

EDGAR WALLACE

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EDGAR
WALLACE

**The Haunted
Room**

WILLIAM H.
FEAR

**No Code
for Killers**

NIGEL
MORLAND

**The Devil
Horse**

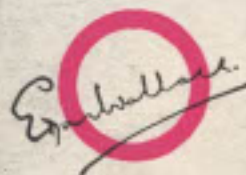
★

TRUE
CRIME

**The Wife
Stealers**

★

**ALL
COMPLETE
STORIES**


Edgar Wallace





EDGAR WALLACE

Born London, 1875

Died Hollywood, 1932

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

EDGAR WALLACE

mystery magazine

EWMM

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"I'm afraid you'll have to stay in the haunted wing," said Pierre Bonnet, smiling. "I hope your nerves are in good shape."

Edgar Wallace

THE HAUNTED ROOM

Once upon a time, the season of goodwill was also a traditional occasion for the telling of ghost stories. However you may spend your Christmas this year – and we hope it be happily – we are sure you will add to your enjoyment by reading *The Haunted Room* – preferably in a quiet half-hour at the fireside, ideally by flickering candlelight . . .

DR. JOHN GRAHAM'S study was a pleasant place of refuge on a hot day in May, for it was cool and chintz-y. The chairs were deep lazy caverns of comfort. Through the open french windows you looked across deep sloping beds of cottage flowers to the purple and green of Norton Woods.

Inspector Sam Holly had remembered his stalwart relative when the Assistant Commissioner had said a little testily, "There must be somebody who understands the science of spookery. For heaven's sake, go find him!"

When his nephew was announced, Mr. Graham, sometime police surgeon, hid guiltily the all too popular novel he was reading and rose to greet him.

"You're staying to lunch, Sam? I've got cold creamed tripe and lobster. . ."

"Herogabalus was a child compared with you, John. No, I'm not stopping to lunch."

The doctor was puzzled.

"I never knew that the infamous Varius Ativus had a penchant for tripe," he admitted. "Adelius Lampridius in his life of –"

"Don't let us rake up old scandals," begged Sam. "I want you to tell me all that you know about spiritualism." He proceeded to state his requirements.

"Spiritualism?" said the doctor slowly. "Well - yes and no. Certain phenomena are inexplicable. Animal instinct, for example. I have seen sheep terrified before the door of a new slaughterhouse, one that has never been used before . . . I have known dogs to be frantic with fear hours before an earthquake. Explain that. It's as easy to explain as spirit manifestations. There is a Something. The mediums feel it, and because they're dissatisfied with its faint message they must interpret the whisper as a shout. They see things dimly and in their impatience or enthusiasm they insist that *you* shall see plainly. With the result that they fake. They rip along ahead of the Thing they should pursue and are mad with you when you prove that all that's following them is their own silly shadows. But why are you so interested? It seems an unusual subject for a police officer."

Sam Holly made a face and reached across the table for one of his uncle's excellent cigars.

"Have you ever heard of Mr. Pierre Bonnet?" he asked.

The old man's forehead puckered.

"Bonnet? No, not the speculating man?"



Sam nodded. "That's the gentleman. He was reputedly a multi-millionaire at one time and he's still fairly well off. He has a big rambling place, Catton Corners near Reading - "

The doctor pushed himself back from the table with an exclamation.

"I know! A Frenchman died there the other day. So you're dealing with that case? What exactly happened - all the details weren't in the newspapers?"

"So I gather," said Sam with a smile, "otherwise you wouldn't ask why I want to know something about spiritualism. The Frenchman was Henri Prideaux, a financier, who was associated with Bonnet in the days of his great wealth. The only difference was that whilst Bonnet was at one time near to bankruptcy, Prideaux amassed and kept a large fortune. He seems to have been a furtive, secretive man. He had no relations and very few friends - certainly nobody who enjoyed his confidence. He had a leaning towards the shadier side of finance and he has undoubtedly dabbled in one or two questionable enterprises which yielded him a huge profit.

"About four weeks ago Prideaux came to London and he told an acquaintance in town that he was engaged in a transaction with Bonnet which would yield him *milliards*. He did not discuss the nature of the transaction and the next day he left for Catton Corners, where he arrived and was entertained modestly by Bonnet. They seem to have spent a week perfecting whatever scheme there was. Bonnet says it was the floatation of a cultured pearl company on an extensive scale. At any rate, Prideaux left at the end of the week for Paris. He returned to Catton Corners early last week and at his own request was put in what the servants called the haunted room."

"The haunted room?" repeated the old police surgeon in surprise.

Sam nodded.

"Apparently one of the rooms is believed to be haunted, and curiously enough it is one of the newest rooms in the most modern wing of the house. Mr. Bonnet believes the room to be haunted - although he is a hard-headed businessman - and he tells me that he has seen dark shapes come and go down the corridor and even through the closed door of the room. He has never mentioned this fact before, for fear of frightening the staff. The morning after Prideaux returned he was found dead in his bed. He had the appearance of a man who had been strangled,

although there were no marks at all upon his body. Suspicion immediately fell upon a mysterious visitor, also thought to be French, who had arrived in the neighbourhood at the same time as Prideaux. This man had stayed at the inn in the village and had spent his nights wandering about the country. In fact he was seen by Mr. Bonnet's gardener in the grounds of Catton Corners itself."

"Could he have got to Prideaux through the windows?"

Sam shook his head.

"I think that's almost impossible. No one could have got into the room without leaving some trace."

"And the mysterious Frenchman?"

"Has disappeared entirely. He gave the name of Dumas. And now comes the remarkable part of the story. Mr. Bonnet sent for me yesterday. He told me that he had been in communication with the dead man who had appeared to him that night by the side of his bed and told him that Dumas was the murderer."

"Hm," growled the surgeon, settling back in his chair. "That sounds to me like a disordered digestive apparatus, aggravated by an attack of nerves. I shouldn't take that too seriously, if I were you, Sam."

He was silent for a while, absorbed in his own thoughts.

"I should like to see this room where the death occurred," he said.

"I hoped you would," said Sam. "I'm not frantically impressed by the spirit theory. Whilst I can't help feeling that there is something just a little uncanny, I'm certain there's something scientific behind it, too. And science bothers me."

* * *

As the doctor's big car swept up the gravel drive of Catton Corners Sam and the ex-police surgeon could see Pierre Bonnet, a slight, sad-looking man, playing croquet on a lawn which was empty save for himself. The thin, almost aesthetic-looking face of the financier, the high forehead and the straight grey eyebrows held the doctor's attention. It was the face of a dreamer rather than one who had been the shrewdest financier in the country.

When Sam had introduced his uncle, Bonnet asked, "Have you any news of Dumas, Inspector Holly?"

"None," said Sam, and Bonnet sighed.

"He must have got away to France," he said shortly and stood

awkwardly waiting for somebody to take up the conversation.

"I wanted to show my uncle the room in which the tragedy occurred," began Sam.

"I wonder if I could see the outside of the room first?" interrupted Graham, and then, sympathetically, "I quite understand, Mr. Bonnet, that it must be trying for you to have this matter constantly brought up."

"I'm hardened to it now," said the financier with a shrug. "I seem to have been living in the company of policemen and newspaper reporters all my life. Here's the room."

Catton Corners was a sixteenth-century farmhouse to which its owner had made certain ruthless additions, none of which were calculated to improve it artistically. The new wing was of red brick and some half-hearted attempt had been made to keep the annexe in harmony with the remainder of the structure.

Dr. Graham looked up. He saw a broad window, the top sash of which had been dropped down a foot. A window box, which unlike its fellows was innocent of flowers, and -

"What's that red square underneath the window?" asked the doctor.

"That's a ventilator," replied Mr. Bonnet. "When I had the new wing built, I fixed these special ventilators in every room. There's another, you'll notice." He pointed to a window.

"And there are no flowers in the window box?"

"Curious," mused Mr. Bonnet. "I hadn't noticed that before. I must ask my gardener why."

He led them round the beautiful grounds and all the time Graham's eyes did not seem to leave the house.

"You are utilitarian at the cost of good architecture," he laughed. He pointed to a large red tank which Sam had previously mistaken for a turret, an illusion which he discovered had been fostered.

"I hoped nobody would ever notice that," said the melancholy Bonnet. "The water supply here isn't sufficient and we're inclined to dry up during the summer, so I store my rain water and at that height we can get sufficient pressure to reach the farthest part of the grounds."

They passed into the house and Pierre Bonnet led the way to the haunted room. It lay at the end of a passage from which opened two other doors, leading, as the host showed them, to spare bedrooms. The door was unlocked and Bonnet flung it open wide. The doctor saw another very ordinary bedroom, comfort-

ably furnished. The bed stood in the corner and there was a dressing table, a writing desk, and two or three chairs. On the polished floor was a fine Persian rug.

"There, you see, is the other side of the ventilator."

Bonnet pointed to the grille in the wall. "It's a curious thing that this room should be haunted because it has rather haunted me." He smiled pathetically. "I intended this to be my own sitting room but somehow I could never work in it. I experimented with every kind of lighting." He pointed to the ceiling fixture which Sam had thought too ornate for the room. "First I tried lighting it from the walls and then from the roof, and then I tried small lamps; but somehow I could never settle down to work here so I turned it into a spare bedroom. The view sometimes tempts me to come up, or it used to tempt me" - he shivered - "until this hideous tragedy rid me of any desire to spend my afternoons here."

Absentmindedly the old surgeon fingered the switches near the door. Suddenly the light blazed in the ceiling. He turned another switch, but there was no further illumination. "The wall lamp is out of order; I'm going to have it re-wired," said Pierre Bonnet. "I feel that I don't want to do anything to this room, now that my poor friend -" He gulped and turned away.

They returned to the garden and Bonnet left them alone.

"What have the servants said? I suppose you've interrogated them?"

Sam shook his head.

"I've only been on this case twenty-four hours and I haven't had a chance of seeing the servants yet," he said. "The local police didn't call in Scotland Yard until a couple of days ago."

"What did the coroner's jury say?"

"Death by misadventure. A safe verdict," said Sam drily.

He strolled towards the gardener who was tying a rose bush.

"Well, my friend, have you ever seen the ghost of Catton Corners?"

"No, sir," said the man stolidly. "And I don't expect to. It's only them women who talk about ghosts. I'm glad the cook's left."

"She's left, has she?"

"They've all left," said the gardener with satisfaction.

He was, as many gardeners are, by nature misanthropic. Few tillers of the soil are cheerful, for there is a spirit of tragedy let loose from the raw earth that men scratch and scarify, that makes

young men old and old men sour.

"I never believed these women tales," he said, "but according to them they've never seen the ghost either. They heard howling and moaning in the room, but that's all."

"I hope cook has found a good job," said Sam.

"Oh, she's all right; she's with Lord Mickleberg, up at his London house. I'm not saying she wasn't a good cook," he admitted, "but she was fanciful, reading too many of them books, seeing too many of them cinemas. That's what does it."

Pierre Bonnet rejoined them a few minutes later and accompanied them to the doctor's car.

"I was hoping," he said, "that you gentlemen would have stayed the night. I'm very lonely here; half my servants have left and the new ones are already terror-stricken."

The doctor turned from the car and looked at the other thoughtfully.

"It would be no great hardship, staying the night in this lovely house. What do you say, Sam? Perhaps we can lay the ghost!"

The detective hesitated. He was anxious to get back to London to interview the cook, for as yet he had not even the end of a thread that would lead him to a clue.

"All right," he said, somewhat reluctantly.

"Good," said the doctor. "I'll send the chauffeur back to my place to get a suitcase. I'm glad you asked me; I would rather like to stay here. By the way, Mr. Bonnet, are you making a rockery?"

"Yes," said the other in surprise. "Why?"

"I saw a heap of broken marble at the back of the house," said the doctor. "But why rockery gardens shouldn't have gravel underfoot and must have unpleasantly-sharpened, pointed marble pebbles, heaven only knows."

They talked of gardens and gardening and Sam learned with surprise that Pierre Bonnet was an authority on horticulture and that he played a good game of billiards, though not as good as the doctor. The evening passed so quickly that Sam was surprised to discover it was eleven o'clock.

"I'm afraid you'll have to stay in the haunted wing," said Pierre Bonnet, smiling for the first time. "I hope your nerves are good."

"Excellent," said the doctor. "I undertake to lay any ghost I find."

"I see," said Bonnet gravely. "But I don't think I should speak lightly of these things if I were you, Dr. Graham. I am only a child in the science, but I have seen amazing things happen." He

seemed to stop himself with an effort, as though he were afraid of placing too great a strain on their credulity; and he bade them goodnight.

* * *

Sam's room was on the right of the passage, his uncle's immediately opposite. He undressed slowly, puzzled as to why John Graham, who hated sleeping away from his home, had so readily fallen in with Pierre Bonnet's suggestion.

He was in bed and had switched off the light when he thought he heard a sound outside. He went to the window, pulled aside the heavy curtains and looked out.

There was a faint light from the clouded moon and at first he saw nothing; and then movement caught his eye from the shadow of a bank of yew bushes. It was a figure, moving stealthily, and he watched it until it passed out of sight.

He sat down on the bed to think. It might be some servant, creeping out to a clandestine appointment . . . It might even be Mr. Bonnet himself - he had complained of sleeplessness and told them that he usually took a stroll round the garden before he went to bed . . . It might be . . .

Eventually, he got back into bed and lay for a long time listening, and then he slept.

He woke with a start. The dawn light was in the sky and the trees were standing faintly. But it was not the cold breath of morning that made him shiver or had awakened him. It was the sound of a low, throbbing moan, "*Whoo - whoo - whoo!*" that sent a shudder down his spine.

In two seconds he was out of bed and had thrown open the door into the passage. There was no doubt about it, the sound came from the haunted room. He tried the handle. The door was locked.

"Who's there?" he called, and then the moaning ceased.

The doctor in his dressing gown joined him.

"What was it?" he asked. "I heard the sound, too. Was it that which woke you? Where's Pierre Bonnet? We must get this door open!"

It was some time before Bonnet joined them. They had to knock thunderously upon his door before he made his appearance, sleepy-eyed and uncomprehending.

"I'll get the key for you," he said. "You heard the sound? Did you see anything?"

"Nothing at all," said Sam curtly. He took the key from his host's hand, turned the lock and pushed open the door. The first thing he noticed in the dim light was the wide open window.

He strode across and looked out, and the doctor heard him utter an exclamation and, joining him, saw the cause of his surprise. A ladder had been placed against the wall. They turned and then -

"Good God!" said Dr. Graham, and following the direction of his eyes, Sam Holly saw the huddled figure of a man lying beside the bed.

They picked him up and laid him on the bed, but the doctor knew that he was dead even before he switched on the lights.

"It's Dumas," said Sam. "The description I had of him was that he was bearded, but evidently he's shaved. Look at that." He pointed to a scar above the right eye, a scar that showed clearly on the discoloured face. "That fits the description well enough."

The doctor was examining the room and from under the bed he pulled out a small neat packet of paper.

"Look at *this!*" he gasped.

It was a wad of 1,000-franc banknotes.

* * *

Three days later Sam came into his uncle's study.

"Dumas was a private detective who was employed by Pri-deaux," he said. "We've just had him identified by the Paris Sûreté."

"I rather thought he was," said the doctor, looking up from his paper. "And that, of course, explains everything."

"Explains everything?" said the puzzled young man. "I don't see that it explains anything."

"Explains everything, including why that infernal wall bracket did not light," said Graham. "I intend spending the night in the haunted room to see exactly what happened. But first of all I want a confidential chat with Mr. Bonnet. By the way, would you like him to put another bed in the room?"

"I should indeed. You'll need company."

"I hope not," said Graham softly.

Pierre Bonnet was not surprised to see his visitors.

"I have got to the point now when I'm ready to turn my house into a newspaper office, police station, coroner's room, or any other darned thing anybody wishes," he said. "I've lost faith;

the last of my servants and even the gardener, whom I thought was a fairly equable-minded person, has deserted me. But I'm very glad for you people to come. I've managed to get a couple from the village to come in daily. The wife has only done plain cooking, so you can imagine what sort of a dinner you're going to get."

During the meal, which was by no means a bad one, Bonnet modified the doubtfully-worded welcome he had given them.

"Of course I'm delighted to see you people," he said. "It's the unintelligent, prying reporter who was getting on my nerves. Dumas, by the way, was hiding for some reason or other at Wallsbury, which is about twelve miles from here; and it seems from what I gathered locally that he had been in the neighbourhood every night. So apparently I've been under observation."

"Who killed him?" asked Graham quietly.

"The ghost of the haunted room," said Bonnet with a smile. "Forgive my flippancy, but -"

"I quite understand," said the doctor gently.

"It is a curious thing," said Bonnet, "that the doctors say that this man had every appearance of having been drowned, but of course his clothes were perfectly dry. They are as puzzled as I am." He shook his head. "I'm going to sell this place; I don't think I can live here much longer. I thought of taking a trip to the South of France and staying there until my nerves get a little stronger."

