements of the lips, with sibilant, tantalising whispers.

Five a.m. From the main ward the swish of curtain rings on screen rails, the soft slurr of rubber-tyred wheels on the polished floor, a buzz of morning greetings and conversation.

It is the third morning after Nurse Wakefield's murder.

* * *

Dimond stretched, yawned and ran an exploratory finger over the stubble on his chin.

"A bath and a shave will have to wait," he murmured, going back to Paddy Coyne's bedside.

"Not even knocking off when I do, sir?" Jefferson asked.

"No. Not if I have to stay here all day. But I shan't have to - I feel sure of it!" In Dimond's dark eyes was a glitter of growing confidence, and his words and movements had the rapidity of nervous tension.

But physically he had relaxed again when, an hour later, Jefferson gave a violent start at a sudden loud exclamation from the gaunt occupant of the bed.

"Why - what - ?" Jefferson stammered.

"Quiet!" Dimond breathed. "Listen . . ."

The sound was not repeated, but the eyelids fluttered twice, then opened. A pair of dull, bewildered eyes stared momentarily up into Dimond's peering face before the lids dropped again.

Seconds later there was a second view of the puzzled eyes, with the mind behind them groping for familiar landmarks in an unfamiliar room. Again the eyelids closed, but Dimond's attitude had a new dynamism that brought Jefferson to his side. He grasped the police officer's shoulder.

"Jefferson, I think he'll be speaking today! Do something for me. There are two phones in the corridor. The one this side will give you the P.B.X. switchboard. Get the Yard. Leave a message asking Superintendent Avery to come here as soon as he arrives - and to bring P.C. Ferris with him."

From his breast pocket Dimond brought a diary. He held it open for Jefferson to see.

"Then ring this Hammersmith number and ask for Mr. Alan Phillips. Tell him I'd like him to be here at eight o'clock. Tell him it's important."

Jefferson nodded and strode out. In two hours' time the day staff would be due on duty. Dimond sat down again, leaning forward with his eyes focused intently on the lips that were yet to speak.

13

The Last Witness

WHEN Superintendent Avery appeared at the side-ward doorway he had with him a sullen companion. Constable Ferris. Dimond crossed the room to meet them.

"What's the idea - ?" Ferris muttered.

Ignoring him, Dimond said quietly: "Superintendent, Coyne is showing lucid intelligence - though how long it'll last no one can say."

"Anyone else know this?"

"All the night staff, presumably. The night sister saw it for herself this morning. Alan Phillips knows it - he's here. Steady, Ferris! I've a little job for you, with the superintendent's permission."

Avery had a puzzled frown.

"Lend him your notebook, will you, Superintendent? Should Coyne say anything intelligible, Ferris, take it down - verbatim. Anything at all, never mind whether it makes sense to you!"

Taking the proffered notebook, Ferris cast a smouldering glance at Phillips and took up a stance near the low table.

"All right, Sergeant," Dimond murmured to Jefferson. "You can go now. No need for Pearson to take over."

As Jefferson went out, Dimond gave a soft exclamation. "Hullo! Sounds like the day staff . . ."

The whine of the distant lift had stopped, and approaching could be heard the rapid footsteps and light chatter of the day nurses.

"Watch!" Dimond advised. Avery watched the nurses pass the half-open door. "Notice anything, Birdy?" Dimond asked. While Avery was hesitating, he said: "All right. Here's Sister Foster . . ."

Sister Foster came immediately into the side ward. Her eyebrows rose at sight of the four men present in addition to the patients.

"Mr. Coyne?" she asked, after a quick glance at the bed. "Has he -"

"He is able to speak!" Dimond told her evenly.

She went quickly across to the patient. Even she looked surprised when he essayed a weak grin of intelligent recognition.

"Hullo, Mr. Coyne!" she smiled. "That's better!" Turning back to Dimond, she said: "This is certainly a great improvement. But I hope you're not going to worry him."

Dimond said: "You'll come in again when I ring?" Something in his tone caused Sister Foster to look at him strangely.

"Of course!"

When she had gone, Dimond gripped Avery by the arm, keeping him facing the corridor. Impressed by Dimond's attitude, Avery stood motionless and silent.

Jordan went past on his way home, and from the opposite direction came Nurse Bingham, arriving on duty. Then Shaw, with her two female night colleagues, went by. Still Dimond stood facing the doorway, till finally Billings appeared, passing on into the main ward. At which Dimond turned to Avery.

"Well, that's the day staff on and the night staff gone."

"But what's the idea? You said you wanted me urgently."

"I do. Among all the factors we've learned apart from hearsay or conjecture, there are two which are plain and unequivocal. You've just seen those two factors."

Avery protested: "But that was no reconstruction of the morning of the murder! There were several differences -"

"Exactly! And those differences are the vital factors in the case!" Dimond crossed to the bell-button and pressed it. Rejoining Avery near the doorway, he said softly: "In just a moment, Birdy, I hope to introduce Nurse Wakefield's killer!"

Avery subsided into a piqued, watchful silence. Ferris too was silent and equally watchful. Phillips was frowning and gnawing at his bottom lip. No one spoke till Sister Foster appeared at the doorway, looking inquiringly at Dimond. Slowly he went towards her.

"Sister Foster," he requested quietly, "will you please send Nurse Bingham in to me?"

* * *

Nurse Bingham came into the side ward and walked straight over to Dimond.

"Sister Foster said you wanted me," she murmured, with the pleasant calmness of professional patience.

"That's right." His fleeting smile expressed nothing of levity. "I wanted you here, Nurse Bingham, to test an idea of mine in connection with the murder of Nurse Wakefield."

He was carrying the sealed packet he had brought from Scotland Yard. Now he broke the seal and tipped the packet over his outstretched hand. On to his palm dropped a knife with a synthetic bone handle and a triangular blade. Nurse Bingham's eyes narrowed. Her jaws perceptibly tightened.

Dimond said unemotionally: "As I don't need to explain, it's the weapon responsible for Nurse Wakefield's death. Now let's settle one vital fact. You told me - as you told Superintendent Avery here - that you usually come on duty with the resident day staff, but that your bus is occasionally late, as it apparently was this morning. What you did not mention was that your bus is also occasionally early -"

"But - but what difference does that make? On the morning of the murder it was just on time, and I did come on with the resident

day staff, as they can tell you!"

Dimond nodded equably. "I haven't disputed that you came on duty that morning with the resident staff! What I did say was that your bus is occasionally early."

With a grip on her arm, he led her to Paddy Coyne's bed. "Please keep calm, nurse. What I want you to do now is to take this knife." He held it out by the blade, its handle towards her.

"I - I don't see why - " she stammered in protest, her elbow knocking from the locker top the half-finished purse on which Paddy Coyne had been working before his operation. Almost abstractedly, Dimond stooped and restored it to its original position.

"Please take the knife!" he requested again.

"I - I won't!" Her lips set in an obstinate line.

"Why should a nurse of your experience be so squeamish? Take it!"

He was holding the knife right under her eyes. At his final crisp command she accepted the weapon, though gingerly and with an expression of strong distaste.

"Now," Dimond ordered, "just lean over Mr. Coyne, so that he can see your face and the knife!"

"Dimond!" Avery broke in. "This is going too far. You can't -"

"Please be quiet!" Dimond requested bleakly. "Nurse - do as I ask! At once, please!"

The two men in the background had drawn nearer to the bed. After a quick glance at Dimond's inflexible expression, Nurse Bingham reluctantly leaned across the edge of the bed - and stopped.

"Dimond!" Avery broke in again. "If you've got evidence, let me charge her now, but don't -"

"I asked you to keep quiet, Birdy! Now, Nurse Bingham . . ."

As though conscious of the face now looming above his own, Paddy Coyne stirred on his pillows. His lips, as they had done at intervals throughout the night and morning, worked soundlessly.

"Mr. Coyne!" Dimond said in an urgent undertone. "Mr. Coyne!"

The patient's eyelids flickered and opened. As before, the eyes revealed were at first dull and uncomprehending. Then, with most of their field of view occupied by the strained features of the nurse, they focused. Instantly the brows above them rose, converging to a furrow of shock and alarm. But no words came.

"The knife!" Dimond's imperative whisper cut across the tense

silence. Slowly Nurse Bingham brought the fatal weapon up till it came between the watchers and the frightened face of the man in the bed.

They saw the eyes flicker from the nurse to the knife – focus on the blade for several seconds . . .

“Tell me!” Dimond commanded, stepping forward so that he too was within visual range. “Tell me, Mr. Coyne – who . . . killed . . . Nurse . . . Wakefield?”

There was intelligence in the contracted pupils. Intelligence that turned them in panic to the stone-like face of the nurse above them.

“You know who killed Nurse Wakefield!” Dimond insisted slowly. “Tell me the truth. You . . . know!”

As Paddy Coyne tried to turn his head away from Nurse Bingham, in fear and repugnance, his pale face twitched. But as Dimond, too, loomed over the bed, he looked up – and slowly his lips moved. From his slack mouth dragged slow and difficult words which the listeners had to strain to catch.

“How . . . could . . .”

As intently as a surgeon operating, Dimond bent over him. “Who killed Nurse Wakefield? Tell us!”