"Monte Carlo, of course," said Graham absently. "Possibly Nice. Some place where you do not have to find any excuse for carrying around large sums of ready money."

Bonnet looked up quickly.

"I don't quite understand -" he began.

"I was only thinking of my own experience," said Graham. "I like carrying a lot of ready money about with me, but here in England the sight of a couple of thousand pounds in banknotes arouses either the basest passions of the unlawful, or the deepest suspicions of the law-abiding."

* * *

At a signal from his uncle, Sam Holly went up to his room early. A camp bed had been put in the room and he sat down, but he didn't immediately undress.

It was nearly twelve o'clock before Graham appeared and he

seemed to be amused at something as he turned and locked the door. He pulled his suitcase from under the bed, opened it and took out not his pyjamas, as Sam had expected, but a small black cardboard box. From this he extracted two tin candlesticks into which he fitted two short candle lengths.

"Are you preparing for the lights to go out?" asked Sam humorously.

"Not exactly. I'm preparing for their coming on!" said the other. "And don't undress, Sam; and by the way, don't lie down. Just sit right up and keep very, very quiet, because the ghost hates noise."

He walked to the window and tried to open the lower sash but it had been fastened. He pulled down the top sash.

"Not that it will be much use," he said.

He took off the silk shades from the wall bracket.

"Why, there's no electric bulb in it!" said Sam in surprise. "There was the other day."

"I didn't think there would be," said the other, replacing the silk shade. "Now prepare to be very quiet." He raised his voice. "Good night, Sam," he said, and sat on the bed.

"Good night," said Sam.

The elder man pulled down the blind, lit the two candles and placed them on the floor. Then he switched out the light.

"Watch the candles," he whispered.

Sam sat watching and watching until there seemed a dozen dancing candles; until his very head ached from weariness. No sound broke the stillness of the night. The faint roar and rattle of distant trains came to them at intervals; but there was no other sound. Once the old man turned his head and looked at the wall bracket, but that was the only movement he made. And then, for no reason whatever, one of the candles went out.

Sam stared at the remaining light, and, as he watched, that, too, went out.

"Don't move," hissed the old man.

There was a flash of light and Graham handed him a torch.

"Hold that," he whispered.

He took a box of matches out of his pocket, lit one, steadied it and then slowly lowered the burning match towards the candle. An inch from the top of the wick the flame went out. The old man switched on the lights.

"Come with me," he whispered.

He unlocked the door softly and they went out into the passage

together, Graham closing the door behind them. In deathly silence he mounted the stairs, Sam following. He did not stop at the second flight, but continued up the narrow staircase which he knew led to a room which he had located from the outside. He pressed Sam's shoulder warningly as they turned the corner of the stairs.

Level with their eyes was a pencil of light which came from beneath a door ahead of them. The old man switched his torch on to the handle, turned it gently and it opened without a sound.

At the far end of a long room with a sloping ceiling was Pierre Bonnet. His back was towards them and he was busy watching a huge glass tank and regulating the flow of some unseen element which passed down a spiral glass tube.

Sam stared. The room was like the laboratory of a busy chemist. Shelves and benches were covered with apparatus and the room reeked with a pungent, acid odour which made him cough.

At the sound of the cough Bonnet swung round, but the old man's pistol was covering him.

"Step down, Bonnet," he said. "My nephew wants you."

* * *

"I looked up Pierre Bonnet in an old reference book, and I found that his hobby was chemistry," said Graham, when the exciting night had ended. "And then I interviewed the builders of the new wing to discover why the electric wall lamp was fixed on the end of a hollow pipe. They told me that Mr. Bonnet had a scheme for lighting the room from storage batteries which he intended keeping somewhere in his workroom upstairs. So in building the wing, and for this particular room, they connected the wall bracket to a hollow pipe which led to the laboratory. He told them some cock and bull story of using the pipes to conduct the wires, and as he paid them well I don't suppose they thought very much about it.

"Bonnet must have planned the murder some time ago. He'd been in correspondence with Prideaux, an old confederate of his, for more than a year; that is to say, before the builders put trowel to brick on the new annexe.

"By some means which we may discover, but very likely shall never know, he persuaded Prideaux to bring an enormous sum of money to London. And the bait must have been a fairly golden

one. Either Prideaux mistrusted his former friend, or else he had no desire to carry so much money without an escort; and he engaged Dumas to follow him and watch him. When Dumas heard that his master was dead and there was no mention of the money, he decided not to go back and report to the French authorities, but to wait on and investigate independently. I'm not imputing any motive to Dumas," said Graham, shaking his head, "but human nature being what it is I should imagine that Dumas wanted to get the money for himself. He was hanging about the place for a month.

"For weeks he had been trying to get into the house to make a search, and Bonnet must have known this, for on the night Dumas came he had left the window wide open and placed a bundle of French banknotes under the bed."

"But why?" asked Sam in amazement.

"So that Dumas should stoop and get them," said the other significantly.

"Then how did Dumas die?"

"I'm not sure," said Graham thoughtfully, "whether it was just carbonic acid gas or whether it was carbon monoxide. They are both very heavy gases, they are both odourless, tasteless, and they could both be poured into a room while a man was sleeping, or sitting, without his being in the slightest degree aware of the diabolical attempt which was being made on his life.

"Before the unfortunate Dumas entered the room there must have been a layer of carbonic acid gas on the floor nearly a yard deep. The money under the bed was the bait that made him stoop. Once his head was in the fumes he was overcome and fell."

"But the moaning ghost?" said Sam.

The old man chuckled.

"The moaning ghost put me on to it. It was an extractor fan, placed behind the ventilator and operated from Bonnet's room. And, of course, it was used to clear the room of the gas, so that any person coming in afterwards would not detect the slightest trace of it. The other ventilators were fakes. This room was designed for Prideaux and his millions. How many millions we may never know.

"Last night I had a talk with Bonnet and I dropped a hint that I knew his game, without exactly saying that I knew the method he had used. I did mention the fact that a fairly deadly gas can be made from marble chips treated with hydrochloric acid; and I guess that hit home. There would have been two sad accidents

last night, my boy, if we had gone to sleep in that room without the warning candle – nothing burns in either carbonic acid or carbon monoxide – and without the knowledge that our dear friend was spending the night profitably in generating the real spirit of the haunted room.”

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Watch for the

NEW

Edgar Wallace Mystery Magazine

and in a host of exciting
features to come will be
notable stories from . . .

Edgar Wallace
Michael Gilbert
Nigel Morland
Charles Franklin

and many others . . .

The Derby favourite was a double murderer . . . Or so it seemed until Fleet Street reporter, Dick Loddon made it a case for Mrs. Pym . . .

Nigel Morland

THE DEVIL HORSE

Nigel Morland's novels featuring Mrs. Pym were once published in sixteen different countries. As the Author told in an article in our second issue, he is indebted for the original outlines of this famous detective character to no less a person than Edgar Wallace himself. In presenting Mrs. Pym to Nigel Morland, time has proved Wallace's generosity. The latest Mrs. Pym novel, to be published by Cassell in the near future is *The Tall Walker*.

MRS. PYM signed the type-written sheet and closed the manilla folder with an air of finality. If she revealed no particular pleasure at this conclusion of a difficult case, she seemed a woman at ease with herself.

An expression of satisfaction came into her grey-blue eyes as she studied the office. Though its cramped dimensions did not seem proper to Scotland Yard's only woman Assistant Commissioner - even keeping the penny-pinching Office of Works in mind - it was exactly what she wanted. The old desk, the worn Persian carpet, the curly bentwood hat-stand, and the well-used furnishings were plainly utilitarian. Ostentation she kept for the outside world.

This comfortable pause of just looking and doing nothing did not commend itself for long. Sitting at the desk, motionless, she still gave the impression of a woman on her toes. Her short, whitening hair did not disguise the aura of coiled spring resource and latent strength. She suddenly found an outlet for inaction by making a violent gesture of annoyance when somebody knocked on the door.

Her sharp "Oh, come in" brought a turning of the handle and the door was thrust back. There was a pause, then

a wheel chair was propelled in. She stood up with a half salute and an expression which suggested that though the visitor was more than welcome, she was not going to betray any of her principles by being effusive.

"Shott! I never expected you to toil up here from the ground floor, but make yourself at home. Since when do senior superintendents going trailing round Central, unescorted?"

Shott smiled and worked his chair into a suitable position. His plump face showed his gratification: this balding, elderly man was visibly expanding in her company.

"It's months since I came to see you, ma'am." She nodded at his words, sitting down. "I thought it about time I had a look at my old stamping ground, back to the . . . um . . ."

"Scene of the crime would be quite appropriate. The way some of the heavy brass still moan about me suggests I am the curse of the Metropolitan Police, even after all these years."

Shott was amused.

"The *Daily Report* is at it again this morning." He pulled a cutting from his pocket. "All about your return from New York after sorting out that series of cyanide murders.* Dubs you the Gloriana of the Force." He shook his head. "Horrible; modern; Beatleish - makes the Force look with it."

"That's the *Report*." Mrs. Pym sniffed. "I never know whether to be gratified or look down my nose - not that I am allergic to publicity. Ever sorry you got all those bullets in you as my sidekick, tying you in that chair?"

"Water under a lot of bridges, ma'am. I'm an office man and even if I hate not being on field work with you, I think desk routine suits me." His eyes twinkled. "And I can keep the worst of the heavy brass off your neck."

"Meaning the Commissioner? He'll never like me. I'm blessed if I'd like me, either, if I were in his shoes." She suddenly looked at Shott. "But you didn't toil up here to gossip with me, did you?"

"No, ma'am. Thought I'd collect the final stuff on the Glintheim case. I got your message that it's cleared up, and that your reports are in the Registry."

The manilla folder was pushed across the desk.

"There you are, Pym-marked and perfect. Glintheim went for his usual morning gallop, as he always did in the country. He came off and broke his neck, when the horse fell dead. Admirably contrived. Glintheim junior has now been charged."

*See *CYANIDE CITY*, *Edgar Wallace Mystery Magazine* No. 2.

"Murder?" Shott riffled through the folder. "But the horse fell dead, ma'am, in the middle of a fast gallop across an open field. There was no trickery in it -"

"Shott, the boy killed his father. He was hard up, in trouble and wanted plenty of money, which, as the sole heir, he reckoned to get. He injected the horse with a solution guaranteed to do the job in about fifteen minutes. He banked on the safe rule that a hard rider like his father would break his neck when the horse fell dead."

"I can't believe it." Shott was dismayed. "In fiction, perhaps but . . ."

"That's because you've got a nice mind. I dug around, using the well-known Pym hunch for nosing out trouble. I had the horse cut up because I hate dove-tailed happenings when there could be a human hand behind them. The evidence was there. The vet couldn't believe it."

"I thought the local people examined the horse, made lab tests of the stomach and things."

"Young Glintheim was an Honours graduate in chemistry. When I heard that, I began probing hard. The horse died of an embolism - that is, a blood clot."

"That's natural enough, surely . . .?"

"It was intended to be. The son used a hypodermic and put in heavy water - D₂O is the technical term - and added a few spots of a soapless detergent. He injected this just before his father came down for his morning gallop. Result, nice, fat, almost unbreakable air bubbles which, because of their composition, would not wholly block the blood flow - I'm quoting this, Shott. The bubbles piled up, as it were, and, in fifteen minutes, the result was a classic embolism. It needed knife work to find out that it wasn't a natural one."

"Ma'am, it's very clever." Shott looked at her with affection. "This is going to scare the Commissioner out of his life. The Glintheims were family friends, and I was told the son was probably coming into the Forensic Science department. I think -" He paused at a knock on the door.

A blue-uniformed orderly entered at Mrs. Pym's call, bearing a visitor's slip which he gave to her.

"Mr. Loddon, Assistant Commissioner. Told me not to telephone you first on the inter-com as it was a waste of time."

"Got him outside, have you? Send him in."

Dick Loddon - lean, tall, and good-looking - came into the

office as if he had been poised on his toes outside the door.

"Hi!" He beamed on them both, flicking his hat deftly on to the hatstand. "My two favourite characters in person - Mrs. Pym, the terror of the underworld, and Mr. Shott, the stern pivot of administration.

"Thank you." Mrs. Pym leaned back in her chair. "I think your years should be cooling that schoolboy zest of yours."

"Me?" Loddon perched himself on the edge of the desk. "Sin-sodden my eyes may be, but I'm a veritable child at heart. I may be chief crime man on the *Report*, but it hasn't killed my illusions. Who dubbed you Public Energy Number One? Who - "

"All right, son, and what half-witted goon dubbed me the Gloriana of - "

Loddon raised a hand with an ecclesiastic gesture.

"That's colour, ma'am, gimmick-wise. In this age of the Common Man, colour is vital. And you're colour, the multi-coloured thread brightening the dreary weave of daily life."

Mrs. Pym shook her head in admiration.

"Son, you're wasted on the *Report*. With that restless tongue, you might even animate Parliament which, heaven knows, is the epitome of dreary weave." She paused as Shott worked his chair. "You quitting? Don't blame you." She nodded with approval as Loddon opened the door and saw Shott on his way. "I might be able to stand you if you opened doors for me like that."

Loddon smiled, returning to the desk.

"I'll spread my cloak in the gutter for you, ma'am - Sir Walter Loddon doing his stuff for Gloriana. But all fooling apart, I've got a blazing drama about a horse - "

"Oh, *no*, you don't! I've put horses out of my life for good." She made a slicing gesture. "No horses, not even if they talk, which, after meeting you, wouldn't help them much."

"Ma'am, they'd talk for you - you'd make 'em. The only woman who could saddle a nightmare and ride it." Loddon whistled. "Why watch television when you have a wit like me in your service."

"I grant you television is about your level . . ." She frowned at a knock on the door. "If I charge admission, I might even start making extra money - come in."

A big, pleasant-faced young man entered, carrying a large hat-box by its string. He smiled at Mrs. Pym, and turned to Loddon.

"Good morning, ma'am; good morning, sir."

"Sergeant MacPherson," Mrs. Pym explained. "Dick Loddon.

The sergeant's been seconded here from Glasgow. They wanted him to have three months' exposure to an even tougher city. For good measure Mac's been lent to me as a temporary assistant. You may well say, God help him."

The men smiled at each other with an air of immediate and mutual liking. Loddon said:

"Glad to see you, Mac. I'm Dick - in private, of course." He nodded to Mrs. Pym. "The Chief has me well trained. What's in the box, clues?"

Mrs. Pym took the box and put it in front of her, hands on the lid.

"Mind your own business. Now, before I delve into my personal affairs, just what is on that mind of yours?"

"Relenting?" Loddon leaned on the desk with a confidential air. "Ever heard of Tenestra?"

"Horses!" She leaned back in the chair. "Do you imagine I'm going to listen to you talking about the only Derby favourite that's said to be out of its mind."

"It's drama, ma'am, red-hot and bubbling. Here's Tenestra, the hottest Derby favourite for years. He kicks his stable boy to death. Temperament, maybe," Loddon shrugged it off, "a mere bagatelle, some say. Granted. But now he's kicked a second boy to death - his own teenage exerciser."

"Um?" Mrs. Pym's eyes were on the box. "I'm sorry. But if you imagine I'm going to jump my place in the cab-rank and ask if I can investigate a crazy horse . . . Go away, and leave me in peace." She took the lid off the box and flicked it to MacPherson, who fielded it neatly. She plunged into a mass of tissue paper and pulled out a hat which she held up on high.

Loddon's mouth fell open and stayed so. MacPherson, with Scots' phlegm, showed no feelings. Mrs. Pym ignored them both, standing in front of the small office mirror.

"Like it?" She turned round. "I can see you don't. But it's in the Pym tradition - screwy. Crooks, seeing me in a lid like this, decide the old bag's not worth bothering about, and I quietly ups and arrests 'em while they're still writing me off as crazy." Her glance at Loddon was amused. "Me, and Tenestra, eh?"

"Come, ma'am; it's a beautiful hat." Loddon slapped the startled MacPherson on the back. "Isn't it, Mac? Stick it up in the middle of Sauchiehall Street, and the Edinburgh Festival would have to surrender to Glasgow."

"You mean well, son," Mrs. Pym sat down at the desk. "You

deserve something for flattering me. Well?"

"It's really a sort of news story. The *Report's* all for Tenestra, dotty or not. I thought maybe you'd take a sort of unofficial peek at him. It'd make a lovely head - DERBY FAVOURITE HARMLESS, BOOMS SCOTLAND YARD'S BIGGEST GUN."

"Thank you. I've been called many things . . ." She took off the hat and gazed fondly at it. "We'll take a run down there in the morning. Where're the stables?"

"Berkshire, ma'am - Peter Painter's stables."

"I'll collect you at your office, tennish."

"Mrs. Pym, you lift my heart. Wear the hat, just for me?"

"Think the horse can take it?"

"We'll find out. You'll come unofficially, ma'am?"