In palpable fear, Paddy Coyne’s eyes flickered again to Nurse Bingham. The knife rolled from the bed, on which it had dropped unheeded. Nurse Bingham, held there now by the magnetism of what she could see and hear, still leaned over the bed, chalk-faced.

“She knows!” Coyne muttered with a ghastly grin. “She knows . . . who . . . killed . . . her . . .”

“By gosh!” Avery breathed behind Dimond. “He did see her –”

“She . . . she knows . . .” Paddy Coyne whispered. “She knows . . .”

“And I know, too!” Dimond told him quietly, taking the out-flung arm to feel the pulse at the wrist. “But tell us! No one can hurt you. Coyne – *tell us why you killed Nurse Wakefield!*”

* * *

“What the – !” Avery’s astounded exclamation was stifled.

Paddy Coyne was gazing up at Dimond in vague surprise. “You . . . you know! You know . . . I . . . killed her . . .”

Avery, Ferris and Phillips were grouped in an arc of astonished faces. Straightening up, Dimond said calmly: “You heard! You – Phillips and Ferris? That, my friends, is the truth. It was Paddy Coyne who murdered Nurse Wakefield!”

There was a tap at the door, and a small man peered timidly

into the room.

"I - I've come to see Mr. Coyne. I'm his brother-in-law, Jim Drew . . ."

Dimond beckoned him inside and picked up the murder weapon. He sprang his questions without preamble.

"Recognise this knife, Mr. Drew? Am I wrong in assuming that it was supplied by you?"

"What the devil - !" Again Avery was caught unprepared.

Dimond asked sardonically: "What was his ostensible use for it, Mr. Drew?" He gestured to the unfinished purse on the locker. "For his occupational therapy?"

"How - how did you know?" Grey-faced, Drew was like a man aroused from a nightmare, only dimly understood. "I - I'd no idea . . . How was I to know - ?"

"He did ask you to bring it in for his leather-work?" Dimond insisted.

"Yes. Yes! That's what he said. That's why he wanted it ground to a point - for cutting out the leather. B - but - " Drew raised his hands, floundering.

"But Dimond - " Avery, too, was still bemused. He waved towards the waiting nurse. "Why this?" His gesture embraced the whole group, the entire circumstances and dénouement. "Why drag her into it? What's it got to do with her?"

Dimond's brows arched in bland surprise. "You haven't guessed yet, Birdy? It's very simple. That's the person Paddy Coyne intended to kill. *He murdered Nurse Wakefield in mistake for Nurse Bingham!*"

* * *

Again Dimond was leaning over the bed, and again with a grasp on Nurse Bingham's arm.

"That's right, isn't it, Paddy? It was Nurse Bingham you intended to kill?"

Coyne's glare of hatred was in itself almost sufficient answer. But he confirmed it in words.

"Yes . . ." he whispered. "She's the one . . ."

"And evidently she had personal reason to realise it, Paddy. Because while you've been unconscious, Nurse Bingham has made a stealthy attempt to kill *you!*" Dimond's grip had tightened on the nurse's arm, and he shot Avery an ironic side-glance. "She tried to make sure, Paddy, that you'd never tell us what you're telling us now."

Dimond studied the haggard face, assessing the returning exhaustion.

"So tell us this, Paddy," he urged quietly. "Tell us why you wanted to kill Nurse Bingham?"

Balefully the doomed man's eyes turned up towards the nurse's stony face. With painful slowness his answer came.

"Yes . . . she knows why . . ." The whispered words were thick with venom. "That poisoner knows why! It was because . . . she . . . murdered . . . my wife . . .!"

And suddenly Dimond was grappling with a homicidal female wildcat.

14

The Fatal Factors

THE Dimond lounge, that evening. Sally was on the settee. Superintendent Avery, supplied with a drink, was comfortable in an easy chair. Rex Dimond, shaved and refreshed after a few hours in bed, was pouring himself a drink and providing explanations. Some of which were now known to Avery, but all of which were new to Sally.

"The killer of Nurse Wakefield was 'Paddy' Kevin Coyne, and it was the part-time nurse, Mrs. Bingham, whom he intended to kill. The motive was revenge. By a few questions he was able to answer when I went back to him this morning, I learned the origin of that motive.

"Three years ago, before she came to work at St. Bardolph's, Bingham was doing private nursing. She was then unmarried, but for convenience I'll refer to her as Bingham. One of her private patients was Paddy Coyne's ailing young wife. Bingham formed a passion for Coyne, which he did not reciprocate. Bingham couldn't believe that he was really impervious to her own attractions and convinced herself that he lacked the courage to leave his wife. That if the wife were out of the way, Coyne would reveal his passion for her.

"Mrs. Coyne died. Her death was certified as natural, but Coyne had suspicions aroused by the nurse's advances. Taxed by him, Nurse Bingham brazenly admitted that a few doses of arsenic she had administered had been responsible for Mrs. Coyne's death. Bingham was astounded when Coyne said he would report this admission to the police. But she had plenty of nerve, and dared him to do so. She warned him that if he did so she would accuse

him of being her lover and her accomplice in the murder. She asked him whether anyone would believe she had murdered his wife single-handed without being certain of his regard for herself. She threatened that she would say he was accusing her now from fear of discovery – to shift the entire blame on to her.

“This threat subdued Coyne. He hadn’t the nerve to go to the police – but he did end all contact with Nurse Bingham. When he became ill and came to St. Bardolph’s Hospital three years later, he was astonished to find Bingham there as a part-time nurse, now married to another man. Having a pretty good idea that he was doomed, Coyne determined that Bingham should not get away with his wife’s murder and see his own end as well. He determined that before his critical operation he would kill Bingham.

“I suggested at the beginning that the ‘C’ Ward murder could have been premeditated as an act, with time and place left to suitable opportunity. That’s how it was. All Coyne actually planned was to kill Bingham before his operation, in case he should be unable to do so afterwards. And there was a point we couldn’t appreciate. It wasn’t essential for him to avoid detection. He was prepared to kill her before witnesses if necessary. It’s ironic that, while careful killers have found their plans going wrong, Coyne avoided detection by sheer, unsought chance. He didn’t and couldn’t plan for an opportunity to murder Bingham unseen. That opportunity came to him – as it appeared.

“After finding Bingham on the staff he’d asked his brother-in-law to bring him in a sharply-pointed knife – for cutting out the leather in his occupational therapy. Coyne helped himself to a wad of gauze to wrap around the knife, which he kept hidden in his dressing-gown pocket. Then he waited for his chance.”

Sally said: “And it came on the morning of his operation!”

“So it seemed to him. On catching a rear view of Nurse ‘Bingham’ going into the linen room that morning, he hurried out of the ward, overtook her just inside the linen room – and stabbed her in the back before she could turn round. The gauze was clasped about the handle of the knife as he struck, so there were no fingerprints to wipe off even had he wanted to.”

Dimond glanced from Sally to Avery.

“It was here that Nurse Wakefield came tragically into the picture. And it was the circumstances responsible for Coyne’s mistake which put me on to the correct solution!”

"About time you came to that," Avery said. "As I understood it, your idea in watching Coyne was to protect him from Nurse Wakefield's killer."

"Originally," Dimond agreed. "And even before the incident with the plasma drip I was inclined to the belief that the killer must be somebody on the ward. Ferris wouldn't have brought the knife to that rendezvous unless he deliberately planned murder, in which case he would hardly have been stupid enough to neglect his more private opportunities and then take the risk of following his victim up to the linen room for the purpose. And Phillips would hardly have done that either, when he might have murdered her on the stairs."

"Why not someone else from outside?" Sally asked.

"Time didn't allow it, Sally. Between eight-twenty and eight-thirty we already had Ferris, Nurse Wakefield, Phillips and the day staff using the stairs and lift. It was only by the narrowest of margins that Phillips could have missed being seen. There was no time for someone else from outside to have made the trip up to the linen room, committed the murder and gone down again without being seen by either Ferris or Phillips. I'd come to the conclusion that Wakefield had been murdered in the linen room because the killer was already in its vicinity when she arrived there. In the ward entrance corridor or the ward itself."

Avery nodded. "Reasonable."

"And then, while watching over Coyne, I saw his strange antipathy to Nurse Bingham. His fear when she tended him -"

"Lucky you saw that, Dimond!" Avery commented.

Dimond's smile was faintly satirical. "You saw that fear yourself this morning, Birdy, and much more plainly - but what did you assume?"

Avery gave a rather sheepish grin. "I took it to mean that somehow she must have managed to murder Nurse Wakefield, and he'd seen -"

"That was the first thought that came to my mind, too. Like you, I knew there was someone at large on the ward who'd sabotaged the plasma drip, and it was natural to assume that the purpose had been to prevent him exposing Nurse Wakefield's killer. But then I came up against the fact of Nurse Bingham's alibi." Again there was a faint glimmer in Dimond's dark eyes. "As you kept reminding me, Birdy, Bingham had an alibi for the time of Wakefield's murder. Now even a suspect with a known motive cannot be guilty if he or she has had no opportunity to

commit the crime; but a person with a known opportunity may well prove to have a motive not previously suspected. So I gave Coyne's fear of Bingham some thought . . . I remembered that up to the drip incident Coyne had been a potential suspect as well as a potential witness – and suddenly I saw daylight!"