"Certainly, and Sergeant MacPherson can come along for the ride. There won't be anything wrong, I'd say. If there isn't, I daresay the touch of my tiny hand will start something."

Loddon held out his own hand, fingers ostentatiously crossed.

"Here's hoping!"

2

THE man leaning on the table, absorbed in what he was saying into the telephone, was small and red-haired, with the sharply shrewd face of the Cockney. The room was well furnished, having about it that curiously detached air usual in places rented to strangers.

His voice was low and confidential:

"Ow much? Crumbs, you been laying it? Me? Nark it; I don't enjoy it, you know, 'aving a relative 'oo runs a betting shop. No, I never said there's anyfing wrong, but it's flat, like playing Postman's Knock wiv your sisters. Okay, sorry I spoke. I'll 'ave 'arf a crack on Glittergal, then." The man was so intent that he did not notice the grim-faced observer who suddenly appeared in the doorway. "Right, and a oncer on Tumbler each way. What was that? Ta, I'll tell Max - I dessay 'e'll be glad to 'ear it. See you."

"You'll tell Max exactly what, Lardy?"

The red-haired man jumped.

"Strewth! I never knew you was there."

"I figured." Max Gemiel walked to the table. "Well, give it me; I'm waiting."

"I never meant no 'arm." Lardy Jones wriggled uneasily. "Only putting on a few bobs, Max. You said so."

"Not on my telephone. You'll tell Max . . . what?"

"My cousin wiv the little betting-shop, Cable Street way - 'im that does all the business with the Malts . . . yes, Max, okay. Well, 'is son's a compositor on the *Report*."

"The newspaper?"

"Yes, Max." Lardy tried to please this grim man with every trick he knew. "Well, this son 'eard something. About racing, it was. Tenestra."

"Yeah?" Max Gemiel was suddenly wary. "Spill it!"

"The killer 'orse. Well, it seems that Mrs. Perishing Pym, that ruddy female dick, is going to 'ave a look-see - 'ere!" Lardy Jones' voice became a squawk when Gemiel reached across the table and gripped him at his throat by his tie.

"Come on, what did this kid hear? I don't have all day."

"Easy on, guv! Seems the boy 'eard that old Pym's picking up this chap Loddon, the crime reporter, at 'is office at eleven termorrer. They're going down to 'ave a dekko at Tenestra, unofficial-like. Cripes!" Jones staggered back as Gemiel thrust him away and walked to the door.

The strong American voice rang out:

"Finkel? Finkel! And Gunner! I want you pronto. There's trouble coming."

3

FLEET STREET, under the fresh June sun, was gay. The red buses romped cheerfully along the crowded road and on the pavements the pedestrians moved with a sort of bright nonchalance peculiar to Londoners when summer has arrived. Even the newsboys, with their ink-captioned posters offering DERBY SENSATION, were too lethargic to shout about it.

Mrs. Pym headed towards the *Report* Building in the open red Aston, the current pride of her heart, and a car most traffic wardens disliked on the principle that it looked as if it was going fast even when it was parked. Sergeant MacPherson, in a bowler hat which made him look as dourly Scottish as an Aberdeen terrier, was in the passenger seat. He started as the dual-note hooter sounded.

"Did you see that lunatic?" Mrs. Pym glared at the uneasy sergeant. "Some of these pedestrians scare me pink."

The sergeant made a sound of protest.

"Aye, the old biddy was nearly under your wheels."

"I saw it. When I was learning the police trade back in Shanghai in the - um - Middle Ages, we had to dodge the Chinese." She nodded at her companion's surprise. "Fact. Elderly native gentleman, for example, suddenly got a notion he had a demon on his tail. So he waited on the pavement until a fast car came along - usually me - and then he shot across my radiator with an inch to spare. The idea was that the old man was safe but the demon behind him got run over."

"And if he didn't make it?" MacPherson was horrified.

"That was one up to the demon, and I was in trouble." She sighed heavily. "Didn't have disc-brakes then. We white folk seriously considered hiring men with red flags to walk in front of cars" - the hooter sounded again - "and the Transport Minister might even consider the notion today."

The Aston slipped neatly into a space outside the *Report* offices. Loddon appeared as if he had been popped up through a hole in the pavement.

"Been waiting for you with baited breath, ma'am." He waved at the several faces behind the windows above them. "Your loyal fans, fighting for a glimpse of you. Even blasé Fleet Street genuflects when Gloriana passes by."

The car moved away from the kerb into the stream of traffic. Mrs. Pym's sigh was loud.

"Remarkable, isn't it, Mac? Dick Loddon used to be a quiet lad, once. That's what hanging round me does. He's not like me, shy."

Loddon, squashed on the small spare seat, cried out theatrically.

"Shy, ma'am? You wouldn't mean that? Mac, would you say the Chief's shy?"

"Well, if you say so, ma'am - in, if I may say so in all respect, a very vivid sort of way."

Loddon chuckled.

"Mac's got the right ideas - wit, tied up with keeping his proper place. And you shy, Chief? Big headlines and splash stories fit you like tailor-made clothes."

"H'm. Mebbe they do. It means I'm better known than any film star, *and* it means John Citizen's fond of me - so the swollen-headed brass thinks twice about jumping on me when I cut corners!"

"At that rate, ma'am, I - *gosh!*" The reporter's exclamation was cried out in a tone of alarm.

The Aston had been travelling along East Strand, a taxi - to Mrs. Pym's irritation - keeping level.

At that moment a hand came out of the taxi window holding what looked like a grey travelling rug. It dropped in smothering fashion over the occupants of the Aston.

Mrs. Pym had been travelling at a reasonable speed, with nothing between her and the kerb, some yards away. In some purely instinctive fashion she somehow felt her way towards the pavement, tearing the blanket from her head at the same time.

Her eyes came clear as she halted the car in the gutter. It was a remarkable piece of self-control, allied to driving ability of a high order.

She was out of the Aston at the same moment, delving into the big handbag which was still slung over her shoulder by its strap. The Luger she always carried was there, and she hauled it out by its barrel, lobbing it after the taxi with all the force of strong muscles, and in blazing fury at the trick that had endangered their lives.

For the onlooker it was a startling drama. But even with every factor apparently against her, Mrs. Pym's luck held. The Luger shashed through the taxi's rear window. The driver, no doubt shaken at the sudden crash of glass on his vehicle, lost control and wobbled into a sandbin at the side of the road. Two men tumbled out and raced away into the crowds on the pavement even as two uniformed policemen appeared.

"It never occurs to the guileless Sassenach to stop running men," MacPherson said unemotionally. "Aye, and would-be murderers at that."

"'Murderers'?" Loddon wiped his face with a handkerchief. "And so it is, and that included us!"

Mrs. Pym turned back to them, raking the onlookers beginning to crowd round the car with bleak eyes.

"Now why the devil did those men try that trick?"

"A good method of murder devised on chance." MacPherson's suggestion was in a wholly disinterested voice, as if he were admiring talent. "If it's in order, I take off my hat to you, ma'am. You fielded that gun -"

"Forget it." She adjusted her hat in the driving mirror. "No harm done there, anyway." She took her Luger from the first constable who reached her side, and dropped it in her handbag.

"Get anywhere? You know me, I suppose?"

"Yes, Assistant Commissioner. I was on point, and couldn't make it in time, though I saw it. Stolen cab, I should say - neither of the men wore a cabman's . . ." He paused at her irate expression. "I'd better get on the telephone at once!"

When Mrs. Pym got away at last, she was still annoyed.

"They have their reports to write, so I imagine I should at least be tolerant. Question is, who the devil is firing blankets at me? I'm not in any vendettas that I know about, and I didn't cross swords with the Mafia when I was in the States, nor did I insult the tender feelings of the Syndicate!"

"I've no doubt it's trouble, ma'am," MacPherson's voice was uneasy.

"Trouble was the chief fairy at my christening, not that it ever slowed me down - Loddon, you're looking very thoughtful for a talking man."

"I've been trying to work it out, ma'am. I got a small glimpse of a face at the window of the cab. I *may* be wrong, but I've an idea it was a hook named Hymie Finkel - I was in court when he was sent down two years ago."

"Finkel, Finkel - a pint-sized hoodlum who used to chauffeur for the smash-and-grab boys in the old days? You could be right."

"I think I am. What's he up to?"

"He certainly didn't sling that blanket at me because he thought I was cold." Mrs. Pym eased the car to the kerb by a telephone box. "Sit here a moment, both of you - I'm going to get a fire lighted under Finkel for a start."

When she had gone, MacPherson looked grave.

"I haven't been with her long enough to know the answer to this, Dick. But villains don't keep their grudges long enough to try and out police officers - at least, I've never noticed it in Glasgow."

"She's probably trodden on some big boy's toes, and he's hitting back." Loddon gestured airily. "You just can't have a rough copper like the Chief, with all the publicity she gets, and expect nothing to happen. Not when she's a woman as well - that causes more resentment than anything else, Mac - I've seen it time and again . . . Here she comes, though."

When Mrs. Pym climbed back into the Aston, she was in a reasonably cheerful frame of mind.

"I've taped Finkel, for what it's worth. Shott thinks I've irked some sensitive soul, which suits me. Irking the criminal classes

is my hobby, and if it gets bloody reaction, then I'm a happy woman! Now, we'll get along."

* * *

When the Aston got out of the urban area and onto the open road, it moved at a racing pace. This enchanted Loddon, who was only pleased when he was speeding but MacPherson held on to his bowler and looked thoroughly uneasy until they slowed down in the narrow Berkshire lanes.

Tenestra's stables were handsomely laid out, the stables themselves of yellow brick and separated from a big old house by a row of trees edging a wide paddock.

The Aston parked, Loddon - who had been there before - led the way into the stable yard, to be greeted by a trim, friendly-faced man in a yellow shirt and jodhpurs.

"Hi, Pete." The reporter shook hands, and led the man to Mrs. Pym. "Ma'am, this is Peter Painter, Tenestra's trainer. Pete, this is Assistant Commissioner Mrs. Pym, and Sergeant MacPherson. As I told you, an unofficial visit to please me."

"I do these things," Mrs. Pym explained. "At Scotland Yard we have so little to do that chasing after reporters' pipe dreams is a way of filling in time. Where's this horse, Mr. Painter?"

"I'll show you." The trainer rubbed his nose uneasily. "It beats me. Tenestra used to be the sweetest thing in horseflesh, but something's soured him badly."

"Maybe the animal's a schizo?" Loddon suggested. "Get some Americans over - they're eccentric enough to have psychiatrists for animals. It would be something for our headline sub: TENESTRA'S UNHAPPY FOALHOOD, EQUINE HEAD-SHRINKER SUGGESTS."

Mrs. Pym made a circle of thumb and forefinger.

"He can keep that up all day, Mr. Painter. Now, about the horse?"

"None of us know the answer, ma'am. Tenestra's a red-hot favourite, as you know, and he's been carefully guarded because of it. Three weeks ago his stable-boy went into the box to see if Tenestra was all right. We found him the next morning with his jaw kicked nearly through his skull."

"And the second death?"

"Tommy Pilcher, who exercises him. They got along fine, but when we got back from lunch we found Tommy, who'd been

watching Tenestra while we ate, kicked between the shoulder blades. He was dead."

"Sounds like something for a vet, or," Mrs. Pym glanced bleakly at Loddon, "an equine head-shrinker. We'll go and see this four-legged killer, not that I think it'll do any good."

They crossed the stable-yard, and paused outside Tenestra's loose-box. Painter waved to the half door.

"There we are, Mrs. Pym, the Derby favourite and the worst puzzle in horse-flesh in my twenty years in this game." Tenestra was watching them, a bright bay with a bold eye. "The course is just his meat. Look at him, by Starbright out of Sunflame, the best blood in the world. It beats me where the black streak comes from."

Mrs. Pym unhooked the half-door and was in the box before anyone could stop her. Tenestra backed away.

"Ma'am, that's very unwise!" Painter's shocked stricture was accompanied by alarmed exclamations from Loddon and MacPherson.

"This horse?" She moved gently towards Tenestra, one hand outstretched. "He'll behave." She touched him, then stroked the horse with a smooth, easy motion that seemed to be acceptable. Painter sighed his relief.

"He wouldn't take that from any other stranger, ma'am."

"This is the Chief," Loddon explained omnisciently. "Man-eating lions would lick her fingers readily."

"Just tasting the meat for quality," Mrs. Pym explained to Painter, coming out of the loose-box and closing the half-door. "Loddon, as I said, talks too - who's this?" She nodded to the slight, merry-faced man who was walking towards them in tweeds so vivid they must have been designed by a colour-blind weaver.

"Mr. Garnett - Mr. Frank Garnett." Painter went over to the newcomer.

"Racehorses," Loddon whispered softly. "Racehorses and gambling - and how!"

When Painter had made the introductions, Garnett seemed pleased, too, they had come to the stables.

"I'm delighted to see you - Mr. Loddon, of course, I have met. Why didn't you all come to the house first?"

Loddon's expression was apologetic.

"My fault. I came to see Pete with my friends. I didn't think you'd want us troubling you."

"Nonsense! And miss so famous a guest? That wouldn't do at

all. Have you seen Tenestra, Mrs. Pym?"

"Yes. I'm interested."

"Of course you're interested. After all, the horse is a killer no matter how you wrap it up." Garnett's face was grave. "It doesn't seem to affect Tenestra's racing chances, apparently; at least, the rules never anticipated anything like this. There seems no reason why the horse should not run, but . . ."

"Mr. Garnett," Painter's voice was uneasy, "has something gone wrong?"

"General opinion seems to be against Tawley. He came direct to me, and resigned."

Painter sighed, then faced Mrs. Pym.

"This must be puzzling to you. Willie Tawley was to be Tenestra's jockey; the nicest feller in the world, but he has a peculiar effect on some horses - they seem to get out of hand when he's around. Nobody knows why."

"That's just it. He's resigned in case he gets blamed for this." Garnett gestured towards Tenestra's head, hanging over the half-door and giving the indication of listening with great interest. "It puts me in an equivocal position. There are two entries from this stable. The other is Crimson; he's my own special horse, trained and brought up by myself. I entered him for sentimental reasons, not that he has a chance. The betting classes him as a rank outsider."

"I see." Painter frowned. "Crimson's jockey, Johnny Baker, will mount Tenestra, and you'll scratch Crimson?"

"Something like that. I can't get anyone else at such short notice. Tenestra likes Johnny, which is all to the good. I'll ride Crimson."

"You, sir, but . . ."

Garnett smiled at Mrs. Pym.

"All this is most discourteous to you, ma'am. I don't usually discuss my private business with quite so much carelessness."

"The Pym charm," Loddon announced at once. "Even politicians feel compelled to tell the truth when she's present. Is this a story for the *Report*, sir?"

"Why not? Owner rides outsider against his second entry, the favourite? By all means. But come up to the house, Mrs. Pym. It's a bachelor establishment; still, we can make you comfortable."

There was plenty to interest them in the house, and Garnett made their brief stay a pleasant one. On the return journey, Mrs. Pym halted the Aston for a while outside the local police station. She rejoined Loddon and MacPherson within fifteen minutes. They headed back to London.

"Useful talk," she began abruptly. "The locals were polite, but correct until they realized I wasn't nosing into their pie officially, and, after all, that it isn't any sort of legal matter." She glanced at MacPherson. "Don't look so depressed, son. We're not really wasting the taxpayer's money - and this is my car, paid for by me." Her nod was affable when his face turned pink. "That's better! Have a look at this morgue shot of Tommy Pilcher."

Loddon took the envelope from her, and withdrew a stark ten-by-eight glossy print. It showed a man's back, and, as if etched there, a horseshoe mark imprinted on the flesh.

Loddon grimaced.

"Shocker, that, ma'am. Bit like the one I saw from the Neville Heath case, only this is a horseshoe. It's just below the line of the neck, isn't it, and got him clean in the middle of the back." He touched it for the benefit of MacPherson, leaning over his shoulder. "That rounded part at the top is called the toe, the heel is these points directed downwards - I'd say the toe smashed his top vertebrae, or whatever they call the bone at the bottom of the neck, like china."

"Correct," Mrs. Pym glanced at him. "I can see you're framing a question. They told me in the station he was working without a shirt; it was a hot day, and he was at the receiving end of a damned powerful kick. Thing is, where do we go from here?"

"I'm afraid I'm wasting your time on something freakish, but not exactly police work." Loddon spread his hands. "Sorry about it, ma'am. Enthusiasm."

"For making me work - exactly." Mrs. Pym did not appear to be offended. She nodded at the photograph. "All very interesting. *Very.*"

Loddon gaped at her.

"You mean you'll take it up!"

"Could be. The well-known female hunch, let us say. What do you think, Mac?"

"I don't see why you should trouble yourself, ma'am. It's like asking the Queen to *consairn* herself with village affairs."

"Give me Scotland for courtiers!" Mrs. Pym looked extremely pleased. "Let's say, I'm intrigued."

Loddon was suddenly perturbed.