"How, exactly?" Sally demanded.

"The clue was right before our eyes! The nurse of whom Coyne was afraid was a blonde S.R.N. – and Nurse Wakefield had been a blonde S.R.N.!"

"By gosh – yes!" Avery said ruefully.

"I was no longer thinking of a killer who'd followed Nurse Wakefield up the stairs, with plenty of time to identify her as his intended victim. I was thinking of someone in or near the ward, who might have had only a fleeting glimpse of the victim as she crossed the short distance from the corner of the entrance corridor to the linen room door – "

"A couple of yards!" Avery said.

"And Wakefield would have been hurrying to get out of sight. She was stabbed in the back. If the killer had not been following her, he must have been in the ward or entrance corridor till she crossed to the linen room door. Have seen her for only that brief moment – and instantly rushed to strike the fatal blow. How, then, had he 'recognised' her as the person he intended to murder? What would be visible to him? Answer – her uniform and her hair."

"That was smart, Dimond," Avery acknowledged.

Dimond flashed him a grin. "But wait a minute! The victim was in S.R.N.'s uniform and had blonde hair. But to commit murder on the strength of those features alone, the killer must have felt absolutely sure of her identity. In his mind only his intended victim could have had those characteristics – S.R.N. uniform and blonde hair."

Sally interposed. "But the victim was *not* the only blonde in S.R.N. uniform. You've just said that Nurse Bingham is a blonde S.R.N. – "

"That's right. There's also another S.R.N. on 'C' Ward – Latimer, whose hair is dark. But the vital point is that *until the morning of the murder* there had been only one blonde S.R.N. on 'C' Ward! Bingham. On the morning of the murder, Wakefield was wearing S.R.N. uniform for the very first time!"

Avery slammed a fist down on his knee. "The point I left out of account!" he admitted frankly.

"The crucial point, Birdy. Nurse Wakefield's intention to wear S.R.N. uniform that morning was known to her boy friend and colleagues – but not to Coyne, who'd been on the ward only four days and had little contact with Wakefield. To him a blonde 'C' Ward S.R.N. was necessarily Bingham, because until the murder morning Bingham was the only blonde S.R.N. And there was a further circumstance conducing to his mistake –"

"Oh – ?"

"This. Nurse Wakefield was residential and normally came on duty with the other residential nurses, while Bingham lived out and came by bus. As you impressed on me, Birdy, Bingham's bus had been right on time on the morning of the murder, and Bingham had come on duty with the resident nurses. But you saw this morning that Bingham came on duty alone, after the resident staff, her bus being a little late!"

"But –"

"Buses don't vary only to be late, Birdy. Sometimes Bingham's bus must have been early – and Coyne must have seen Bingham arriving alone in advance of the resident staff. So when, on the morning of the murder, he saw the 'one-and-only' blonde S.R.N. arriving alone in advance of the resident staff, it would not enter his head that she could be anyone but Bingham. Realising that, I understood Coyne's fear of Bingham. The fear of a man regaining consciousness to see the living face of the woman he thought he had killed! Because of his mistake, Wakefield had died – and we had mistakenly looked for murder motives concerning *her!*"

Avery put down his empty glass. "So you staged this morning's drastic test of your idea, and –"

"And had Ferris and Phillips present so that they'd see for themselves that nothing was being hushed up, by either the police or the hospital authorities. Because Coyne will never be brought to trial. He will die unconvicted."

"But – Nurse Bingham!" Sally exclaimed.

"Mrs. Coyne's body will be exhumed, and if it substantiates Coyne's allegation . . ." Dimond shrugged. "Bingham's attempt to silence Coyne makes it pretty certain that arsenic will be found and that Birdy will be bringing somebody to trial through this affair. For the murder of Mrs. Coyne!"

Avery climbed to his feet. "Well," he acknowledged handsomely, "you've done it again, Dimond!"

Dimond gave a modest cough. He fetched something from the bureau and handed it to the superintendent.

"Here's a souvenir of the case for you, Birdy. Made by young Roy Dickens. He suggests it may be useful for carrying clues'n' things!" At Avery's expression, Dimond grinned. "And there's one other person with a souvenir that'll last him many a long day."

"Oh?" Sally, too, was getting up, and two pairs of questioning eyes were on Dimond. "Who's that?"

Again Dimond grinned.

"Our friend Mr. Withers!" he suggested humorously. "Can't you picture him for years to come, Birdy, every time murder's mentioned? 'When I was at St. Bardolph's . . .!'"

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Next month in **EWMM**

EDGAR WALLACE

"Planetoid 127"

PIERRE AUDEMARS

"Aces High"

VERN HANSEN

"The Knocker-man"

WILLIAM SHAND

"You Can't Cheat the Rope"

- and other stories



EDGAR WALLACE MYSTERY MAGAZINE No. 5
will be on sale **Saturday, 14th November**. Readers
are advised to order in advance.

The two men came round the corner behind him, one big, one small, their faces grotesque blobs in stocking masks with hats perched incongruously on top of them. The bigger man carried a pick handle . . .

**William
Shand**

THE SWINGING MAN

Crime writer John Creasey once stated in a review column that a William Shand novel would "please hosts of readers who recall the heyday of 'Sapper' and Edgar Wallace with real nostalgia." Shand, author of the "Tempest" books published by Herbert Jenkins, is a Midlander now living in the South. His relaxations include listening to classical music and jazz; he says: "I am a beatnik-cum-square." He has used jazz backgrounds for several novels and stories including *Death on a High Note* and *Death and Little Girl Blue*.

WHEN Magdala came running in from the back, screaming, Sammy Alexis was halfway through a song.

"The man with the saw-toothed tonsils" they called him. He had a rasping, singed-round-the-edges tone that made the boys growl to imitate him and gave the girls goose-pimples. He was olive-skinned, droopy-eyed, sophisticated, but with a lithe boyish look.

He used his body as well as his voice. He used every inch of the tiny stage while his pianist, the tiny coloured boy called Pip, grinned and nodded as he tickled the keys and gave out now and then with a little yelp of approbation.

The voice; the atmosphere. They went together. The subdued lighting. The sooty brick walls daubed with messy murals. The lack of ventilation; the blue smoke wreathing everything like a commuter's dream. The 'pub' chairs and tables in thick mahogany-coloured wood with cast-iron legs flowered and scrolled, heavy, hideous with chipped green paint.

The fans loved the atmosphere, smoke and all; and the rasping Alexis voice cutting through it like a vibrating buzz-saw.

The entrance to the club was camouflaged by a dust-stinking curtain at the bottom of hollowed stone steps. The fire-exit,

a narrow battered door beside the pocket-handkerchief stage, led to the lavatories and the yard and the small annexe where the artistes and band-boys changed. It was through this door that Magdala Crone burst, yelling blue murder, eyes enormous in dead-white face, blonde hair dishevelled as if she had been tearing at it with both hands.

"Sammy," she screamed. "*Sammy!*"

Alexus stopped in mid-verse as if his windpipe had been slashed. The stage was raised about four feet from the floor. At the side



were four wooden steps. Magdala ran at these as if they weren't there. Her knees hit the second one and she sprawled half on the stage, half off it, her green satin dress swirling around her plump flanks, showing white panties edged with lace.

She kept on screaming. She scabbled at the boards with her red fingernails as if something had broken inside her and she couldn't move her body any more; only scream, and scream . . .

While the customers milled nearer to the stand with questions, suggestions, Sammy Alexis lifted Magdala the rest of the way. He

held her erect with one hand and slapped her smartly on the cheek with the other.

She was sobbing brokenly when he half-carried her to the chair which the pianist had vacated. "Get her a drink, Pip," he said, and the coloured boy nodded and jumped down from the stand.

Two young male customers pushed out through the tiny fire exit and soon returned, both as pale and wide-eyed as Magdala had been.

While one of them stood as if in a trance, unaware of the questions being thrown at him from all sides, the other climbed onto the stand.

"It's Rafe Benson," he said hoarsely. "He's - he's hanging!"

* * *

He was a very tall man and the pointed toes of his evening shoes almost brushed the cobblestones. It seemed as if his body had been wrung out, stretched, hung up to dry. His long shadow was thrown on the wall by the unshaded light which hung over the entrance of the Ladies Toilet, where Magdala had been going when she saw him.

Magdala was Sammy Alexis' girl and she didn't really have to use the club's outside toilets. Alexis' flat was only next door - its windows overlooked the yard where the strangled body swung - and she could enter that at any time. But the lift was out of order - Alexis confirmed this later - and she hadn't felt like climbing the stairs.

So she had gone out the back and she had seen him swinging there. *Rafe Benson*. She wouldn't have known it was Rafe were it not for the length of him. He was the tallest horn-player in the business. His head was crooked and his face bloated, unrecognisable in the shadows and the sickly light.

Pip 'phoned the police. Alexis left the sobbing Magdala with two girls from the audience. Then he went outside.

"Don't touch him," he cried. "No, I shouldn't touch him!"

Rafe Benson was dead all right. Nobody could dispute that fact.

His saxophone-playing in the old days had been notable for its technical ingenuity. He had used the same kind of ingenuity for this, his last appearance, his ironical and terrible comeback.

2

THE Sammy Alexis Club was in the semi-basement ground floor of a soap warehouse. Behind the club was an apartment building which, being L-shaped, ran next door to the warehouse. Sammy Alexis had an apartment in the building and, on his arrival from the States the day before, Rafe Benson had taken a place there, too.

It was a very old building and had been reinforced and buttressed. At the back iron bars stuck out of the wall at intervals. The renovations had been cheaply and carelessly done. One of the iron bars protruded beside Rafe Benson's third-floor window and the rope had been thrown over this improvised hanging-tree. The end of the rope was tied to another bar at ground-level, fairly high up but not too far for the beanpole Benson. The other end of the rope became the dangling noose.

Benson had stood on an old tea-chest, part of the junk that had collected in a corner of the littered yard. The dirty tar-spattered rope had come from the same source; Benson could have smuggled it upstairs; or even thrown it . . .

He had placed the noose around his neck. Then he had jumped from his improvised perch. He had evidently kicked the tea-chest over on its side as he choked to death. He couldn't have saved himself at the last moment even had he tried.

* * *

All this must have been noted by the inspector from Scotland Yard who handled the case. His name was Caydell and he had a pronounced Northern accent and a fish-like eye. He asked questions haphazardly and didn't seem to hear the answers; or, if he did, acted as if he disbelieved them.

Lurking behind his lean figure in the earlier stages was a blockier individual, a cockney sergeant called Loames. He it was who eventually did most of the quizzing of the club members before they were allowed to leave.

"What with the both of 'em," one long-haired youth was heard to say, "you'd have thought Rafe Benson had been murdered and we'd had something to do with it. As if it was some kind of conspiracy maybe between us all."

"Maybe it was, sort of," said his girl, a beautiful creature with

serious eyes behind modish spectacles. "We didn't like his playing and we made him know it. We gave him the bird. And he used to be one of the great ones. He was nervous . . ."

"He was tanked," said the boy. "He was tanked to the gills. Are you trying to say that because we razzed him a bit, he went out there an' hanged himself?"

"Musicians are queer folk," said the girl.

Sergeant Loames said very much the same thing to his chief as they faced each other across a desk that night.

And Caydell said darkly, "I've had my eye on that singin' bloke and his club for some time."

Loames didn't take much notice of this. It was his private opinion that the inspector had a sort of a thing about clubs.

But Caydell was quite right, of course, when he said: "There's something queer about this case. Such an elaborate way for a man to do himself in! To hang himself in that way, in that particular place. Bloody queer fish, some of these jazz people, as you say. But you can't explain it all away just like that. There are other things!"

"The abrasions on the forehead and face. Yes, sir. The bruised hands and broken nails . . ."

"Precisely. Yes. The hands and nails he got from the wall of course. In trying to save himself at the last moment. Or maybe in just swinging against the bricks. The wounds on the head and the face could've been caused in the same way . . ."

"There's the one pretty high up . . ."

"Yes, almost as if he butted his head against the wall in a dying frenzy . . . or was cracked over the head beforehand an' then strung up!

"We'll know more when we get the full medical report," Caydell went on. "In any case, I want to go over that yard thoroughly by daylight in the morning. And interview that blonde who found the body, give her a better doing when she's got over her hysteria - preferably when she hasn't got her boyfriend to lean on either. That singer! Whatsisname?"

"Sammy Alexis, sir."

"Yes. There's a moniker to go to bed with." Caydell clapped his hands together over the littered desk. "Well, what else have we got for tomorrow? This club business 'ull probably turn out to be a straight suicide after all. I'm reserving judgement for a bit, that's all. So what's left, barring a massacre during the night or something?"

"There's that Notting Hill dope-slashing case, sir."

"Let's have a run-through on that then, huh, before we close up shop!"

* * *

"A clarinet," said Magdala Crone. "I didn't know you had a clarinet."

Alexus turned away violently from the bed. His dark eyes looked mean.

"Don't creep up on me like that!"

Magdala looked strained, surprised. She held her key up and dangled it on its ring.

"I didn't ring the bell. You've never objected before. It's the first time you've ever moaned about my coming into your bedroom without knocking, too. And I didn't creep up on you. I just happen to be wearing my ballet shoes."

She did a little pirouette on her toes. She had discarded the green dress she wore at the club and had on a brief fluted skirt which swirled around her thighs as she spun. Her yellow blouse was almost the exact colour of her glossy hair. She obviously wasn't wearing a brassiere, but her breasts were high and firm, the nipples pressing darkly and prominently against the soft silk.

Sammy's petulant rage died as he looked. Something about Magdala always made him go soft inside. He was a man attractive to women and he had had many of them. While barely out of his teens he had married a woman much older than himself, an agent who got him his first break. He had got out of this as soon as he could without damaging his career. The woman died of drink years later. Sammy Alexis hadn't made another permanent attachment since. That is, until Magdala came along. They planned to get married as soon as they could find the time.

Alexus had been singing with a band at a debs' ball and Magdala had been one of the debs. Among the rest of the insipid females and their equally insipid escorts she blazed out like a wild flame.

Alexus found a way to meet her. They struck sparks from each other right away. They became lovers that same night, that magical early morning . . .

How right they were together! Nothing had changed between them since that first time.

Sammy Alexis placed the sections of the clarinet in the black oblong leather case. He bent and put the case beneath the bed.

"I couldn't stay at home," Magdala said.

"We'll go away," said Alexis. "Just you and me. We'll show the world."

"Oh, yes, Sammy. Yes, please!"

He grinned; a flash of white teeth showing in his swarthy face. "Not right now. We have other things to do right now. Let's not waste time in case the cops are on their way to grab us and clap us in the nick."

"You don't mean that," cried Magdala, frowning. Then her face cleared. "No, you're joshing me . . ."

"Do you love me, Sammy?"

"Yes, I love you."

3

YOUNG Constable Jones couldn't understand why he should be required to watch the dead man's flat. A crazy saxophone-player who had committed suicide. Jazzmen! Show-offs all of 'em! The man had even chosen an exhibitionist's way when he wanted to do himself in. No consideration for other people. No consideration at all!

Jones was a newly-married man. He would have much preferred to be at home in bed with his lovely plump blonde wife instead of standing in a draughty hallway, evading the snoopings of the apartment house's myriad rubbernecks.

But finally it seemed that at last everybody had had a go at him in one way or another. And now the building slept. The lift ceased to whirr and bump, the footsteps to echo. One by one the radios and record-players and televisions closed down and Constable Jones was left with his lonely vigil.

He wanted his wife; he wanted her badly. This was the first full night they would have spent apart since their marriage. It was inevitable, of course. They had been lucky. The only way to avoid lonely nights for both of them was for Jones to cease being a copper. He had been thinking seriously of handing in his resignation.

He sighed gustily. He got a packet of cigarettes out of his tunic pocket, looking surreptitiously around him before he put one in his mouth. The night was becoming cold, the draught more penetrating. He cursed as his first match was blown out. He turned towards the wall as he struck another, cupping his large pink hands round the flame.

The two men came around the corner behind him, one big, one

small, their faces grotesque blobs in stocking masks with hats perched incongruously on top of them. He must have heard them, sensed them. He dropped the match and his cigarette, still unlighted. He began to turn.

The bigger of the two men carried a brand-new pick handle. He swung this up and over and brought it down on Jones' head with a crack, knocking his helmet off. The young man clawed at air, mouth open and yammering as he tried to shout. But he only made little gasping sounds as he bent and weaved. The big man hit him again, squarely on his unprotected head, and he pitched on his face and lay still.

The second man was already trying the door. "It's locked of course," he said, his words muffled by the stocking worn tightly over small features.

He turned, looked down at the prostrate constable whose brown hair was already widely stained with blood.

"You hit him pretty hard, Mike."

"He's a big 'un. I had to keep him down."

"Let's get this door open, get him out of sight. Keep watch."

"Okay, Patsy."

Patsy took out a small penknife, opened it, got to work on the lock. Now it was as if his brutish companion and the immobile blue-uniformed figure at his feet were no longer there. He was completely absorbed in what he was doing. He was an expert; his penknife was in actuality a carefully-filed lockpicker's instrument.

"Got it!" he said finally in muffled triumph. "Drag him in here."

He opened the door and Mike dragged the inert blue body into the dark room. The other man crossed to the window and pulled the drapes to, glancing briefly at the yard below before making sure no chink of light would escape.

"Stay right where you are, Mike."

"Okay, Patsy."

Patsy crossed the room unerringly in the darkness. He passed Mike, his foot brushing, too, the still form on the carpet. He made sure the door was firmly closed and then he switched on the light.

"Put that thing down," he said and with a huge gloved hand Mike placed the bloodstained pick-handle carefully on a nearby armchair.

"Let's start looking. No banging or thumping or knocking things over. We don't want the neighbours snooping. You start in here. I'll take the bedroom."

"Okay, Patsy."

"Don't just stand there then!"