"Berkshire hasn't officially invited you, ma'am. There's that nasty question of protocol, and the Chief Constable -"

"You leave the C.C. to me. I'm automatically the belle of the ball without being invited. You let Mac worry about protocol, Loddon - he loves it." She gazed fondly at the countryside bright in the sunlight. "Tenestra's got trouble coming, and I mean me!"

4

MAX GEMIEL was at his table, both hands flat on its surface. Standing before him, squat and troubled, was Hymie Finkel. The blond man at his side, his unintelligent eyes on the far wall, took little part in the discussion.

"A hell of a pair!" Gemiel was irate. "At home, I could hire me a couple of goons from Brooklyn, and they'd make a better job of it - shut up!" The snarl was for Finkel, who tried to speak. "And the heat's on you, stupid. You muffed it, and someone saw your pan. Give me strength!"

"She threw a gun." The blond man came to life, his voice horrified. "She might've fired it at us!"

Gemiel pounded the table.

"Gunner Jukes, with two notches on his gun. 'She might've fired it,' he says. Goddammit! Next time I want a couple of roughs, I'll send to the kindergarten along the street."

"Look, I never fort she'd drive wiv that blanket on 'er 'ead." Finkel's voice was hurt. "Nobody could've."

"You flubbed it, gum-brain. It costs me, and that I do not like."

"It's dangerous, mucking about wiv 'er," Jukes said, after what seemed prolonged thought.

"'Dangerous'! You lunk. I'll buy you a little kitty to play with - no, maybe not. It might scratch you." He waved away Jukes' query. "Forget it, you nut."

"It's a silly business," Finkel said. "Knock 'er off, Max, and you'll 'ave another pop up in 'er place. It ain't sense."

"She's just digging for no reason. Don't you get it? No other dick is thinking her way, and I don't want it. I want her out, and out fast." He thought for a moment, and hooked a telephone towards him, dialling a number. "'Lo? Lew? You been watching? Fine. When does she usually? Fine. Keep watching." He

replaced the receiver and stood up. "I've got a way to figure this out. You get Jones, Finkel, and the big car, and take Jukes with you, and you both carry guns. I'll be along."

When they had gone, Gemiel opened a drawer and removed a stubby S & W Police Positive. He checked it, and dropped it in his pocket. From a second drawer he removed a child's soft rubber mask, representing a red-nosed man, and fixed it over his own face. He went out of the room.

5

IN the June twilight Mrs. Pym's car was parked near the Back Hall steps at Scotland Yard. She was sitting at the wheel and MacPherson, looking distinctly uneasy, was on the pavement.

"I still think I should see you home, ma'am."

"Huh?" Mrs. Pym adjusted her hat in the rear mirror, peering to admire the effect. "Just because I had a blanket thrown at me? I admire your courtesy, Mac, but this is me talking, not your senile Aunt Fiona or whatever her name is."

"Aunt Elspeth." MacPherson's face held the ghost of a smile. "She's braw. She can stalk for a whole day without taking a breath. You'd like her, ma'am."

"All right, I bow to Aunt Elspeth."

"Thank you, ma'am. I still feel I should come back with you."

"Are you aiming to tuck me in bed?" Her eyes were amused. "I'll stand for a lot in the line of duty, but not having you in my house after dark. Think of the neighbours if they saw you, not that I have any to speak of. But the cry would be around Bloomsbury in a minute, accusing me of cradle-snatching."

MacPherson was scarlet.

"Och, ma'am! I meant I feel I should . . ."

"I'll accept your zeal. Now, good-night, Sergeant." She started the engine, gestured to him, and went rumbling up the incline of Derby Gate and into the traffic of Whitehall.

She reached Red Lion Square, heading for the dour old house she had lived in for so many years. As she eased the car into a space against the central railings she noticed a dark saloon parked under the trees. She climbed out, pausing at the sound of a groan of pain.

There was nobody to be seen in the growing darkness, then she realized the sound must have come from the saloon. Peering

through the rear window, she could see the outline of somebody humped over the steering wheel.

She went to the car's driving door.

"You in trouble?"

"In back," the humped man did not move. "Medicine . . ."

"Okay. Hold it a minute." She jerked open the rear door and froze as the light came on. A man was kneeling before her, an automatic of some sort pointed at her. At that moment a hard muzzle was pressed into her back, and she was told to "Op in, if you don't want outing."

She did so, taking a delight in stepping heavily on the foot of the blond man who was getting to his feet to make room for her. He got out quickly and joined the driver, who was now sitting upright.

Mrs. Pym sat down, a man on one side of her and a second man, in a rubber mask, coming through the far door to sit on her other side.

"Don't say I'm being *kidnapped!*" She sounded delighted.

"So what?" The blond man turned and glared at her. "You big-footed 'orror."

"Charmed." She settled back comfortably. "I never thought this was going to happen to me. Shades of Al Capone! Boys, you've made me a very happy woman."

Finkel, at her side, made a circular motion with one hand.

"Crackers."

"Just pleased. I never thought such a nice thing could happen to me. Pity I left my bag; there's a gun in it." She held out two square, capable-looking hands. "I shall have to rely on these."

"Fat chance." Finkel touched her with his gun, not moving it as the car turned a corner too sharply.

"You think? Who's the joker in the kid's mask?" Mrs. Pym jerked a thumb at Gemiel. "Somebody lammed him, or is he too damned ugly to unveil?"

Gemiel wriggled. He was proud of his looks, and in anger he thrust Mrs. Pym's thumb away none too gently with the Police Positive. Her reaction was instant. She brought her hand, chopper-fashion, into Gemiel's stomach and the air went out of him like a punctured paper bag. Finkel pressed his own gun deeply into her side.

"Sensitive cove." She stared round at Finkel, her eyes like slate chips. "I know you've got a gun, but handle it carefully, or

I'll gut you before you can press the trigger. Now, behave, the lot of you."

She settled back comfortably, listening to the gasping Gemiel. In some odd manner they accepted her control, but in no way relaxed their vigilance. Her complacent interest in the passing scene beyond the car windows sharpened as she saw masts.

"Isle of Dogs, eh? I'm surprised you boys didn't blindfold me; it's always done. And I should've left a paper trail out of the window for the rozzers to follow. . . . Peking Street now? Very appropriate." The car began slowing. "Is this where I get it, or am I being held to ransom? I somehow think our Receiver won't pass out a nickel - in fact, the Commissioner will probably pay you to keep me here."

Finkel opened the door.

"Go orn; ladies first, and don't you never stop nattering?"

"You're very polite - oh, I get it. Any slugs floating round and they'll slay me first, while you sit pretty." She clambered out. Finkel made a gesture of frustrated despair at Gemiel.

Mrs. Pym had no time to peer along the deserted street before she was marched into a small house. Finkel's hand held out a torch so that she could see her way along a shabby passage, across a kitchen into a wash-house. There he pulled out a lighter and put it to a candle standing on the only article of furniture, an ancient table.

Mrs. Pym sniffed delicately, then looked at the men in the doorway.

"This where I stay? I always thought it was in a cellar."

"You will be safe enough here." Gemiel's voice was thick; his stomach hurt.

"Got you," she nodded. Her ear for shades of accent was as keen as her ability to pin-point them. "Bronx, eh? I might've guessed you'd come from somewhere even drearier than Brooklyn." She glanced at his quivering hands with interest. "Can't take it, eh?"

"Thank - thank you. I'll remember this. Meantime, you'll stick around here for a few days until the week-end."

"Fine. If you can hold me." She jerked down the front of her jacket sharply. "'A few days'? Now I get it. There's something phoney going on at Tenestra's stables, and you're the mudlark in the hog's-wallow. I might've guessed it when you slung that blanket." She nodded with pleasure at the expressions round her. "Right on the nose, pure feminine guesswork! Well, *well!*" She

settled on the table. "Everything falls neatly together."

Finkel was acutely alarmed and quite reckless.

"I told you!" He glared at Gemiel's mask. "She's sharper than a ruddy barrer-load of monkeys. You never ought to of touched 'er."

"Shut up! You stick around and see she stays right here. And keep a grip on that gun."

They went out and Finkel, after peering back at her, went after his colleagues and locked the door.

Mrs. Pym stared round. With the tiny pencil torch she always carried in her jacket pocket, she examined her prison. It contained nothing of service, and no exit other than a very small window high up in the wall. There was a large drain grating beside the stone container in which the iron copper was set.

The corner was tighter than she had expected.

6

THE room was black and silent until the dim outline of the sleeper in the bed made a movement. Frank Garnett had been sleeping for some time, as far as he could guess from the illuminated dial of his wrist-watch.

He lay there, wondering what had wakened him. There seemed to be nothing wrong. He rolled over and settled down again, coming suddenly bolt upright as a torch beam shone on him. He tried to brush the light away, one hand held up to shield his eyes.

"What the devil is this - who are you?"

"Garnett - you're riding Crimson. Right?" The unknown's voice was neatly disguised, apparently with some object held in his mouth that distorted everything he said.

"I beg your pardon!" Garnett began pushing back the bed-clothes. "If this is your idea of a joke, Mr. Burglar -"

The other brought his right hand into the gleam of the torch-light, holding a revolver with a curious swollen tube attached to the muzzle.

"Take it easy. This gun is silenced. I shall have to use it if you get tricky - oh, not to kill you, of course."

"Look." Garnett was seething. "If it's money you want -"

"Shut up. Remember Parkhurst Prison, sixteen years ago?"

"I . . . remember," Garnett became very still.

"You bet you do. You should keep your private papers better

locked up. You went there for rigged cards and such."

"I was innocent."

"No doubt. You ran with the wrong lot and got into trouble. Now I have the dope on all this. You don't want it circulated round?"

"It wouldn't help me." There was a deep frown on Garnett's face. "I've got a good reputation and I'd like to keep it. Very well: how much?"

"Sensible man. You'd be finished, socially and in racing, if I broadcast what I know. The mud would never wash off."

"Shall we stop this? *How much?*"

"Not a penny, if you do as you're told."

"What? What do I have to do?"

"You'll switch Baker to ride Crimson; you'll ride Tenestra."

"Is that all?" Garnett looked baffled. "I've no objection, if that's all you want. I fancied riding Tenestra from the beginning. But I'm not up to Baker's standard; he's good . . . What is this, a betting ramp?"

"Never you mind. Baker's good, better than Tawley. You will ride Tenestra. That puts the race to him; there isn't a horse that can touch him." The unseen man seemed pleased. "The whole country knows it, barring accidents."

"That's all?" Garnett was incredulous. "No money; no funny business?"

"Just ride Tenestra. Just ride. You can't win."

"But even . . . I don't get it. I'll keep my promise and I'll ride Tenestra. I'll win, if it kills me. I'm going to *win!*"

"Fine." The visitor began moving away. "If by any chance you look like winning, you'll be dealt with one furlong short of home."

The door closed softly.

7

MRS. PYM had the candle on the floor; she was crouching above the drain grating in the corner of the wash-house.

On her knees, she began gently pulling at the iron grid, pausing as she worked at it to listen and verify that Finkel was not approaching the door.

Gradually the smooth pulling began to have effect. The grid began to move, then it came away and nearly pulled her on her

face at the unexpected free weight of the iron cover that was at least sixteen inches square.

It was laid on one side without sound. The pencil torch shone down to reveal a huge concrete pipe that must have been some seven feet deep. At the bottom a small stream of water was moving slowly forward.

Mrs. Pym's knowledge of London, learned under Shott's omniscient tuition, was excellent. She thought for a few moments, considering the purpose of the pipe that was obviously neither sewer nor drain.

Visualizing the topography of the land where she was, gave the answer. The concrete pipe was there to draw off one of London's many lost rivers, and the one over which she crouched must clearly be a tributary of the Black Ditch by which any sharp rise in level could be carried direct into the Thames or to the Isle of Dogs pumping station.

The torch was tucked into a pocket and, dexterously, she wriggled through the hole, lowering herself to the full stretch of her arms, and dropped gently into the small stream. The water was very cold.

The torch revealed that the concrete pipe, to her left, continued for a few yards and turned sharply. In the other direction the level dropped gently. It decided her, and she moved forward, the air growing fresher as she progressed.

Then she reached a vast iron grille which seemed to be covered by a loose-hanging metal cover. It was some sort of discharge point, quite useless to her.

It meant retracing her steps, and this she did, passing under the wash-house where she could see the gleam of the candle. Round the angle of the pipe and some ten yards beyond it, the big pipe terminated in a series of small feeder pipes each a matter of ten inches in diameter, quite useless as a means of escape.

She hurriedly switched out the torch as she heard distant sounds, then a curse and a splash. Finkel's voice snarled: "Dropped it!"

Moving round the angle she peered forward and could see, in the faint gleam of the reflected candlelight above, a shape that looked like Finkel's, groping in the water.

"Mrs. Pym?" His voice rang out, echoing in the tunnel. "I've got a gun 'ere. You better nark it, quick."

She said nothing, wondering what to do next. She had no chance of fighting back without a weapon, and no chance of

getting into the wash-house unobserved.

Dropping on her knees in the stream, the faint light showed her Finkel's outline, just beyond the wash-house. It was not clear what he was doing then, but as he came right under the wash-house light, she realized he was moving towards her almost on his face with outstretched arms so that she would not slip past him.

The chance was too good to miss. She hauled off her hat and dunked it silently in the water, then let it go. The movement of the stream carried it slowly towards Finkel.

It hit his face, a wet, curious, and wholly unexpected thing. He lost his head, jumping to his feet and dropping his gun. He shouted: "Get away, you 'orror!" and backed hurriedly down the incline, suddenly falling on his back with a loud splash.

In that time Mrs. Pym had moved to the wash-house and reached up, hauling herself bodily through the drain opening into her old prison. She turned the table upside down and dragged it over the drain, weighting it down afterwards with the iron grid. Finkel would be prevented from escaping for a while, and would come to no immediate harm, unless he frightened himself to death with imagined horrors.

The house was silent. Nothing materialized to trouble her, and Mrs. Pym felt almost disappointed. Then she heard a small sound, and promptly backed into the dark shadows of the hall. A man came in the front door.

Her sudden "Stick 'em up; I've got a gun!" brought a squawk of surprise, followed by a boom of pleasure.

"Gosh, you scared me sick, doing that!"

"Loddon?" For once Mrs. Pym's voice was genuinely delighted. "Where did you spring from?"

"Had a tip-off. I'm darned glad it was genuine."

"Where did you get the news?"

"Chap didn't give his name. Said he worked for somebody, who was pushing him around until he was sick of it, and told us that some relative of his worked for the *Report*. No names, of course. Just where you were." Loddon chuckled. "I'm glad I'm here, ma'am."

"I don't get it - is that my handbag?"

"Yes, and your gun's in it, which means you can't have it in your hand - but I believed you just now! I went round to your house to check when I found you weren't at Central, after the tip. I brought your car. You don't mind?"

"Mind the United States Marines arriving just a little late? You're very welcome, son." Mrs. Pym studied the growing light in the street. "I dozed for a while on a table top - it wasn't bad. Now take the car down the road or somewhere, and hover outside. Tap on the door and run if you see anyone heading this way."

"Sure. But can you handle it alone, ma'am?"

"With this Luger I can handle almost anything! Scram, and stay out." She waited until Loddon had gone, pulling the unlatched door close, then hooked the handbag on one shoulder.

Back in the wash-house she pushed the table and the grating to one side.

"Okay, Finkel, come along up. If you've got a gun, drop it. I've got one, too, and I can blow your eyes out as you come up."

"'Ere!" The outraged voice sounded hollow. "That's illegal. I'm staying 'ere."

"Kidnapping me is not only illegal but it's probably classed as interfering with ancient monuments. Oh, come on up before I stick this gun down and shoot both ways!"

"Cor, you're an 'orror, straight! What 'appens if I come up?"

"Finkel, I'm counting ten. If you aren't here by then . . ." She audibly clicked the Luger's safety catch. "I hope you stay put. One . . . two . . . three . . ."

She stopped at seven. A wet and worried-looking Finkel hauled himself through the drain orifice like a man trying to use the demon trap when the spring had broken. "About time, son!"

"Easy, missus, easy!" Finkel backed away. "I never 'urt you, did I?"

"Not yet. Hurry, and talk!"

"Not on your nelly I don't!"

"No?" The Luger was waved threateningly. "Ever been pistol whipped? I use the sight on this like a whip. Peels off the skin beautifully - I've always wanted to try it."

Finkel tried to force himself back into the wall.

"Nark it. You know what'd 'appen if I grass."

"This is it, Finkel." She advanced slowly, wondering what she would do if he still refused. Finkel did not.

"'Ere, I'll talk. Keep orf, will you? 'Ow you ever found an 'usband I'll never know . . . all *right!* Wotcher want to know?"

"Everything, and a bit more. Hurry! I'm waiting."

"Yes'm. I'll tell you."

* * *

While Finkel was talking, Loddon found the street boringly quiet. As the sun rose, an occasional worker on his route to the factories went incuriously past. The secret of a happy life in the Isle of Dogs is minding one's business.