* * *

Patsy himself was beginning to move when he paused to look down at the inert policeman. He got down carefully on his haunches. He raised the limp wrist and felt for the pulse. He let the large hand fall with a plop to the carpet. He lifted an eyelid. A sightless milky eye stared back at him.

"He's finished."

"Hey?" said Mike turning away from an open sideboard drawer.

"You've killed him, you bloody witless ape!"

"Oh!"

Patsy rose in disgust and marched into the bedroom. Like an automaton, Mike went on with his searching. Presently, however, he knocked over a small table lamp and the bulb smashed with a loud report.

Patsy ran in. Mike, on his knees collecting the pieces, looked up sheepishly.

"Oh, Christ, I should've had more bloody sense than to bring a moron like you with me."

"How about the copper?"

"Oh, yes, I had somebody for the copper all right! An' if I'm caught here, I stand fair to be topped for murder . . .! Leave that alone. The damage's done. All of it! Go over to the door and listen."

"Sure, Patsy." Mike rose, crossed the room bent-shouldered, humbly.

Patsy looked about him at the mess Mike had made. He hadn't done so badly before he knocked over the lamp. But he hadn't found anything.

Patsy hadn't been lucky either. He stood cogitating, and he got himself an idea. But first to finish up here, just in case. You never know! There might be a hiding-place they'd missed.

"There ain't a sound out here," Mike said.

"Let's finish the job then," said Patsy. "It looks to me though as if the boss was right - we've been double-crossed."

4

SOMEWHERE in the swirling dark mists of nightmareland a gun went off.

Sammy Alexis jerked awake. He was sweating and trembling and for a moment he didn't know where he was. Then he saw the square of the window and the familiar pattern of the tied-back drapes. He sat up in bed and the clothes fell down to his waist and the cold air struck at his naked body like a douche.

He remembered the events of the night and shuddered. He told himself it was the cold that affected him, after the perspiring terror that had been the aftermath of his nightmare.

As his eyes became accustomed to the darkness he looked down at the girl beside him. One arm was out of the clothes and the flesh of her shoulder and breast was pearly, her hair a wealth of deep gold dappled with shadows.

Here, in the deep night when a man's spirit is at the lowest ebb, Sammy Alexis began to wish he was back in yesterday; in any one of the yesterdays that had passed since he first met Magdala . . .

He remembered then the bang that had awakened him. Had that been only part of the nightmare, too? Part of the horror and the uncertainty, the terrible sick feeling of inevitability?

But the night was so silent, so peaceful. The world was outside and he was snug here with his love. And perhaps the violent sound had only been something from that other world - a car backfire maybe; an electric lamp bursting . . .

He nursed his knees and stared at the window. Though he didn't mean to do so, he was still listening, still straining his ears. He was reluctant to lie down again. But he was still cold. So he tried to draw the blankets up around his shoulders.

A little voice at his side said, "What's the matter, Sammy? You woke me up."

He looked down at her. Her eyes were large and softly-shining, her lips full, faintly-parted.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to disturb you."

"Lie down. You're pulling all the clothes off me."

She reached her arms out to him and he slid slowly down the bed.

It was warm down there. It was safe and cosy. And there was a soft, cajoling woman . . . who became a demanding woman. And for a time a man could give himself over; and he could forget.

Afterwards they sat up in bed, the clothes pulled up around them, tent-like. They lit cigarettes, watching the blue smoke curl away in the soft gloom lit only by the square of the window.

But even then other things were not far from the surface of their minds and, finally, as if thinking aloud, Magdala said:

"Why did he do it, Sammy?"

"He - he was at the end of his tether I guess. You don't remember him from the old days . . ."

"I've heard his records, though. They were superb . . ."

"That's just it! They were! That lanky cuss swung like nobody else - except maybe Bird. But he tried too hard. He worked too hard. He couldn't stand it. He had to be better all the time, better than anybody else. It was as if he was striving for the unattainable . . ."

"Then, when he couldn't make it, he seemed to turn in on himself and go bitter. He had always been a drinker. He began to be a real lush. Dope, too! His playing suffered and he began to have difficulty in getting dates. Then his crack-up came and he sank out of sight.

"It all happened in such a short space of time really. It's only a few years since I met him in a club in New York where he was playing to capacity crowds every night. I was planning this place then. I told myself that some day soon I'd have Rafe Benson at my own club.

"Later, of course, I didn't think I would and didn't think he'd be any good to me anyway. Then I heard he was making a comeback. He was off the booze and the other stuff . . ."

Sammy Alexis spread his hands in the darkness, disregarding the live ash that fell on the bedclothes.

"I got him over here."

"And he let you down," said Magdala. "And he let himself down."

"Yes, I guess he was sick and just didn't have the confidence. He started drinking. I caught him with a bottle and took it off him. He must've got more. His playing was awful. You know. It was awful! And the audience told him so. He was finished. He must've been on the brink of suicide for a long time, I guess . . ."

"But why do it in that way?" said Magdala. "Bringing so much pain and fear and worry to other people! To you! When I saw him there, I . . ."

She broke off with a sob. She grabbed Alexis' hand and held onto it hard.

"Don't think about it anymore," he said. "I guess he just couldn't stand it, you see. Being jeered at! He had to show 'em. He had to show everybody. The poor devil! He had to have his last show.

"He always was a good showman. I'm told that when things were getting bad for him he played in a rock-and-roll group for a time - a honking horn. He wore his hair halfway down his back and a glaring check suit two sizes too big for him. Until folks started to say he had turned queer . . ."

They sat in silence then, holding hands, till presently Magdala said in a soft hesitant voice:

"That's his clarinet you've got, isn't it, Sammy? I know he didn't play it. But I wondered why you wanted it, why you seemed so savage when I saw you with it . . ."

"I was jumpy, I guess - startled when you crept in. It was nothing to do with the clarinet. It's a souvenir. Rafe would've wanted me to have it. I used to play clarinet sometimes in my dance-band days, y'know. I wasn't much good. I -"

The shrilling of a bell stopped Alexis.

"The door!" said Magdala.

"Yes. I wonder who the hell that can be at this time o' night."

The bell went on with its shrill plea, as if somebody was leaning on the button.

"Whoever it is, they don't intend to give up," whispered Magdala. "Maybe it's the police. Hadn't you better go and see, Sammy?"

"I suppose so."

Reluctantly, Alexis got out of bed. He threw on his dressing gown and padded out on bare feet through the half-open middle door.

Their passion had been so great the first time that night, they had not closed the bedroom door behind them, and there was a trail of discarded garments running back into the living room.

* * *

Magdala heard him open the outer door. Then there were scuffling footsteps and a sharp cry as of somebody in pain. Then the sound of the door closing again.

"Sammy!" she cried.

She got out of bed, ran to the light switch and clicked it on.

Alexis staggered backwards into the room, the side of his face

bleeding. Following him came two men, one big, one small. They had stockings pulled over their faces and their hats perched incongruously atop of them. They looked like something out of a horror movie. The big one carried what looked like a pick handle.

The naked girl opened her mouth to scream and the big man hit her savagely. She slumped to the carpet. Her face and head were a pulped mass of blood.

Sammy Alexis backed against the wall, his hand up to his own bloodied face.

"God!" he cried shrilly. "You've killed her!"

The smaller man whirled rat-like on his companion.

"You maniac! I told you . . ."

Alexis ran out and across the living-room, wrenched at the door, got it open.

Anxious to make amends, the bull-like Mike charged in pursuit. But he had the door slammed in his face.

"We haven't got time to chase him now," said Patsy from the middle door. "He's yellow. He won't do anything. We can catch up with him later."

Mike joined him and they began their search. Mike got down beside the nude body of the girl. He touched her. She was cold.

He reached under the bed. "I've got it, Patsy," he cried like a delighted child. "I've got it!"

He clambered to his feet, holding the black oblong case in both large hands. Patsy snatched it from him. He put it on the bed and opened it.

"It hasn't been interfered with," he said. "Come on. Let's get out of here!"

5

THERE was nobody in the lighted lobby when Sammy Alexis ran through it and out onto the pavement. The street was silent and empty; there was nobody to see the wild-eyed man in dressing gown and bare feet.

Gasping, Alexis trotted down the street.

Then, suddenly, he paused. It was as though an awareness had gripped him and he realized where he was and what he was doing.

He took a few more slow steps and turned into the alley-cum-drive which ran beside the old apartment house, on the opposite side to the warehouse and club. There was just room here for a fair-sized car - for a couple of pedestrians to walk in single file and

squeeze by as a car passed. There were cobblestones and a drain down the middle to let off the rain.

Around the corner at the end of the drive was the row of garages. In front of these, a car was parked, turned round ready for driving into the street. Alexis knew the cars of the other residents. He had never seen this one before. It was a metallic grey colour, and fast-looking.

He went on to his own garage at the end. He didn't have his key. But the lock was faulty anyway. He got his fingers around the edge of one of the doors and, after a bit of tugging, got it open. He didn't bother about the other one.

He skirted his own car slowly, getting his eyes accustomed to the gloom which was broken only by a window at the side, not far from the rickety work-bench. He hadn't used the car for some time – he preferred taxis. The place had been shut up and there was a throat-gagging smell of petrol.