The reporter began nodding, physically tired out. He never heard the sound of soft footsteps. The first thing he knew was the sudden pressure of a gun in his back. Jukes was there, with the driver of the kidnap car behind him. There was nothing the frustrated Loddon could do but head into the house as the Gunner ordered him.

He was pushed along the passage by prods from the gun muzzle. A sudden shout from the rear of the house stopped them with a warning: "Look out, the old buzzard's loose!"

There was confusion and uncertainty for a few moments. The Gunner was not mentally equipped to deal with real emergencies. Then a hand appeared from a dark doorway, and Loddon was jerked out of sight. Mrs. Pym appeared, holding the Luger.

"Hi. Looking for me?"

The car driver, a quick thinker, thrust the Gunner forward both as a shield and to create confusion. Mrs. Pym side-stepped with agility; the Gunner went staggering into Loddon's waiting arms. The driver's hand was coming up with a gun, and the Luger banged, its reverberating roar intensified by the narrow passage. The man's gun hand spurted blood.

The Gunner, suddenly raging at the way things had gone, tore away from Loddon and leapt on Mrs. Pym. The Luger's muzzle clunked on his ear with a thump that coincided with his scream of pain.

It was a hilarious Loddon who was sent in her car to fetch men from the divisional station. They came readily, for N-Division thought highly of Mrs. Pym and Arbour Square duly made her three captives warmly welcome.

Sitting in her car again, with Loddon, she sighed heavily.

"The things that happen to me!"

"Lost your hat, too, ma'am?"

"Along with all the other things I do for England, son. Now, it's getting on. I've telephoned MacPherson, and we're headed for Epsom."

"Wow! It's Derby Day, and I'd forgotten. What's happening, and why?"

"It's a simple story, as the truth usually is. It's what people do to hide it that makes for drama." She started the car. "You can have it, but don't use it until I say so. The Press Bureau at Central dislikes me quite enough as it is now."

"It's a deal, ma'am." Loddon settled comfortably.

"No need to put your feet up. The case isn't exactly over, but it's easy enough to get the sense of it.

"Your good friend, Pete Painter, is the nigger in the woodpile – I beg your pardon, that's rudeness in these enlightened days." She sniffed loudly. "The bogey at the bottom of the well, if you prefer it."

"Pete!" Loddon was astonished. "Pete's a crook – *never!*"

"Gambling. He's lost one hell of a lot to a man named Gemiel, one of these smart Americans who isn't above using strong-arm boys to implement his little tricks. Painter is so heavily in Gemiel's debt that he's held by the short hairs – he's even threatened to take the man's daughter from the school in Ascot where she's getting an expensive education, and see that Painter's bills are talked about where the most harm will be done."

"I might've helped the silly coot if he'd told me."

"People never confide in their friends, not in these greedy and self-centred days." She touched the hooter at a dawdling cyclist. "Gemiel was planning a betting coup with Tenestra, and couldn't figure a way. Fate gave him an idea, according to what I'm told.

"That stable boy who went into Tenestra's box must've done some sudden, damn-fool thing. Tenestra apparently lashed out in terror, and killed him."

"You mean . . ." Loddon stared at her. "Tenestra really is a killer?"

"Yes, and no. The horse kicked when it was frightened. Thing is, the horse was fancied in a warm sort of fashion up till then. When the news of the killing got out, John Public, in his well-known way of behaving like an ass, went mad and poured the money on Tenestra."

"Five to two against," Loddon murmured. "What a beauty!"

"Depends how you see it." She concentrated for a few moments on a block in the traffic. "Point is, Tenestra was a likely favourite without the dead boy – he just speeded the process. Have you heard of Crackater's?"

The reporter seemed surprised, then he nodded.

"The bookmaker's it is. The show is Gemiel's, and not doing too well. Then along came Tenestra and everything else. Apparently it was to be a betting coup of the century. Gemiel saw to it that Painter agreed to dope Tenestra - nothing much, just slow-down dope, morphine, saltpetre, and one of the new tranquiliser derivatives."

"Pete agreed?"

"What the hell else could he do?" Mrs. Pym glowered. "Honour's all very well, but other things count when a man's really cornered, and you damn-well know it!"

"Sorry."

"Don't apologize - I'm just being irascible. Little Tommy Pilcher, the exercise boy, walked into Tenestra's loose-box when Painter was using a hypodermic, trying the mixture before a gallop because Gemiel wanted to know its exact qualities. Pilcher was no fool and wanted a share in what was going on. All Painter could do was report to Gemiel, who said he would straighten it out."

"And Gemiel arranged for Pilcher to be in Tenestra's box, and got somebody to fix it so that the horse kicked the boy to death." Loddon looked elated. "Am I right, ma'am?"

"Well, yes, and on the other hand, no. You see, it was plainly murder - the picture of the hoofmark on Tommy's back made it clear." She was looking complacent.

"Eh? How? You never told me. And there wasn't a thing in that picture that I saw!" Loddon sounded indignant.

"The Pym brain, son - it oozes intelligence and what have you. Forget it for now. Gemiel got rid of the inconvenient Pilcher and everything was set. Crackater's quietly took certain betting men for everything they cared to put down, and at odds very much better than the market. The suspicious ones are staying clear, but there's plenty of money going on; Gemiel's book looks like quarter day at the Bank of England."

"He'll never be able to lay it -" Loddon whistled. "I'm stupid! Tenestra's going to lose."

"Well, now, that could be it. But Garnett's riding, and he's going to kill himself trying to win." Mrs. Pym made a short gesture and was occupied for several minutes with some complicated early morning traffic. When she was through it, she nodded. "It isn't speed limits the Transport Minister wants to worry about - speedy reactions for drivers would be more to the point. Where were we? Oh, yes, there was a switch in jockeys, and

Frank Garnett decided to put Baker up on Tenestra, and ride Crimson himself.

"That rattled Gemiel because he'd got a notion some of his customers might demand a test on Tenestra after the race. He told Painter to drop the dope, tell Garnett to ride Tenestra, and ride to win. Baker was to ride Crimson. Garnett agreed because riding to win is no sin, and, anyway, there was some dirty business in his life which Gemiel knew."

"*My God!*" Loddon's expression was blank. "Isn't *anybody* honest?"

"There's me," Mrs. Pym spoke jovially, "and there's you. Shott and Mac, maybe - that's the lot. But with all the will in the world, Garnett isn't up to the big boys who're riding today. Yet, since miracles are commonplace, he *might* win. And if he looks like it . . . well, any race is won by the first horse past the post. And if that turns out to be Tenestra, or, rather, if that's how it looks in the home stretch there'll be Gemiel *somewhere* in that vast crowd. He's lived in Kentucky, where men can shoot the eye out of a wild turkey at a very long range . . . Frank Garnett riding to win is a lot bigger than a turkey!"

8

THE Derby course was a glittering picture of brilliant sunshine, colour, and movement. The whole world seemed to be there, for it was turning out to be an Epsom classic in its pattern.

The tic-tac men's gloves were white flashes against the constantly changing background of the crowd. The roar of voices was a combination of sound broken by strident bursts of laughter and the squall of transistor radios. But there was more than one uneasy mind worrying about what was to come.

Detectives from several divisions were present, some recalled from leave, and others whose presence away from their normal work troubled many an over-extended police station. They were searching almost hopelessly among the mighty gathering.

Up in the Press Box, banished there by Mrs. Pym, Loddon was using powerful glasses to search every possible inch of the ground before him in an endeavour to find Gemiel. The betting was causing uneasiness, and the reporters in the box were discussing it, for the entries from Garnett's stable were at the bottom of the uncertainties.

Sergeant MacPherson, so far as Scots dourness would permit, was in a state of nerves. He had orders to try and find Gemiel, with the help of the detectives under him. On the heels of that, Mrs. Pym had vanished.

Over on the public side, the small money was following happily on Tenestra. Those who knew nothing about it went round assuring all those who would listen that it was going to be a favourite's race. Tenestra was the burden of the busy tic-tac men's messages.

The excitement seemed to spread to the line-up of horses when the great event came at last. The first start was a false one. Crimson was giving trouble, while Tenestra, with Frank Garnett's hand gentling him, waited like a veteran. Then:

"They're off!"

It was a cry from one mighty throat as the crowd spoke. The line of horses went for a moment with military precision. Then, as they moved to the thunder of shouting, the ululation of frenzy, the horses began to find their places.

Leading the bunched field, Crimson was going with a fury that did not promise well. The French horse, Cloisonne, was moving comfortably behind, and exactly as those who understood form had expected. Tenestra lay well back.

Not until they were at last coming into the home stretch did the crowd really go mad. The noise startled Loddon where he watched through his glasses in fascination. Next to him an excited sports writer was crying his views:

"Crimson's falling back - I knew it! By gosh he's - ah, Cloisonne's coming up nicely. Oh! Oh! Beautiful! Cloisonne's going to - my God, it's Tenestra! Tenestra's making it like a bloody fire-engine. Come on, Tenestra!"

The bright bay had found its stride and was narrowing the lead with that fascinating use of reserve speed which can happen at times.

Garnett remembered Painter's boast that the race was Tenestra's meat. He had held his place until the home stretch, when he really let Tenestra get away.

The horse seemed to pick up its heels, and flew as if borne on the wind. The sour-rich smell of cut turf came up to blend with the reek of leather and horse sweat. Garnett was conscious of all this, of the rush of warm, heavy air. Crimson was alongside, and fell back; Cloisonne lay half a head back with the rangy Abroukir riding level.

The audience was raving. The leading trio were neck to neck now. And it was as if the entire human world tensed for the final yards to the winning post.

Then Loddon, his glasses off the race for a moment, moved slightly and seemed to freeze with horror.

Near the far rail, a few hundred yards from the winning post, a grim-faced man could be seen, slightly above the crowd, partially hidden by a right-angled board used by the course authorities for some purpose. Loddon's glasses centred and were in focus at the right moment.

The man was crouched, his body partially screening the gun he held which seemed to have an elongated barrel comprising some sort of attachment. As the field approached the man raised himself very slightly.

Loddon's mouth went open and stayed that way. He knew exactly what was going to happen to Garnett, and there was not a thing he could do. Like a watcher in a gallery, he saw the drama on a stage which nothing he could do would change.

A few yards back was a bulky tic-tac man in a long white coat, a cheerful brown bowler hat, and white gloves. He was one of several scattered in the area, and because his glasses were so precisely and accidentally on the right view Loddon saw it all.

The crowd yell was fantastic, blending with the soft drumming of the racing field.

"Tenestra! *Tenestra wins!*"

It was as if one man spoke, but Loddon only saw the questing muzzle of the gun, and he knew Garnett's body would fall to the ground at any moment. Then he saw another gun appear in the gloved hand of the tic-tac man. There was a puff of smoke.

The man with the elongated gun clutched at his throat and sank with a curiously slow motion into the crowd. The tic-tac man put his gun away as the crowd announced formidably that Tenestra had won.

But Loddon's mouth was still open. He had, in his long association with Mrs. Pym seen her in every conceivable hat dreamed up by imaginative *modistes*.

He could not deny that a brown bowler was something quite impressively original.

9

SHOTT was at his desk – the big desk with the semi-circular cut-out made to admit him in his wheel-chair so that he could work in comfort. MacPherson was there, as was Loddon with a long rolled sheet of paper under one arm. Mrs. Pym was in the most comfortable chair.

“You’ll have to do some very deft talking with the powers-that-be to wriggle out of using a gun in a public place like that,” Shott was saying.

“I’ve wriggled out before. There wasn’t much else I *could* do, when you come to think of it.” Mrs. Pym’s expression was suddenly delighted. “Standing in as a tic-tac man was the only possible way of stopping Gemiel, if my men didn’t do it – and, I’ll bet a million, the messages I semaphored out baffled the other side all right!”

“Thing is, Mr. Shott, she did it, and no matter what they have to say about it, you can’t beat the Chief when she decides to take a chance.” Loddon’s championship was warm. “Gemiel tried every trick under the sun to pull off the coup, even to lese-majesty like kidnapping Mrs. Pym.”

She leaned over and picked up a brown paper parcel from the floor, unrolling it.

“There’s a pretty thing for you.” She held out a boxing glove with a horseshoe strategically wired to it. “Gemiel’s invention,” she assured the startled audience. “Used on a boy by Gunner Jukes, an ex-pug, who packs a punch like a mule’s kick – if Tenestra doesn’t mind the simile. It got rid of the boy safely, and put the blame on that unfortunate horse, already a one-time killer.”

“You mean, it wasn’t Tenestra at all!” Loddon was truly staggered at the weapon.

“Did you honestly believe it was, son? Damn it, you saw this, didn’t you?” She held out the picture of the dead boy’s back. “It’s plain enough, surely?”

There was silence as the stark police print was studied.

“Looks like a hoof-print to me, ma’am,” MacPherson said at last.

“And genuine,” Shott added.

“You mean, it shows marks where the wire attaches it to the glove?” Loddon asked. “But it doesn’t.”

"Who said it did?" Mrs. Pym's sniff was surprisingly mild if censure was intended by the sound. "The position of it - can't you see it? If Tenestra kicked young Pilcher the way the mark shows, then the boy was standing on his head. The horseshoe's attached to the glove upside down, if it's supposed to be the normal kick mark made by a normal horse!"

When the silence had run its course, Loddon smiled on them all.

"Meanwhile you've done it again, Chief." He unrolled the sheet of paper he carried. "I had this specially printed as a mark of esteem - pity we can't put it on the streets. There isn't a man in London who wouldn't agree!"

The news-bill was something to see:

Daily Report

MRS. PYM

WINS

DERBY!

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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, 4 Bradmore Road, Oxford, England.* It will be your letters that help us to plan ahead, featuring the most popular types of stories by your favourite authors.

Introducing Bob Brewer,
live-wire insurance
detective. His job is
protecting high society from
its carelessness and folly . . .

Ear Wallace

THE BOSS OF THE BIG FOUR

"The Big Four" yarns show the Master of Mystery in his finest form as a short story writer, and are long overdue for re-issue.

The stories' appeal lies in their unity of structure and their humorous telling.

TO all outward appearance, Douglas Campbell was a dour and possibly a short-tempered man of forty-eight, tall and broad of shoulder. He had what women describe as a bad-tempered face since, through no fault of his own, his eyebrows met.

As chairman and general manager of the Federated Assurances it was only right and proper that he should be credited with a total absence of any sense of humour. He was, as all who have met him will testify, a grave and serious man, who used precise language cautiously.

He sat at his desk one spring morning reading his correspondence. Presently he put the letters down, looked at his watch and lifted the telephone.

"I am expecting Mr. Robert Brewer in a few minutes," he said. "Show him straight in and see that we are not interrupted."

"Very good, sir," said his secretary.

After a few minutes the telephone rang.

"It's Mr. Brewer," said the secretary.

"Show him in," said Campbell, rising expectantly.

Mr. Robert Brewer was young, perfectly and fashionably attired, and about him generally was that air of buoyant freshness which can only

come from the consciousness of youth.

He advanced to Campbell with outstretched hand.

"My dear old Highlander, you're glad to see me!"

"I'm not so sure about that," said Campbell. "Sit down. You're looking very bright and beautiful this morning."

"Aren't I?" said Mr. Bob Brewer delightedly. "Dear old boy, I feel positively pretty. Now let us get down to business. I gather you haven't brought me from New York to hand me compliments."

"You're a wonderful man, Bob," said Campbell admiringly. "Man! If I'd had half your nerve when I was your age; if I'd been half as stuck on myself as you are, if I'd had just a touch of your coolness, audacity, and unscrupulousness - I'd have been a millionaire!"

"Instead of which you are a two-millionaire," said Bob Brewer, "whilst I'm a poor insurance detective, finding it very hard to make both ends meet."

Mr. Campbell drew up his chair close to the table, and lowered his voice.

"Bob, the chairmen of three of our companies have advised me to send for you. I represent six of the biggest insurance companies in this country, mostly burglary, accident and that sort of thing. You know the kind of business. You've been connected with it yourself."

Bob nodded.

"We insure society against their follies and carelessness," Campbell went on, "and, frankly, it hasn't paid. Bob, you've heard about the sins of society? Well, I'll tell you what its principal sin is - lack of grey matter. We've got the finest and the best clients in Britain, the cream of the whole bunch. Everybody with money and personal adornment is insured with us. But, Bob, their trouble is that whilst they had enough brains to get their money they haven't got enough to keep it.

"You know what they are," he went on. "They move like automatons from one fashionable place to another, and they move in a crowd like a flock of sheep. They're at Ascot, they're in London, they're at Goodwood, they're in the South of France and they're in Scotland and they're at St. Moritz, all at the proper time. Now, when that army moves, Bob, there's another little army which follows it. They're the camp followers, or scamp followers, or whatever you like to call them. They're the parasites who live upon these mugs -"

"Oh, what vulgarity!" murmured Bob.

"They're mugs and nothing else," said Campbell. "If they weren't mugs they'd be original. They'd go to St. Moritz in the summer, and Nice in the winter. But, as I was saying, there's a young army of parasites that moves with them and lives on them, and unless we want to go broke it's our job to frustrate their knavish tricks, as the Good Book says."

"You're a whale on insurance, Campbell, but you're rather short in the literary line. The clever little line you quote is not, as you imagine, from the Good Book."

"It doesn't matter where it's from," Campbell went on. "The point is this - we've got to put a man on specially to watch over these sheep, and see that they are not torn limb from limb by the wolves. We are going to offer you a very big salary to take this job on and we will give you permission to accept any private commissions that may come your way. Is it a bet?"

"It all depends upon what your idea of a handsome salary is," said Bob with a grin. "In the old days it used to be somewhere in the region of £300 or £400 per annum."

"We are more broad-minded now," said Campbell, "and we never talk under thousands."

Brewer looked at him and nodded.

"Take down the notice," he said. "I am engaged."

Campbell walked to the door and turned the key.

"I'll introduce you to the names of the king-bird of all the birds of prey," he said. "He's the boss-man of the Big Four - 'Reddy' Smith."

Bob laughed quietly.

"Reddy, eh?" he said. "Why, I need no introduction to Reddy! You couldn't live in the seams of New York City and not know him."

"Does he know you?" asked the other quickly.

"He does not," replied Bob. "We've never met in the way of business, but I know him. You see, in New York, I was on the commercial side of insurance - trade frauds and that sort of thing. Reddy was a con man, an advertisement faker. He used to sell non-existent shares to the deluded agriculturists of the Middle West. I've seen him at exercise in a prison yard, but I doubt if he knows me. As a matter of fact, I was on his track about a year ago, before he sailed for Europe."

Douglas Campbell nodded.

"All I know about Reddy," he said, "I've learnt from the police. He has been working with a high-class crowd in France.

They never brought any charge home to him, although it's pretty well known he was concerned in one or two bad robberies. I have information that he and his gang are in Monte Carlo. Unfortunately, a number of our clients are there also, including a selection of the wealthiest and most vulgar. You will find them and their womenfolk there, encrusted with precious stones and clothed in rainbow raiment. They will be eating ice-creams with diamond spoons, and new peas with golden knives; and you will possibly interrupt Mr. Reddy just as he is telling the most bloated of them about a diamond mine that he has discovered in Sicily. Reddy always carries a few spare diamonds as a convincing proof."

"What help do I get from the French police?" asked Bob, and in reply his new employer pulled open the the drawer and took out a small leather-bound book.

"Here's your authority, signed by the Minister of the Interior, and countersigned by the Minister of State of Monaco. The authorities in Monaco are more anxious to keep out the crooks than we are to pinch them."

Bob took the book, examined it and slipped it into his pocket.

"Now off you go. You will live at the best hotels."

"Trust me, old boy," said Bob. "Do I draw my salary in advance, or when I can get it?"

"I knew your father," said Mr. Campbell eyeing him severely, "and he was a good and thrifty Scot. I knew your mother, and she was a Macleod and a thrifty soul. But, you, Bob, you have just developed into a spendthrift Englishman. Shall I give you a little on account?"

"A lot's a little," said Bob. "I'll take six months' salary and I'll let you know what I want for expenses. I shall stay for a few days in Paris, and Paris costs money."

Mr. Campbell sighed and wrote a cheque.

* * *

Two men sat outside the Café de Paris in Monte Carlo. They were both well-dressed, clean-shaven, and had the appearance of citizens of the world, which meant that they might have been of any nationality, but were probably American.

The elder of the two was sucking a cigar thoughtfully and nodding his replies to the other.

Presently he said:

"I've never met him, but I've heard a lot about him. Jimmy, this place is not going to be healthy after Monday. I think we'll skip by the Sunday morning train. That gives us four days to draw dividends. What's this Brewer like?"

Jimmy shrugged.

"Search me!" he said. "I know as much about him as you do."

"You are sure he's coming?" asked Reddy.

"Sure," said the other emphatically. "I saw his telegram on the clerk's counter this morning. It was sent from Paris and asked for the best suite overlooking the entrance to the Casino. It said he would arrive on Monday, but he if didn't the rooms were to be held for him until he did arrive."

Reddy nodded again.

"That gives us four days, and I think we shall get the stuff," he added confidently. "Little William certainly looks like easy money."

He nodded towards the hotel, on the steps of which stood a resplendent figure in a brilliantly coloured shirt and shorts of a dazzling whiteness.

"He almost sparkles from here," said Reddy admiringly. "Gee! That fellow is the nearest approach to cash in hand that I have ever struck."

"What is he?" asked Jimmy curiously. "I saw you talking with him in the rooms last night."

"He is William Ford. His pa made enough out of patent fuses to settle the British National Debt. Pa died off and left a cartload of money to Willie, and Willie's seeing life for the first time."

"What did you get him with?" asked Reddy.

"With my Montana silver mine," replied the other. "He just fell for it. Come over and shake hands with him."

Mr. Ford stood with his hands in pockets, a long amber cigarette-holder between his teeth, staring about him, and apparently oblivious to the beauties of the scene. Walking slowly across the broad, well-swept roadway to the Municipal Gardens, he bought a newspaper at the kiosk, and returned to a long garden seat facing the Casino. It was here that they accosted him.

"Good morning, Mr. Ford, I want you to shake hands with Mr. Kennedy, one of our millionaire ranchers from Texas."

Mr. Ford blinked up at the newcomer, and offered a limp hand.

"Good morning," he said to Reddy. "It's beastly hot, and I can't read this beastly French newspaper. Do you understand this beastly language?"

"Why, sure, Mr. Ford," said the other, taking the newspaper from the young man's hand. "I've seen it, and there's nothing at all worth reading about unless you're interested in French racing."

"I hate racing. I think it's beastly," said Mr. Ford. "I am a business man y'know, Mr. Redwood; gambling doesn't appeal to me. I risk a few thousands at the beastly table, but it bores me."

"Quite right," said Mr. Redwood cordially; "that's a fool way of spending your money."

"Of course," said Mr. Ford modestly, "I can afford to lose. I brought a million francs in ready money."

"Which I hope you keep in the hotel safe," said Reddy warningly. "There are a great many dishonest people in Monte Carlo."

"Not much," said Mr. Ford scornfully. "I always say if a man can't look after his beastly money he doesn't deserve to have it. No; I keep it in my room."

Reddy drew a long breath.

"I haven't come to Monte Carlo to learn how to protect myself," went on Mr. Ford. "But look here, as a business man, and without any beastly beating about the bush, what do you want for this fifth share in your mine?"

"Well, I don't know that I want to sell," Reddy said modestly. "I've come to Monte Carlo to enjoy myself, and not to deal in stocks and shares."

"You do too much of that at home, Mr. Redwood," chimed in Jimmy, feeling it was his turn to speak. "Why, Mr. Redwood is known from one end of Colorado to the other end of Montana as the biggest man in the mining world. I suppose you deal in five million shares a year, don't you, Mr. Redwood?"

"About that," said the modest Reddy. "Probably not so many, but somewhere about that figure."

The young man was staring at him with an amused smile.

"You can't frighten me with talk of millions," he said. "I understand that your Montana mine is capitalised at a million dollars; that is nearly £400,000."

Mr. Redwood nodded.

"You say you want about £75,000 – that is two hundred thousand dollars for a fifth interest!"

Mr. Redwood nodded again.

"The shares stand at 2.50 in the open market," he said; "and a fifth share is worth more than twice as much as I am asking for

it. I'm tired of mining, tired of making profits. I'm going to get out of my holdings, Jimmy," he said, turning to the 'rancher'. "This gentleman wants to buy a share of the Montana Deep. He's a business man, and there is something about him that I like."

"But surely," said the shocked 'rancher', "you're not going to sell out your holdings in the Montana Deep? Why, they're the richest mines in the West! There would be a sensation if this were known in Wall Street!"

Reddy made no reply. He took from his side pocket a thick package, unrolled it and disclosed some beautifully printed share certificates, stamped and sealed. These he looked at musingly, even regretfully.

"When I think," he said, "of the trouble I have taken to make this mine a success, why I hate the idea of parting with them. I shall be giving them to you, Mr. Ford, for a mere bagatelle. Exactly the amount you have brought to Monte Carlo in ready money expecting to lose."

"Of course, I haven't made up my mind that I am going to buy them," said the young man hastily.

"And I haven't made up my mind that I'm going to sell them either," smiled the other. "Come and have a drink."

He was too wily a bird to press his victim, and made no further reference to the deal for two tays.

"Time's getting short," said Reddy on the Saturday after lunch. "Did you hear from Paris?"

Jimmy nodded and produced a folded paper.

"Brewer's staying at the Hotel Meurice," he said. "That was the hotel his telegram was sent from. I cabled him last night in the name of the hotel to ask if he still wanted the rooms, and I watched the counter all morning to see if he replied. Here's a copy of the telegram. It came just before lunch."

He handed the scribbled slip of paper to the other who read:

"Yes, of course I want the rooms. - BREWER."

"The hotel people were a bit puzzled by the wire, but that's nothing. We shall be gone, anyway, before he arrives. Now, what about this fool?"

"He's bitten, but he looks like taking a few days to land," said Reddy. "I had a chat with him in the rooms, exchanged confidences with him, told him that I always kept my money under the pillow and that I went out this morning forgetting to take it with me. He said he kept his money in the bottom drawer of

his bureau under his clothes." He chuckled. "If we don't get his stuff today legitimately, Jimmy, we're going to get it tonight by coarse, violent methods! Don't trouble to cancel the sleeper, but we're going to get away by another route."

"How's that?" said Jimmy.

"I've ordered a car from Nice to meet me outside the Post Office at two o'clock tomorrow morning. We'll take the road as far as Marseilles, slip on through Narbonne, across the frontier into Spain and lie low at Barcelona for a while. I fixed another car to meet us at Marseilles on Sunday afternoon outside the Hotel d'Angleterre."

"Good," said Jimmy.

"Our room is on the same floor as his. It's easy to swing from one balcony to another, and he sleeps with his windows open. I'll get into the room and open the door. You come in, and if he gives any trouble you put him to sleep. We ought to make Marseilles before midday."

They strolled through the big pillared hall, passed through the doors into the *salle*, and spent the next half-hour wandering from table to table in the track of their victim, who was not apparently engaged in any serious betting.

Mr. Ford at last saw the two Americans, and favoured them with a pitying smile.

"Beastly nonsense, don't you think," he said. "I say, let's get out of this place. It makes me ill to see people wasting their money."

They followed him obediently and he went back to his favourite garden seat before the Casino.

"I have been thinking about that mining proposition and do you know, I nearly decided to buy your shares. Then it struck me that Montana was a beastly long way off, and I know nothing about mining."

"Fortunately you don't have to know," said Reddy. "There's just nothing for you to do but to sit tight in your beautiful home in London and watch the dividends pile up."

"That's all right, my friend," said the young man in a superior tone, "but suppose they don't pile up, hey? I will tell you what I'll do. I will write to a friend of mine, my broker, a beastly clever fellow, who does all my work for me, and I will get him to cable me. Or suppose I wired him. Telegrams are so much quicker. You don't mind, do you, Mr. Redwood?"

"Not at all," said Mr. Redwood calmly. "And if he replies

favourably, as of course he will, you will give me a cheque."

"Oh, no," said the young man, "I will pay you cash."

"I thought you might have put the money into the bank," said Mr. Redwood, greatly relieved.

"Not a bit of it! Not a bit of it! I always say that if a fellow can't look after his beastly money himself he doesn't deserve to have it. Oh, by the way, I have had a telegram from a fellow named" – he fumbled in his pocket – "from a fellow named Brewer. A beastly impertinent telegram, telling me to do nothing until I have seen him. Who the devil is Brewer?"

"Brewer," said Mr. Redwood with great earnestness, "is one of the worst crooks on the Continent. Whatever he lays his hands on is as good as lost."

"You don't say so," gasped Mr. Ford, "Well, of all the cheek! Do you think I ought to notify the police?"

"It's quite unnecessary." Reddy was thoroughly enjoying the humour of the situation.

Ford looked at his watch.

"I am going up to La Turbie. I have ordered a car. Would you two gentlemen like to come up?"

"No thanks," said Reddy. "I've got a lot of work to do this afternoon – letters to write and all that sort of thing."

The work that Reddy had to do was peculiar to his profession. He had to study road maps and improvise timetables. He had to telegraph to one of the Big Four of Crime, who was in temporary retirement at Montdidier, to fix a passport which would enable him to cross the frontier. He had to pack his scanty belongings and make a further reconnaissance of Ford's room.

He had already discovered that it was impossible to get into the room by day. By special arrangement with the hotel proprietors a man stood on guard in the corridor all the time Mr. Ford was out – a guard which, owing to the young man's confidence in himself, was removed at night. Each big room had its own oblong balcony and between the balconies was a space of two feet which a bold and an agile man could easily negotiate – and Reddy and his partner were both bold and agile. Patience was one of his virtues; and most patiently he waited for the night to fall.

At midnight the rooms closed and a big crowd flocked out. The doors of automobiles banged, the engines of automobiles purred. There was a great melting away of people, and presently the space before the Casino was clear.

By one o'clock most of the regular habitués of the Casino had either gone home or had passed across to the Sporting Club, which did not close until four in the morning and where Baccarat was played for high stakes. When Reddy stepped out on to the balcony there was not a soul in sight.

He listened for a full minute, then swung himself over the iron rail of the balcony, reached out for the next and in this way traversed the three balconies which separated him from Mr. Ford's room.

The windows were wide open, only the wooden jalousies being closed, and these he opened easily and noiselessly. He slipped into the room and closed the wooden doors behind him. To make his way across the room and unlock the door leading to the corridor was the work of a few seconds. He had listened intently on entering the room, and had been rewarded by hearing the regular breathing, not to say occasional snore, of his victim.

As he unlocked the outer door, Jimmy slipped in, closing it noiselessly behind him, and turning the key. Reddy felt for the bottom drawer of the bureau. He had pulled it open and his hand was dexterously searching amidst a mass of clothing, when the room was suddenly flooded with light.

Mr. Ford was sitting up in bed balancing a wicked-looking Browning on his knees.

"Put up your hands, Reddy," he said.

"What do you mean?" said Reddy indignantly. "I've got into the wrong room. I sure am surprised at you, Mr. Ford."

Mr. Ford slipped from his bed, and Reddy noticed that he was fully dressed save for his coat.

"I've been waiting for you, Reddy," Mr. Ford went on. "I'm taking you into custody on a charge of burglary, attempted fraud by misrepresentation and impersonation. I'm taking your pal, too."

"Who are you?" demanded Reddy.

"My name is Bob Brewer," said the young man. "You may have heard of me. I'm a notorious crook who takes everything he can lay his hands on. Put out yours. I'm going to take you into custody!"

The Governor's Dilemma

Above the roar of the battle, Emile Carsacci, the Corsican gang boss, was standing upright, blazing away at the men advancing on him. He was spattered with blood from head to foot. But the end was near . . .

William H. Fear

NO CODE FOR KILLERS

This enthralling and authentic story of gang warfare stands four-square in the Wallace tradition.

For the most part, it is set in Paris during and after the Second World War, where crime increased greatly following the Liberation.

THE time, 1942; the place, the Santé Prison near the Boulevard Arago in Paris.

Monsieur Marcel Dubois, the Governor of the Santé, was working in his office inside the prison, silently cursing the sticky summer heat and the interminable flies that buzzed round his head, when there was a knock on the door.

Monsieur Dubois raised his head with a sigh, dabbed at his forehead with his handkerchief, and called: "*Entrez!*"

The door opened to admit the prison's chief guard, Mercier, a very correct man who had served for many years in the *Gendarmerie Nationale* before taking up an appointment in the prison service. Mercier drew himself up to his full height, and saluted his boss.

"Well, Mercier?" Dubois growled shortly.

"There are three—" the guard hesitated. "Three men waiting to see you, *m'sieur*."

"What sort of men? Who are they? Can't you see I'm busy?"

"They're Germans," the chief guard told him. "One's from the Gestapo."

"What!" Monsieur Dubois half rose to his feet. Damn these infernal Boches, he thought to himself. Up till now he'd man-

aged to steer clear of the Nazis, and they hadn't interfered with him, or his duties as Prison Governor. What the devil did they want now, prying into a French civil prison?

"Show them in," Dubois ordered the chief guard. And he added: "And for goodness sake try to be polite to the bastards, Mercier."

"*Oui, M'sieur le Gouverneur,*" Mercier growled.

A moment later the three visiting Germans were ushered into the Governor's office. From behind his desk Dubois eyed them darkly – and decided he didn't like any of them.

One wore the black uniform of the Nazi Gestapo; the other two were tough-looking thugs in grey with the double lightning flash of the S.S. on their collars. These two stood just inside the door whilst their black-clad comrade advanced to Dubois' desk.