The floor was icy to Alexis' bare feet. One of them stung abominably and had a gummy feel about it. His wounded cheek prickled and smarted.

He reached the work-bench and bent and lifted from beneath it a tin of petrol. From the shelf above he took down an empty milk bottle, one of the narrow-necked variety.

He found another milk bottle but it was of the wide sort and did not suit his purpose. He put it gently aside. He found a pop-bottle on the floor half-full of liquid. This proved to be merely dirty water which he poured away.

Using a funnel he tipped petrol into both bottles. He stopped the necks with strips torn from an oily duster, leaving a fair amount dangling in each case.

Carrying the bottles carefully, one in each hand, he left the garage, hooking the door to behind him with his foot. He paused by the grey car to listen, but there was no sound.

He turned the corner and went down the drive-alley and did not stop until he reached the small alcove almost at the bottom. He didn't know why the alcove was there. Maybe it was a shelter for pedestrians in danger from speeding cars; though that hardly seemed likely somehow. Probably it was just a minor architectural freak.

He drew himself back into the dark alcove. It might have been built – been left like this – specially for this night. He placed the bottles carefully on the ground in front of him.

He had a spare lighter, as usual, in his dressing gown. He had

not dared to light it before for fear of being spotted. A chain-smoker, this was one of the four lighters he owned. Of tarnished gun-metal, it was cheap and ancient. But it was more reliable even than the gold one Magdala had bought him for his birthday.

He took the lighter from the pocket of the dressing gown and cupped it in his hand.

He heard the quick footsteps, the thud-thud of rubber soles on the hard pavement. Then the two men went past along the alley. They weren't wearing their stocking masks and the big man probably had his pick handle hidden under his raincoat. The little one was carrying the clarinet. Though Alexis had wanted it so badly once, they were welcome to it now.

He waited patiently. He heard them start the car up. He clicked on his lighter and it flamed at the first go. The car came round the corner and he picked up one bottle and lit the fuse.

He stepped out of the alcove and threw the bottle as the flame seared his face. He dimly saw the car bearing down on him, and then the deadly cocktail burst on its bonnet in a *whoosh* of flame.

The car swerved and piled up against the wall and he heard screaming. He lit the fuse on the second bottle and threw it unerringly, as if tossing a cricket ball to a bowler from the edge of the field.

This one burst fully on the car and the whole structure became virtually hidden by flames. There was no sound then, except for the crackling of wood and the popping of metal.

Alexis turned away and walked into the street.

He was at the pay-phone in the lobby of the apartment house when he heard the explosion.

6

“WE used him,” he said. “All he wanted was a chance to make a comeback – and we used him.”

He spread his hands out, palms upward on the desk and looked at Inspector Caydell with eyes full of appeal and anguish.

“They used him first over there in the States. They booked him in at clubs . . . fancy ones, but obscure. Not places used by the regular jazz-public. Places where people wouldn't realise just how bad the great Rafe Benson had become. He was the passer for the dope-ring, handing the stuff to pushers all over the States. He carried a clarinet around like most sax-players do. Rafe never

bothered much with a clarinet but there was nothing strange about his carrying one. It was specially made. It was playable even. But drugs could be packed into it, too.

"When he came over here, though, it was diamonds, and this time he didn't even know. We used him. I used him, God forgive me . . ."

Alexus let his head fall sideways, bruised side upwards, on the desk beneath the lamp. It was not yet daylight and the blind was still down at the window. The office was cool and quiet and melancholy.

Tears spilled from Alexis' eyes and trickled down his mutilated cheek. Caydell exchanged glances with Sergeant Loames who stood over by the door.

"He was the greatest," mumbled Alexis. "In the old days . . . Nobody swung like him . . . Nobody . . ."

"Get on with what you were telling us, man!" said Caydell.

Alexus pulled himself upright but kept his eyes down, not looking at the inspector, speaking downwards at the desk but speaking clearly now.

"Though Rafe didn't know it, it wasn't the same clarinet he brought over here. There'd been a switch. He didn't think he was running anything this time. He thought he was finished with that business. In his state of health he wouldn't have got the stuff through the customs anyway. Those boys are smart. He would've given himself away.

"It was a risk. But it was his risk. They'd covered themselves well the other side. If the diamonds had been discovered, who would've been in the shit? Not me! Not those smart boys over there.

"I was to borrow the clarinet and take it to Hymie the fence. I didn't know Rafe was going to hang himself. When I didn't turn up, Hymie sent those two boys. You know the rest . . ."

He was silent momentarily while the two patient coppers watched him, waited to see if he had anything to add.

Then he mumbled, "Do diamonds burn? I dunno! Maybe you'll be able to save 'em from that fire . . ."

He looked up then, and around him; at Loames and then back to Caydell.

"I had to do it, y'see . . . After what they did to Magdala . . . After what happened . . . we did to Rafe . . ."

Somebody knocked on the door and the inspector called "Come in."

It was a plainclothesman.

"Constable Jones is dead, sir. We found him inside Benson's flat. They'd been in there, too, and turned the place over completely. The lock was picked by an expert and the door locked up nicely afterwards. Jones was probably killed by the same weapon that was used on the girl."

"A pick handle," said Sammy Alexis. "That big bastard used a pick handle."

"How about the girl?" said Inspector Caydell.

"The doc says she'll be all right when her face heals. She looked a whole lot worse than she really was . . ."

"The girl?" said Sammy Alexis. "The girl! Magdala? *Magdala!*"

He started to his feet. Sergeant Loames intercepted him to hold his arm as he stood, trembling.

"Thank you, Jenkins, you can go," said Caydell, and the second man left the room.

"What did he mean?" said Sammy Alexis. "What did he mean about the girl? Magdala?"

"You heard what the officer said. Miss Magdala Crone is going to be all right . . ."

"She's not dead? This isn't some kind of a trick? Why . . .?"

"Don't talk wet, man. You heard the officer. They killed a police-constable. But your girl's going to be all right."

"Killed a copper," said Sammy Alexis.

He began to splutter. "Killed a copper! But Magdala's goin' to be all right."

He began to laugh.

Loames shook him. "Stop it!" he said.

Alexis laughed in a series of shrill, gulping yelps that shook his body in great spasms in the sergeant's grasp. Loames' square face became suffused with crimson. He raised his free hand, balled the fingers.

He caught his superior's eyes and he let the fist drop.

"Take him away," said Inspector Caydell tonelessly. "And let's have a couple of cars and some men so we can call on Hymie and his rats."

"Yes, sir," said Loames, and he led Sammy Alexis still laughing from the room.

TRUE CRIME

THE MONSTER OF DUS- SELDORF

re-told by

T. C. H. Jacobs

The popularity of the *Kriminalroman* (detective story) in Germany is largely due to the wide circulation of the translated works of that great master, Edgar Wallace. The German police thought so highly of his astute reasoning, knowledge of the criminal mind and his ability as a detective, that they did him the unprecedented honour of inviting him to co-operate with them in their investigation into the Dusseldorf Murders. But Wallace did not figure in the finale to the gruesome affair. A peasant girl, a wife's betrayal, and chance, brought about the mass murderer's unmasking.

PETER KURTEN'S reign of terror lasted nearly two years. During that time the entire resources of the efficient German police were mobilised against him. Yet when he was finally brought to trial the impression he created was one of astonishment . . . that this sadistic monster should be so calm, polite, softly-spoken and mild in appearance. He seemed to be a gentle, pleasant personality, a man of high intelligence and a quite remarkable memory. There was not a trace of anything vicious or abnormal about him.

But he had killed men, women, children, birds and animals for the sheer sadistic thrill of killing. He displayed every abnormality known to medical science, including pyromania and delusions of grandeur. On his own confession he was only nine years of age when he murdered two companions by drowning them in the Rhine. At sixteen he attempted his first murder of an adult.

His wife had no illusions about his moral character, but she had not the faintest suspicion that he was the man who had brought such terror to Dusseldorf. His friends and neighbours were sure the police had made a terrible blunder when they arrested him.

Frau Kurten worked at a café and frequently it was the

small hours of the morning before she was able to leave work. When the terror was at its height in Dusseldorf she was so nervous that she asked her husband to meet and escort her home. This he did regularly, sometimes coming straight from some horrible murder to 'protect' his wife.

After his arrest Kurten was kept under close and constant examination by the most distinguished psychiatrists in Germany. They were unanimous in declaring that he was fully aware of what he was doing when he committed crimes so atrocious that the public were excluded from Court while the details were being revealed by medical witnesses.

Among the most gruesome were the vampire and werewolf features, it being Kurten's practice and chief satisfaction to drink the blood of his victims as it poured from their wounds. In one case, being baulked of a human victim, he cut off the head of a swan and drank the bird's blood. This was not something invented by the defence to prove insanity. The dead bird had actually been found at the time.

Kurten was forty-eight when he was executed. He had spent twenty of those years in prison for various crimes. Yet no one recognised the dangerous quality of the man, because he was such a model prisoner. Even in prison, as a hospital orderly, he managed to secure poisonous drugs to cause the death of fellow prisoners - crimes which remained unsuspected until his own confession.

The long series of murders and attempted murders which held the population of Dusseldorf in terror, began in February, 1929 with the discovery of the body of an eight-year-old-girl, Rose Ohliger, on a building site. Her clothes had been soaked in paraffin, but because they were wet had only charred. The body had been lying for several hours in pouring rain before the attempt to burn it had taken place.

Medical examination revealed that the child had been stabbed thirteen times in her temples and left side after being strangled. This outrage followed an attack the previous Sunday night on Frau Kuher, who had been seized from behind and stabbed in no less than twenty-four places. The wounds in her temple were identical in character with those inflicted on the child. Her assailant had left her for dead, but after some weeks in hospital she recovered. She had not seen the man, the assault being carried out so swiftly that she had had no opportunity to defend herself.

Two days later another murder of identical pattern was com-

mitted, but this time it was a man, Rudolf Scheer, powerfully built, and forty-five years of age. There was no sign of a struggle. This second murder presented the police with a problem, because the theory of a sex maniac fell down. This assassin attacked either sex.

On April 2nd a sixteen-year-old girl, Erna Pinner was lassoed from behind. It was a raw, cold night and she had turned up her thick coat collar. Unquestionably this saved her from strangulation. As she lay on the ground a man came down beside her and tried to strangle her with his hands. She was a strong girl and she fought desperately, screaming for help. Her assailant slipped the rope from her neck and vanished into the darkness.

Twenty-four hours later another woman, Frau Flake, was attacked in similar circumstances. But as she was being dragged by the neck a man and woman appeared from the fields adjoining the road, and again the assailant made off.

The neighbourhood in which these attacks took place was on the outskirts of the city, where fields led into extensive pine woods. Neither the man nor the woman could give any clear description, except that he appeared to be young, made a peculiar snarling noise, and ran with a forward stoop, like an animal.

From this sketchy description the police arrested Hans Strausberg, a twenty-one-year-old epileptic, living in a refuge for the homeless. He had a cleft palate and hare lip and could only talk with difficulty. Strausberg was found unfit to plead and confined in an asylum. Dusseldorf breathed again now that the terror had been removed from its midst.

But not for long.

On the night of July 30th, Emma Gross was strangled in the room she rented in a low class hotel. On August 21st, three separate attacks were made – on two women and a man. Fortunately, none proved fatal, although serious wounds were inflicted.

Unbalanced criminal minds tend to imitate previous crimes which have received wide publicity. The police thought this was happening now. Strausberg was safely in custody, but other lunatics were carrying on the terror. To combat this new danger, squads of plainclothes officers patrolled the lonely outskirts.

On Sunday, August 24th a new wave of terror swept through the city. On an allotment the bodies of two children were found, both girls, lying between rows of runner beans. The same afternoon twenty-six-year-old Gertrude Schulte, a domestic servant, was stabbed with such force that the knife point broke off and

remained lodged in her spine.

Two young men heard her screams and came running. She was barely conscious when they arrived. An ambulance was called and she was rushed to hospital, where an emergency operation saved her life. When later she was able to make a statement all she could tell the police was that her assailant seemed a nice, polite man, fair and about thirty years old.

Kurten at that time was forty-seven. He was fair and he used rouge and cosmetics. No doubt to a casual 'pick-up' he looked younger than he was, but that didn't help the harrassed police.

A popular agitation began for the release of Strausberg, whom no one now believed was the monster. However, Strausberg was certified as insane enough to be kept in the asylum, guilty or not.

A month later the terror boiled up again.

Ida Reuter, a domestic servant, and Elisabeth Dorrier, unemployed, were found in exactly similar circumstances, their underclothes torn to ribbons as if in a frenzy of lunatic rage. A hammer was the instrument of death. Neither woman had been first strangled.

Officers of the Berlin C.I.D. who had been called in, agreed with the Dusseldorf police that there must be a number of sex maniacs at work, because the crimes differed in methods of operation. They were working on the theory, usually valid, that criminals seldom alter their methods. The best detective brains of Berlin had no more success than the local police.

Murders and attempted murders went on with mounting horror in the public mind. Then the newspaper *Freiheit* received a letter which pointed out the exact spot where the bodies of two victims could be found. A map drawn on grey wrapping paper was enclosed showing where the second body lay. Only the murderer could have given such precise information.

The first body was that of Gertrude Albermann, aged five, concealed among rubble and heavy growths of weeds. The second was that of a nude young woman, buried in woodland. Twenty-five wounds had been made in her temples, breasts and abdomen, all inflicted with the savage ferocity of a maniac. The body was eventually identified as that of Maria Hahn, the housekeeper of a novelist, who had given up her employment with him the previous week.

Investigations revealed that Maria Hahn had been seen in company with a man wearing heavy horn-rimmed glasses, smart in appearance, about thirty years of age. This, vague though it was,

tallied with other descriptions of the mass murderer.

It was on May 14th that Maria Budlick came to Dusseldorf, hoping to find work in the city. Mindful of the dreadful tales she had read of the Dusseldorf Vampire, she was very wary when a man spoke to her at the railway station. But when he offered to find her a womans' hostel where she could stay the night, she went with him. However, when he tried to induce her to enter a large public park so late at night, she refused. It was then a second man appeared.

Maria appealed to him for help and the first man hurried away. The newcomer was nicely-mannered and well-spoken, and seemed such a thoroughly reliable type that the girl had every confidence in him. She told him she was hungry and needed a night's lodging.

"If you care to come to my flat I can give you a meal," he said kindly. "But my wife wouldn't like you to stay the night. I do know, however, of a small hotel which is quite cheap."

Maria gratefully accepted his offer and walked with him to his flat in the Mettmannerstrasse. The flat proved to be three small rooms in the attic, which surprised her, because from her companion's dress and manners she had imagined him to be a gentleman of means. He gave her a ham sandwich and a glass of milk. It was then after 11 p.m. and she was anxious to get a bed fixed for the night. He said he would show her the way.

After a ride as far as the tram terminus he suggested they should take a short cut through the Grafenburg woods. So completely had he won her confidence by his kind and correct behaviour that she did not refuse. The hotel, he assured her, was just on the other side of the trees.

But as the pine woods grew more dense, Maria became suspicious. It was dark and silent, and the path obviously not in frequent use. She refused to go further.

He laughed. "You are in the middle of dense woodland. You may scream as much as you wish and not a soul will hear you."

When he seized her by the throat and bore her down the girl struggled with the strength of sheer desperation. She was a strong, peasant girl and fought him off, making a sudden wild bid for life. Fortunately, she headed the right way and presently saw the lights of the tram terminus. If Kurten had overtaken and murdered her the terror might have gone on indefinitely.

Maria took a tram to the city centre and eventually located a hostel. On the train coming to Dusseldorf, she had made the acquaintance of a Frau Bruckner whose address she had noted.

This woman had promised to help her. In the morning Maria wrote a letter to Frau Bruckner in which she related her adventure. But Maria spelt the name incorrectly and the letter was delivered to a Frau Brugmann. This lady, recognising the sinister possibilities, handed the letter to the police.

Maria was located and requested to point out the house where she had been entertained to a scratch supper. She remembered the name of the street, having seen it clearly by the light of a street lamp. She remembered the house, too.

The detectives told her to walk up the four flights of stairs and make sure it was the right attic flat. They kept out of sight. With considerable courage the girl entered the house, where she met the landlady in the hall. She told the landlady she was acting under police orders.

Maria recognised the furnishing of the flat. As the two women came out upon the landing Kurten was mounting the stairs. He turned and ran down again. Looking out of the window, Maria saw him cross the street, walk quickly along and turn into a side street. She hurried out to the detectives and told them the man they sought had just walked out of the house under their very eyes. Immediate pursuit failed to catch him and Peter Kurten remained at liberty. In the end it was his wife who betrayed him.

After Kurten had fled from the house on sight of Maria Budlick he knew time was running short for him. He was sure she had recognised him. That night he met his wife as she left the café and told her he would have to lie low because of the assault he had made on Maria.

"With my prison record I shall get fifteen years," he said.

But in the morning he returned home. The fact that he was able to do this leads one to suppose that the police had not taken the girl's evidence seriously enough to regard it as a direct lead to the mass murderer.

After all, what had Kurten done to merit suspicion? He had taken a girl, obviously willing, into the woods and got a little rough with her. When she objected he had let her go. His character, as given by those who knew him best, made him the most improbable suspect as a mass murderer. The police felt Maria had asked for trouble, might even be a liar trying blackmail.

Kurten found his wife at home. He arranged to meet her in a café in the Duisburgerstrasse. Later, they went walking over the Rhine bridge. He said, "If you promise not to betray me I will confess." She promised, and he went on, "I've done everything

that's been happening here in Dusseldorf."

His wife didn't believe him. She demanded, "You killed those poor innocent children, too?" Kurten said he had. They separated near their home, arranging to meet at 3 p.m. the next day outside St. Rochus Church.

The police were waiting for Frau Kurten when she returned. The officer in charge of the investigation, Chief Inspector Gennat of the Berlin C.I.D., had only just learned of the Maria Budlick affair from the local police. He knew of Peter Kurten and his long prison record.

But Frau Kurten was so bewildered and her manner so wild that they took her straight to the police station and a cell for the night. In the morning she made a full confession.