He was only a youngster, Dubois decided – a good-looking, fair-haired young swine who had been fully indoctrinated with the false ideals of Nazihood from childhood, and who probably regarded Hitler as his god.



The young Nazi came to attention before the paper-littered desk, and bowed sharply from the waist.

"*Sturmbannfuhrer* Otto Ulrich of the *Geheimstaatspolizei*," he introduced himself coolly. "You, *m'sieur*, are the Governor of the Santé Prison?"

"I am," Dubois answered evenly. "What can I do for you?"

The young Nazi replied: "I am here to collect one of your prisoners, *M'sieur* Dubois. The Gestapo requires his presence in Berlin immediately!"

"One of my prisoners?" echoed Dubois in astonishment. "This is highly irregular, I must say. What is the name of this prisoner?"

The *Sturmbannfuhrer* consulted a paper he took from a briefcase he carried under his arm.

"His name is Brionne, René Brionne."

The Governor's slack face showed his amazement.

"Brionne? But René Brionne is here serving a life sentence for murder. He is one of our most carefully guarded prisoners!"

"I don't care who or what he is," the *Sturmbannfuhrer* answered stiffly. "I have my orders to carry out, *m'sieur*, and those orders are to convey René Brionne to Berlin. Please to have him brought here."

"But I can't release a dangerous man without the proper authority," Dubois protested. "An official document must be sent to the Minister of Justice. It is impossible, *m'sieur*!"

The two hard-faced S.S. men by the door looked sideways at each other. The hand of one dropped to the leather holster on his belt; the other shook his head.

Sturmbannfuhrer Ulrich allowed a sheet of paper to flutter from his hand down onto the Governor's desk.

"There is all the authority you need," he said icily. "A letter signed by *Herr* Himmler himself. Now have Brionne brought here!"

Dubois mopped his streaming forehead. What was he to do?

"I can't," he stuttered at last. "I - I -"

Sturmbannfuhrer Ulrich leaned forward and rested his knuckles on the Governor's desk. He looked into Dubois' eyes, then spoke in a harsh whisper.

"You have a good job here at the prison, *M'sieur* Dubois, and during the two years of our occupation of France you have not been troubled. But if your attitude towards the Third Reich is this, then believe me, *m'sieur*, you're going to find plenty of trouble in store. How do you think life in a labour camp in Ger-

many would compare to the position you hold now, *hein?*”

Dubois swallowed hard and ran a finger round the inside of his limp collar. The threat was obvious.

He reached out and pressed the buzzer on his desk. In answer to it, the chief guard knocked on the door and entered. He looked at the two S.S. men who glared back at him, then saluted the Prison Governor.

“Get Brionne up here at once, Mercier,” the Governor said in a voice that sounded slightly strangled.

The guard raised his eyebrows.

“Brionne?” he echoed.

Dubois banged his fist down hard on the desk top.

“Yes, damn you, Brionne!”

Mercier reddened. “*Oui, m’sieur,*” he grunted.

He left the office in a hurry, and made his way through the long, echoing corridors of the old Santé Prison till he reached a small door set in a solid stone wall. The chief guard unlocked it and passed through. He was standing now on a small balcony protected at the front by a curtain of wire netting. Before and below was a huge, bare chamber made entirely of concrete. The chief guard moved to the front of the balcony, and looked down to where some fifteen feet below, a long line of brown-clad convicts were running round the floor keeping close to the walls, and under the watchful eyes of three blue-uniformed prison guards armed with revolvers.

“Hey, Ruiz!” Mercier shouted loudly above the slip-slap of the feet of the runners on the hard floor. “Up here!”

One of the guards looked up to the balcony.

“Get Brionne out of the line!” Mercier shouted. “Take him outside. He’s wanted upstairs!”

The guard, Ruiz waved an arm. He turned to face the running prisoners, and ordered them to halt. The brown-clad men shuffled to a standstill, panting and sweating, glad of a moment’s respite from the gruelling punishment they were undergoing.

“Brionne, stand out of the line! Hurry, you scum!”

René Brionne, convicted murderer, one-time Paris gunman and armed hold-up specialist, stood to attention, and marched a few paces forward. As he did so a dark-skinned, crinkly-haired convict next in the line whispered from the side of his mouth: “*I hope they beat the guts out of you, Brionne!*”

Brionne stood at rigid attention in front of the line, and replied without moving his lips: “*One of these days I’m going to shut your*

trap for good, Carsacci!"

Guard Ruiz jerked a grimy thumb towards the door leading out of the punishment chamber.

"Okay, Brionne, outside!" he snapped.

Five minutes later René Brionne, his wrists manacled to prevent any violence, was standing outside Governor Dubois' office with Chief Guard Mercier beside him.

Mercier knocked, and being told to enter pushed the murderer before him into the presence of the Governor and the three uniformed Germans.

Brionne stared hard at the young, fair-haired man in the black of the Gestapo, and *Sturmbannfuhrer* Ulrich stared hard back at him.

The *sturmbannfuhrer* saw a man in his early forties, dark-haired, thin-faced, and with the hooked nose of an eagle's bill. So this was René Brionne the man he had come to get, the convict Dubois was reluctant to lose . . .

Brionne's gaze travelled to take in the two S.S. men standing by the door. For a moment his lips parted; it seemed as though he was about to say something, and then he changed his mind.

Chief Guard Mercier stood by the Governor's desk whilst Dubois mopped his freely perspiring brow agitatedly.

Sturmbannfuhrer Ulrich said shortly: "You are René Brionne? You are coming with me!"

He signalled to the two S.S. men who fell in one on each side of the manacled man. The *sturmbannfuhrer* glared at Mercier.

"Take those chains off his wrists."

"What if he tries to escape?" Mercier wanted to know.

The *sturmbannfuhrer* patted his holstered pistol.

"I will shoot him in the legs if he tries anything like that with me," he told the Frenchman.

Mercier shrugged his shoulders, and unlocked the chains from Brionne's wrists. The *sturmbannfuhrer* turned to Dubois and bowed correctly.

"I thank you for your co-operation, *m'sieur*," he told the Governor. "And now I bid you goodbye."

When they were gone, Dubois did nothing. He sat at his desk in the uncomfortable heat staring at the door through which the Germans had taken his convict. He was wondering whether he had done the right thing. What his superiors were going to say when he told them he had delivered one of his prisoners into the hands of the German Gestapo, he didn't know.

Mercier moved over to the barred window overlooking the prison courtyard, following the progress of the four men to the main gate of the prison. Without turning his head he said almost absently:

"It's my opinion we've been tricked, *M'sieur le Gouverneur*. I don't think those swine are Germans at all."

2

The Hold-up

DUBOIS looked up in surprise.

"What - what the hell are you talking about, Mercier?"

Mercier jerked his head at the window.

"One of those men with the Nazis. I'm damn sure I've met him before today, and he wasn't wearing a German uniform then. I'd bet a year's pay that his name's Michel Durieux, one of the old pre-war armed hold-up men who worked with Brionne!"

"What!" Dubois sprang out of his chair like an uncoiling spring. "Why the hell didn't you say something before, you bloody idiot? Here, out of the way!"

He pushed the chief guard from the window, pushed up the lower half, and yelled through the bars: "Hey, Durieux, Michel Durieux!"

The Germans and their prisoner were almost at the main gate where one of the guards was holding open a small wicket door for them, but as the Prison Governor shouted one of the S.S. men stopped automatically, and turned his head to look up at the window from which the call came.

"There, what did I tell you?" snapped Mercier triumphantly. "*Mon Dieu*, they're trying to pull a break!"

A chill wind of icy horror swept through Dubois at the thought of what was happening, and he screamed shrilly to the guard by the wicket door in the main gate: "Don't let them through, Carboni, they aren't *Boches*, they're French!"

Sturmbannfuhrer Ulrich acted instantly. Drawing his black-steel Luger pistol from its holster, he covered the guard on the gate, and snapped coldly: "Leave the gate open or I'll blow your head off your shoulders!"

"The hell with the threats!" snarled the S.S. man who had been revealed as the crook named Michel Durieux, and, pulling his own

gun, he fired a shot which took the guard in the middle of the throat, and sent him down writhing on the ground with blood spurting from the ghastly wound.

The four men leapt over the body and through the open gate into a narrow side alley where their car was waiting. They piled inside with Durieux at the wheel, his pal beside him, and Brionne and the pseudo *sturmbannfuhrer* in the back seat.

The car, a low, black Citroen, roared away from the kerbside at top speed whilst the freed convict, René Brionne, shouted with laughter and slapped the driver on the shoulder.

"*Bon Dieu*, Durieux! How the hell did you do it?" he wanted to know. "I've been stuck inside that stinking hole for the last five years!"

Without turning his head Durieux replied: "It's a long story, Brionne. Tell you all about it when we're safe. We can't stay in this car for more than five minutes. By now the Governor will be phoning the *Sûreté*, the *Judiciare* and the *Gendarmerie* headquarters. Every *flic* in Paris will be on the lookout for us."

Brionne looked at the tight-lipped youngster sitting next to him, grinned, and asked: "And who's this young man? I don't think I know you."

Again it was Durieux who answered.

"His name's Fortuna, Phillipe Fortuna; he's from Marseilles originally. He was just the lad we wanted to pull this off, Brionne. Working for the *Boches*, and hating their guts all the time, passing out bits of information to the various resistance groups operating in Paris. Phillipe's a good boy. He was able to fix us up with all this gear, including the car with the German *Kommandatura* stamp, petrol and all."

Brionne took Fortuna's hand and shook it warmly.

"*Merci*, Phillipe. I am grateful to you, *mon ami*."

Phillipe Fortuna inclined his head, and smiled in return.

"We must all do what we can these days, *M'sieur* Brionne, to further the cause of resistance to the *Boches*."

Brionne blinked. He swivelled to face the back of Durieux's head, and snarled: "Hey, what is all this?"

Durieux shrugged.

"Like I said, Brionne, it's a long story. I'll tell you all about it when we've ditched this car, and we're safe in a place I've found in the Pigalle."

Two hours later found the four men, now all out of the clothes they had been wearing at the time of the prison escape, safely hidden away in a tiny attic of a tenement house in an alley off the Place Pigalle.

The room was full of tobacco smoke when the hitherto unnamed member of the gang, a scarfaced little rat called Lemaire tossed a few francs in Fortuna's direction, and growled: "There's a *bistro* down at the corner, Phillipe. Get a bottle of wine, and keep your eyes open for the *flics* or the *Boches*."

Fortuna caught the money in his hand, and pulled on his cap. The three men watched him silently as he went through the door and closed it behind him. Then René Brionne turned to his two hoods, and snapped: "Right, now let's have it. Who's this guy, Fortuna? And what's all this rot about the Resistance?"

Durieux laughed, and slapped his knee with his hand.

"You'll die laughing, Brionne," he told his chief. "Young Fortuna thinks you're a great hero, if you'll pardon the expression. We told him you were locked up by the pro-Germans as soon as the *Boches* took over the country to prevent you from taking over as the head of the Paris underground movement."

Brionne said in astonishment: "You mean he actually fell for it?"

"You bet he did," simpered little Lemaire. "You see, Brionne, Fortuna hates the Nazis who killed his two brothers on the front in '39. When they occupied Paris he was working as a clerk for the administration, and he kept on working for *them* just to be able to spy out their secrets, and pass on information to the Resistance groups in the city. When we approached him with the idea of supplying the necessary for getting you out of the Santé, he was all for it, especially once we'd built you up as the shining hope of *la belle France*."

"But," Brionne exclaimed. "He won't be able to go back working for the *Boches* after this. His description will be on every wanted poster in the city."

Durieux shrugged.

"So what? Let him stay with us, Brionne. He's done you a damned good turn. If it hadn't been for him supplying the car, and the uniforms and the official papers, it would have been impossible to spring you."

Brionne cackled with genuine amusement.

"And he still believes all this about me being the true French patriot?"

Durieux nodded.

"He does indeed, and he believes that now you are free we're going to knock hell out of the Nazis in Paris."

"Well, and why not?" agreed Brionne. "They're the people with all the money in Paris, I suppose. I'll see if I can't work something out."

Lemaire exclaimed happily: "That's the René Brionne we all knew in the old days! And those will come again, *mon brave*, now that you are out of the Santé. We'll be rich like we were before that swine Inspector Versiac came on the scene and put you away for the murder of that accursed jeweller!"

* * *

Phillipe Fortuna was a worried man these days. It had all seemed the right thing to do when he had played his part to spring René Brionne out of prison where the pro-Nazi French had put him at the beginning of the Occupation, but now Fortuna wasn't so certain.

René Brionne wasn't acting the way a Resistance leader was supposed to act, and in all the weeks he had been free he hadn't once tried to contact the other groups in Paris with a view to working with them or offering his services in any way.

All the three Parisians seemed to do was to lie about in their stinking attic all day long, drinking and smoking, then prowling the streets after curfew, and avoiding the German patrols.

Occasionally Brionne worked over a map one of the others had brought him, and when Fortuna was busy with domestic chores, the hook-nosed leader sometimes discussed a plan he seemed to have in mind with the other two.

It was late in the year when the young man from Marseilles was at last brought into the secret of Brionne's plans for the future.

The leader showed him a scale map of the Louvre Arrondissement with a certain building in a street branching off the Avenue des Champs Elysées marked by a heavy, pencilled cross.

Under the flickering light of a candle, the only lighting the attic contained, Brionne explained what it was he had in mind.

"You see this building, *mes amis*? D'you know what it is? *Non*? Well, I'll tell you. It's the German pay office for all their French collaborators."

"And the place is stacked to the ceilings with crisp franc notes,

eh, Brionne?" Durieux gloated. "What do we do, raid the joint?"

Brionne smiled and shook his head.

"Something easier than that, Durieux," he said. "You see I happen to have found out when the next consignment of money will be arriving there - and we're going to get it!"

"*Vive la France!*" whispered Fortuna his eyes glowing with excitement.

Brionne stared at him, and murmured: "Quite."

Fortuna was happier now as the voice of the leader droned on into the night, explaining what was going to happen to that German payroll when it arrived in Paris in two weeks time. It would mean more money for the resistance, more money to purchase arms and equipment, desperately needed in the fight against oppression.

At last Fortuna felt he was doing something worth while in the cause of freedom, something a hundred times better than merely working in the German administration building and passing on small items of information when he could.

* * *

Right on time, the green-painted van flying the Swastika over its bonnet, was driven into the Rue St. Valerie off the Champs Elysées. It was escorted by two German soldiers on motor cycles, armed with submachine guns slung by straps over their shoulders.

As the van slid to a stop outside the building, the two troopers climbed off their cycles, and took up positions at the rear doors. The driver and his mate came to join them, and the driver produced his bunch of keys.

The doors were opened. The driver took one hefty mailbag, and his mate the other. The troopers hefted their machine guns to cover the operation.

At that moment a ramshackle lorry drove round the corner at the far end of the street, and came careering along as though it was out of control. Halfway along the street it veered sharply to one side, hit a stationary car, and ended up across the pavement with its steaming bonnet a mere few inches from the plate glass window of a shop.

From nowhere a crowd of voluble Frenchmen collected, all shouting at once at the tops of their voices, and waving their arms to emphasize whatever it was they were saying.

The lorry driver, a young, fair-haired man in faded blue overalls climbed down from the cab, and joined his voice to that of the

general confusion.

It was only natural that the four Germans should have taken an interest in what was happening, and because they were all standing together in a tight group watching what was going on they failed to observe the fast Citroen which came gliding up to their rear, screeched to a halt beside them, and opened up its doors.

The Germans were taken completely by surprise as the two men inside the car opened up with automatics. To the unexpected roar of the guns, three soldiers went down in a heap together, and as the fourth – one of the two motor cycle troopers – turned, bringing his machine gun up to the firing position, the two gunmen both brought their weapons to bear on him.

Hot lead slashed into his unprotected body; red blood spewed from his gaping mouth as he spun like a ballet dancer in the road. Even before his bullet-ridden body hit the ground the two gangsters were out of their Citroen.

One grabbed up the two money sacks, the second the machine guns and automatics from the bleeding corpses, and then they were back inside their car, and driving away from the scene of the hold-up before the excited crowd of Frenchmen at the crash was aware of what was going on.

As they all started running to where the four Germans were lying in an ever-widening pool of their own blood the fair-haired lorry driver melted away, and was gone long before the gendarmes and the German *feld-polizei* arrived on the scene.

* * *

Later in the day, Lemaire, and Phillipe Fortuna – who had driven the lorry into the Rue St. Valerie and so created the diversion the other two needed to carry out their daring hold-up – were being heartily congratulated by the fourth member of the gang, Durieux, who had remained behind in the attic to make certain nothing happened to prevent the successful trio from being able to return there.

“A fortune!” exclaimed Lemaire as he ran his bony hands through the stacks of banknotes on the table. “There must be all of five million francs here.”

“Say ten million and you’ll be nearer the mark,” Brionne grinned. “From here on we’re in business, *mes amis!*”

Durieux, examining the German weapons the hold-up men had brought back with them, said happily: “And with guns like these

there will be no stopping us!"