Under police direction she met him. Four policemen with loaded revolvers closed in on them and the Vampire of Dusseldorf was in the bag. His wife collapsed and had to be taken to hospital.

Kurten confessed everything, even revealing murders he had committed years before, together with a whole list of other crimes. His vanity urged him to paint himself as the Monster criminal of all time. But Kurten was not inventing this incredible list of major crimes, he was speaking the absolute truth, aided by his fantastic memory for even the most obscure details.

To make certain that this confession would not be retracted intensive police investigation was instituted, checking on his statement. Complete proof was obtained in nearly every case.

An official report issued on May 30th read:

"Certain newspapers have described the accused Peter Kurten as having broken entirely under the ordeal of examination. This is not the case. Kurten is as alert and fresh as at the beginning of the proceedings, extraordinarily keen mentally, and has made his statements without trace of fatigue. Kurten is giving information readily and exhaustively. He has shown no inner emotion during the descriptions of his crimes. He stresses the point again and again what intense satisfaction he is experiencing through public opinion being worked up to such a high pitch of feeling by his sensational evidence."

From February, 1929 to May, 1930 he had committed no less than thirty-three murders and attempted murders. Coupled with these crimes were other serious offences.

"If I were to tell you the full truth, you would hear some gruesome things," Kurten told the Examining Magistrate.

How right he was! Many of those terrible things were revealed

in all their frightful details when he came up for trial before three judges and a jury, in April, 1931. Public interest was intense. Everyone wanted to see this shocking vampire. But there was little room in Court for any but those directly concerned.

In the dock, Kurten was seen to be a good-looking, fair-haired man, young for his forty-eight years. His manner was gentle, calm and polite, even when he was relating the most revolting details. He displayed a high degree of intelligence, expressing himself in precise, business-like manner, never once faltering under cross-examination. The evidence against him was overwhelming. He was sentenced to death.

On August 1st at 5 p.m. he ate a breakfast of Wienerschnitzels, fried potatoes, washed down with a full bottle of wine. He showed no emotion whatever and went to his death on the guillotine with the same calmness as he had shown at his trial.

A great deal of medical and scientific evidence was given in his case, but it did little to explain Peter Kurten, who must remain an enigma, a human wolf without conscience or pity.

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NEW BOOKS

AFTER a slow start, the evergreen beat-the-hangman theme is given a rigorous exercise by Douglas Warner in *Death of a Nude*.

The condemned man is Gabriel Adam, an artist denounced by popular prejudice as a double murderer, rapist, art forger and pornographer. The lone man who fights to secure his reprieve and establish his innocence at the cost of losing his job and his wife, is Paul Charlton, a middle-aged, fifteen-stone Fleet Street crime reporter. The clock gives him just seventy-two hours . . .

Realism (usually the sordid variety), convincing characterization, clever plotting – these are the qualities for which Mr. Warner has received frequent and generous praise, as the publisher's blurb writer is at pains to remind us.

This novel? Very good, but inevitably lacks the freshness of the author's earlier pieces. (Cassell, 16s.)

Featuring the Saint by Leslie Charteris is the first of a new collection of the ever-popular Saint books in paperback. It is to be identified by a striking new cover design and a price increase of one shilling.

Being the twenty-second edition of the book, a review of the three

novelettes it comprises would be inappropriate. Having read and enjoyed the stories twice in my early teens, my main interest lay in the page-and-a-half Author's Foreword, which I do not recollect having seen before.

Here, Mr. Charteris, with his customary tongue-in-cheek egotism, discusses the pros and cons of bringing his (and other writers'?) earlier Saint stories up to date. His conclusions are more or less identical to ours on the modernizing of the Wallace stories. "I let this book go out as another period piece in the making," he says.

Mr. Charteris describes the task of bringing Saint stories up to date as "a labour which could be endless, as my slothful instincts finally realized in the nick of time, and ultimately pointless anyhow, if my Immortal Works outlive me by a few centuries, as I expect them to." (Hodder, 3s. 6d.)

Dead Calm by Charles Williams is one of the most outstanding thrillers I have read in recent months.

The author takes five people, two boats and an ocean, and blends them into a suspense-packed crime novel with a difference. Mystery, adventure, realism, dramatic action . . . herein lies a formula which I am afraid is foreign to far too many of our own, British crime writers. Yes, including EWMM contributors! (Cassell, 15s.)

Alan Hunter presents something new in the way of murder weapons in his latest novel, **Gently Sahib**. A starved Bengal tiger is used in a plot to dispose of a very active blackmailer . . . and Chief Superintendent Gently is called to the incongruously "correct" and placid town of Abbotsham to conduct inquiries.

Pipe-smoking Gently interviews a colourful array of likely suspects, uncovers the flaws in several "unquestionable" alibis, steers the case through a violent and exciting climax and, in his wisdom, brings matters to a just and tidy finish.

A very readable novel with several pleasing touches of humour. (Cassell, 15s.)

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

STORIES, PLAYS AND FILMS

Dear Sir,

I heard personally from Mr. Martin Thomas last week and I see now that his employment of the term "European settlement" in the novelette, *Harvest of Homicide*, was quite correct, in the sense of a topographical location. Please convey my thanks to him for a very interesting letter. Perhaps we can have some more stories from Mr. Thomas dealing with the Far East?

The Drug Smugglers by William H. Fear (EWMM No. 2) is a grand yarn. I would say it was the finest short story I have read for many years. One point that puzzled me, however, was the statement that 30-year-old John Caine became an agent of the U.N. Narcotics Commission in 1950. This would make him only 16 years old when he joined the Commission, which seems very young for such a dangerous job. Or could it be that for the first two or three years he was on the office staff? More John Caine stories would be welcome.

Nigel Morland's recollections of Edgar Wallace were very interesting. Sir Carol Reed, before he became a film director, produced several Wallace plays. He would probably have some good stories to tell, too.

I went to the Coventry Theatre to see the new production of the Wallace play, *On the Spot*, and enjoyed it, though not quite as much as the version I saw at the Civic Theatre five years ago. Miss Penelope Wallace went on the first night and I enclose the cutting from the local paper. You will notice that the play was directed by Allan Davis. Several of the Anglo Amalgamated films have been directed by him, including *The Clue of the New Pin* and *The Fourth Square*.

Mr. J. Best, 131 Dane Road, Stoke, Coventry, Warwickshire.

Thank you for an extremely interesting letter, Mr. Best. William H. Fear has several new stories and novelettes lined up, and will shortly be starting work on a sequel to *The Drug Smugglers*. - Editor.

CANADIAN COLLECTOR

Dear Sir,

I have taken out a subscription to EWMM. As Edgar Wallace was many years before me, I have only been reading and collecting his work for about four years - and find some difficulty in doing so. Your magazine will no doubt help to fill in some gaps in my collection.

I should like to see some stories by John Dickson Carr and David Frome in future issues, and also some serializations of a few of the

older Wallace novels, such as *Number 6* or *The Daughters of the Night*.
Mr. Dougal MacDonald, 14322 Ravine Drive, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

RARE WALLACE

Dear Sir,

Congratulations to you on the first two issues of your magazine.

I was especially pleased when *The Ghost of Down Hill* was featured in EWMM No. 1. I have been looking for a copy of this yarn for years to add to my collection of Wallace thrillers (not his adventure books). I can now boast 110 of his works in hardback and paperback, but some of the titles still elude me and I was wondering if you could put me on the way to obtaining the following:

Number 6 and *The Little Green Men* (originally published by Newnes); *The Steward* (Collins) and *The Iron Grip* (Reader's Library). These were, I think, short stories, but I should also like to obtain *The Daughters of the Night* and *Barbara on Her Own*, which I believe were full-length mystery novels originally published by Newnes. Another title I do not have a copy of, is *The Queen of Sheba's Belt* (Reader's Library).

Maybe, of course, you will be reprinting some of these items in your publication.

Since reading my first Edgar Wallace story in 1928 or thereabouts – it was *The Clue of the New Pin* – I have always considered him to be in a class by himself in the field of thriller writing. Compared with his works, some of the present-day material is mere rubbish – a waste of good paper and printer's ink!

Good luck with the EWMM!

Mr. J. A. Wark, Greenknowe, Clyde Street, Kirn, Dunoon, Argyll.

NUMBER UNOBTAINABLE

Dear Sir,

Please send me No. 2 of EWMM. I enclose a postal order. Over the last two months, I have been travelling about in the North, and never once have I seen a copy of EWMM on the bookstalls. How on earth do you expect it to become popular if you do not attempt to put it where the public will see it?

I hope to see the magazine flourish as time goes by.

Mr. E. R. Heaton, 42 Farway, Holme Wood, Bradford 4, Yorkshire.

THEY SEEK EWMM EVERYWHERE

Dear Sir,

I must say that, wherever I am, I shall always want EWMM. No better crime magazine exists on the market.

By the way, I do not see EWMM anywhere, despite my looking in at several newsagents.

Mr. Charles E. Gouge, Woodside, Woodlands Caravan Estate, Blean, Kent.

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A scene from the Edgar Wallace film, ACCIDENTAL DEATH, an Anglo Amalgamated presentation, now on general release