Phillipe Fortuna clapped Brionne on the shoulder.

"The Resistance will be proud of you for what you have done today, René. Now we will be able to buy the explosives we need to put the *Boches* out of action in Paris for good!"

"Later, later," Brionne advised Fortuna. "For a while we must leave the capital, and lie low. In a couple of months we will return refreshed from a sojourn, say in the south of France, and then our enemies will really feel the weight of our anger, eh?"

Fortuna nodded happily. It wasn't that the young man was simple-minded or anything like that. He so believed in the man he had rescued from the Santé Prison that it was impossible to think of him as evil, or that his designs were mercenary.

That would come later, much later, when it was too late for Fortuna to undo the damage he had caused, and the deaths of which he had been a part.

3

Fighters For Freedom

THE return to Paris nine weeks after the daring daylight raid on the Germans in the Rue St. Vaerie, was followed by a bank hold-up on the Boulevard Saint Michel on the south bank of the Seine. After that came a raid on a fashionable restaurant on the Allée de Longchamp on the road to Versailles. Here, many high-ranking officers of the German army were wont to take their beautiful French mistresses for wining and dining – and a private room for the night afterwards.

Large rewards were offered by the Nazis for information leading to the arrests of the gang who were committing these outrages but nothing came of it. At this stage of the game, Brionne, an old hand at the armed hold-up racket was careful to direct his greed mainly at the *Boches*, and the Frenchmen who might have said something were convinced the the hold-ups were the work of a Resistance group, and so kept their mouths tight shut.

Brionne and Co. were living in comparative comfort at a small hotel at St. Germain en Laye, about ten kilometres from Paris when the news came through in 1944 of the Allied landings in Normandy.

From that time on the German rule was harder and more merciless than anything the French had known before. Arrests were made

on the least pretext, and executions and deportations were the order of the day.

It was then that René Brionne decided it was time to get out of Paris for good. He knew that the German rule was nearly over. When Paris was liberated, and France freed from Nazi terror, the authorities would start thinking about their criminal population again, and the hunt would be on for those who had made their escapes from prison during the years of turmoil.

In the past, Brionne had merely pretended to Phillipe Fortuna that he was helping the Resistance. Now the pretence must end and he must do his bit against the enemies of his country.

And so it was that René Brionne announced to his three confederates one day about a month after the Normandy landings that they were getting out, and running for the south.

"But why?" Fortuna wanted to know. "Now is the time for real action against the *Boches*. All of Paris is ready to rise against the oppressor and throw off the chains of slavery!"

Brionne didn't explain that he needed time, a lot of time in which to establish himself as a bona-fide member of the French Resistance Movement, and that could only be done where plenty of fighting was taking place, and would be likely to go on for some time to come.

* * *

Moving only at night, and then over open country where the Germans wouldn't be likely to bother them, the four men made their way south into the vast ruggedness of the Pyrenees Mountains where French Maquis, armed and led by officers of the British Army, were in constant action against the infamous Hermann Goering Panzer Division, one of the toughest Nazi regiments ever to come west across the German frontier.

At the end of July, 1944, Brionne and his gang, escorted by a rifle-armed member of the Maquis came to a well-guarded camp in the mountains where a large force of Frenchmen were making ready to ambush a Nazi motorised column.

Phillipe Fortuna, bearded and ragged, stood in the centre of the camp with his companions while the equally bearded and ragged guerrilla soldiers of Free France surveyed them curiously.

All about him the sawtoothed peaks of the great mountains soared to meet the blue sky. It was hard to believe that a terrible war was being fought out to a grim and bloody conclusion here.

The leader of the group interviewed the newcomers with one

hand resting on the butt of a German Mauser pistol in his belt.

"You say you have come here from Paris. May I ask why you left Paris?"

"Of course," Brionne smiled. "Things were getting a damn sight too hot for us up there, *m'sieur*. We were a small group on our own – most of the Resistance work that way in the big cities – and the Gestapo was wise to us. As a matter of fact they knew all about the next raid I had planned, and they were going to be waiting for us. They knew our names, everything. Some dirty swine had informed on us. So what could I do except get my gallant band away from danger?"

"We came here knowing there was plenty of fighting, hoping that you people would let us join you."

The leader nodded.

"You really want to fight, *hein?*"

"I've done nothing else but kill Germans for the last few years," Brionne told him coolly. "Naturally I want to be around when we kick the *batards* out of France for good."

The leader of the Maquis group smiled and nodded his head.

"All right, *mes amis*, I believe your story. You can join us. If it's fighting *Boches* you want then you can take it from me you've come to the right place."

The four raiders from Paris very soon had proof of that for themselves. The Hermann Goering Division, trapped in the mountains by the Maquis, refused to admit even to themselves that they were beaten. They fought every inch of the way, and the French advanced only over the dead bodies of their enemies.

Before the hard, bitter campaign was ended Durieux had fallen to a German sniper's bullet, thereby doing the legal executioner out of a job. Brionne merely shrugged his shoulders and remarked to rat-faced little Lemaire that Durieux was a fool to expose himself the way he had. The hook-nosed hold-up man was making quite sure that he wasn't going to get in the way of any stray *Boche* bullet – not with more than twelve million francs stashed away in a hiding place in Paris known only to himself and his confederates in crime.

The only hero of the quartet was Phillipe Fortuna. Time and again he risked his life in the path of duty to be applauded by the Maquis, and then admonished by Brionne. Over the past two years the iron-hearted villain had come to look upon the young man who had engineered his escape from the Santé with a certain degree of fondness, and he disliked the thought of Fortuna

finishing up the same way as Durieux.

Luckily he didn't. In 1945 the war was over, and France was free again. With the Fourth Republic firmly in power the men of the Resistance were the heroes of the hour, and it didn't take René Brionne long to put into effect the scheme for which he had risked his life in the Pyrenees Mountains and all the way to Marseilles.

It took the form of a long letter to his deputy telling of his foolish, mis-spent life, the accidental killing that had wound him up in a French prison serving a life sentence for murder.

He glossed over the method of his escape, but gave great play to his rôle as a fighter in the Resistance and the part he played in the destruction of the Hermann Goering Division in the south.

He had plenty of references from Maquis leaders and British officers – who thought every French fighter for freedom to be a hero – to back up his own letter, and all of them to whom he had told of his unfortunate imprisonment, begged the Minister of Justice to give René Brionne a free pardon, and another chance to prove himself a worthy citizen of the New France.

The bluff came off, and in the fullness of time Brionne was pardoned for his crimes against the Third Republic, and permitted to return to Paris – to spend his ill-gotten gains, and to plan for the acquisition of further illegal wealth.

* * *

The trio of criminals, Brionne, Fortuna and Lemaire came home to the capital towards the end of the year, collected their loot, and proceeded to act, live and spend like the aristocrats they were not. Good living, women, fast cars – Brionne and Co. had them all throughout the latter half of 1945, and no fly in the ointment such as the police to question them or doubt their loyalty to the new Republic of France.

Perhaps at the time the only one who was not really happy was Phillipe Fortuna. He had teamed up with René Brionne during the war to take money from the Germans, and give it to the Resistance.

They'd taken the money from the *Boches* all right, but to Philippe's way of thinking the French Resistance had got very little of it. The great bulk of the accumulated wealth had lain hidden until Brionne came home from exile to take up a life of luxury.

Fortuna doubted now that René Brionne had ever been a member of the early anti-Nazis as he claimed. He suspected that

Brionne's imprisonment was for something other than that Hitler was afraid of him.

But there was no way of finding that out yet. He could hardly go along to the Santé Prison where the chance was that he might be remembered for the part he had played in Brionne's escape – especially if Brionne had been serving a prison sentence for some crime in which politics played no part.

So Fortuna took his share of the money, and lived in the lap of luxury in a large apartment on the fashionable Boulevard de Sebastapol on the North Bank.

One cold morning in December, René Brionne paid his young associate a visit. The hook-nosed villain was dressed for the bad weather in a heavy overcoat and silk scarf when he came breezing into the luxurious apartment, removing his kid gloves with a flourish.

Fortuna, clad in a flamboyant dressing gown, with a copy of the morning paper in his hand, rose to greet him.

"*Bon jour*, René," he greeted the older man. "You're out early, aren't you?"

Brionne laughed happily as he slapped his gloves down on a table.

"Ah, *bon jour*, Phillipe, *mon ami*," he replied, "Early, *oui*, but today is a special day for me; a very special day."

Fortuna smiled.

"I am glad for you, René," he said guardedly.

Brionne touched Fortuna's elbow.

"I want you to come with me, Phillipe. I've got the car downstairs. I'm on my way to meet an old friend of mine. I've found out he is returning to Paris today, and will be arriving at the Gare du Nord in an hour's time. He won't be expecting me. I want to surprise him."

"An old friend?" Fortuna raised his eyebrows quizzically.

Brionne laughed again. There was something about that laugh that Fortuna didn't like.

"*Oui*, an old friend. He was arrested by the *Boches* way back in 1940. They sent him to a concentration camp in Germany. He was freed at the end of the war, but owing to various delays in Allied administration he hasn't been able to come home to Paris until now."

"Why do you want me with you?" Fortuna wanted to know. "Surely you would prefer to meet him alone?"

"Maybe, but I want somebody to drive me to the station. The

way I feel about this I might end up in a crash before I got out of the boulevard! Do this for me, Phillipe, as a favour."

Fortuna grinned, shrugged his shoulders.

"All right, René, if that's the way you want it. Give me ten minutes to get some clothes on, and I'll be right with you. Help yourself to a drink; there's plenty in the cabinet."

4

The Man From Germany

FIFTEEN minutes later Phillipe Fortuna was behind the wheel of Brionne's brand new Delahaye, speeding over the intersection from the Boulevard de Sebastopol into the Boulevard de Strasbourg on their way north.

Well within the time limit for the arrival of the train bearing René Brionne's old friend from the hell of Germany, Fortuna eased the shining car to a halt in the Rue St. Denis, the favourite haunt of the prostitutes of Paris, in the shadow of the entrance to the Gare du Nord.

There was a thin sprinkling of snow on the ground, and both men were content to sit in the heated car, smoking cigarettes and talking in low tones.

At last Fortuna glanced down at his watch, and remarked: "Your friend should be coming through any moment, René. Better keep a good look-out for him or you might miss him in the crowd."

"Don't worry, I'm watching." Brionne was smiling, but the smile was not a pleasant one, and the way his knuckles showed white through the skin as he clenched one fist, revealed to the astute young Fortuna the hidden tension of the older man.

* * *

Fortuna glanced at the crowds of people hurrying out of the Gare du Nord, hailing taxis or rushing off to buy their tickets at the bus stop ticket machines.

It was obvious that Brionne hadn't seen his friend yet. He was still peering intently through the closed window of the car, with narrowed eyes and tightly clenched teeth.

"Where the hell is he?" he heard Brionne snarl angrily. "We can't have missed him!"

Soon the crowd dispersed, anxious to reach their final destinations before the cold weather seeped its way through their clothing into their bones.

There were only a few people left now, standing around idly on the pavement with pieces of luggage. Their breath rose in clouds of white mist in the cold air, and they stamped their feet to keep them warm.

"That's him!" Brionne barked suddenly. "That's Versiac. Drive over to him, Phillipe, quickly!"

Fortuna frowned.

"Which one, René?" he asked.

"The little man with the grey hair and the black beret!"

Fortuna picked him out immediately. Yes, Brionne's friend did look as though he had spent a long time in a Nazi concentration camp, or somewhere equally terrible. His face was pale and pinched, his old khaki greatcoat well worn and about half a dozen sizes too large for him. The boots he was wearing were down at heel and bursting at the uppers.

As Fortuna stepped on the accelerator he felt a pang of pity for this man who was Brionne's friend. He hoped Brionne could do something for him – and yet there was something about all this that made Fortuna feel uneasy. He felt that Brionne, for all his grim tension, was laughing inwardly at a joke his companion didn't know about.

The luxurious car slid to a silent halt a few yards from where the little man in the khaki greatcoat was standing with his pitiful bag of belongings at his feet, and Brionne pushed open the door. He climbed out onto the pavement, and smiled at the stranger.

"Well!" he exclaimed, as though he only this instant recognised the man he had come to meet. "This is a pleasant surprise indeed. If it isn't my old friend of the *Sûreté*, Inspector Guy Versiac!"

The little man from Buchenwald blinked and looked surprised.

"Please excuse me," he murmured politely. "I don't seem to remember –"

"*Non, non*, of course not!" Brionne cried. "Here, let me take your bag. Just tell me where you want to go, and I'll drive you there in my car."

He already had the ex-concentration camp inmate's elbow in a firm grip, and was propelling him towards the car where Fortuna behind the wheel was an interested spectator of what was going on.

They both got in the back of the car, and Brionne pulled the door shut behind him.

It was obvious that this Inspector Versiac hadn't known such luxury in a long time. He sank back against the well unholstered cushions with a drawn-out sigh, and smiled for the first time.

Fortuna up front half turned his head.

"Where do you want to go?" he asked.

"Go? Oh yes. *Merci, m'sieur,*" the inspector said. "I have a sister living in the Rue Guillaume off the Avenue Marceau down by the Seine. Do you know it?"

Fortuna nodded, slammed his gear in and purred away from the railway station.

In the back seat of the Delahaye, the Inspector of the *Sûreté* opened up the conversation, and Fortuna was able to hear every word said by the two men.

"I thank you for your kind offer of a lift, *m'sieur,*" the little man was saying. "But I'm afraid your name still escapes me. Although I must admit your face has a familiar look." He laughed shortly. "There was a time, before the war, *m'sieur,* when I had the best memory in the police force. That shows what five years in a Nazi prison can do, *hein?*"

"It does indeed," murmured Brionne sympathetically. His voice altered suddenly. It became cold and hard. "But I must say that I am unable to feel any concern for you, Inspector Versiac. As a matter of fact, I will admit that when I heard of your arrest by the *Boches* as an enemy of the Third Reich, I had a damned good laugh over it. I laughed so hard and so loud that they sent a couple of guards into my cell to beat some sense into me!"

Versiac blinked again. He half smiled, then said slowly: "I don't understand you, *m'sieur.* What are you talking about?"

Brionne thrust his hook-nosed face close to that of the one-time policeman. His voice was a vicious snarl now, his gloved hands tight-clenched as though he was about to hit the other at any moment.

"Take a damn good look at me, Inspector bloody Guy Versiac! Take a good look, then see if you remember René Brionne who you arrested before the war!"

* * *

Inspector Versiac did as he was told and took a good look. He recoiled in surprise. His pale face was a mask of cold hostility as he rapped: "Yes, you're Brionne all right. I can see it now although you're a damn sight fatter than you ever were in the old

days. But what the devil are you doing on the outside, Brionne? They gave you a life sentence for the murder of that jeweller. *Mon Dieu*, if you're on the run I promise you that as soon as I'm back on the force I'll -"

"Save it, Versiac!" laughed Brionne harshly. "I got out all right in '42, with the help of my boys, and this bright young lad who's driving me now. Young Fortuna here worked an overbearing Nazi thug trick on 'em, didn't you, Phillipe? But don't think you can get me back inside on that murder frame-up, Versiac. I'm clean now, as clean as that falling snow outside in the streets. I fought with the resistance during the war while you were rotting in Germany. They wiped the slate clean for me because I proved myself a true French patriot in the time of need, not somebody who allowed himself to be caught and rushed off like a scared rabbit to Germany the first time the *Boches* showed their noses in Paris!"

Inspector Versiac swallowed hard. It had always been a policy of his never to lose his temper, and it had stood him in good stead during those terrible years in Germany. But this man, this dirty animal, this Brionne disgusted him. It was obvious he had used the French Resistance Movement for his own personal ends, to establish himself in the good books of good Frenchmen, so that when the end came he would be able to escape his just deserts as murderer and thief!

"All right, Brionne," he said at last. "You've had your hour of triumph. You were free while I was in prison, and that's funny, even to me because I was the policeman and you were the killer. But it's over now. As soon as I am re-instated I'll check on this pardon of yours, and from then on I'll watch you like a mother watches her favourite infant - and the first crooked step you take I'll have you so fast you'll think you've sprouted wings!"

"Now stop this car, and let me get out where the air is clean and fresh. You stink of death and treachery, Brionne!"

Fortuna, white-faced now and shaking a little because of what he had heard, braked the car, and heard the Inspector climb out. The door slammed hard behind him, and then the little man's face was peering through the window at the front. Fortuna dropped his gaze.

"Don't worry, *mon ami*," he heard Inspector Versiac's voice shouting through the closed window above the wail of the wind and the hiss of the driving snow. "I've seen your face and I won't forget you, Phillipe Fortuna. Helped Brionne out of the Santé,

did you? And what about your free pardon? I hope you've got one, because you'll need it once I start after you!"

* * *

Fortuna watched as the shabby little figure of the Inspector vanished into the white blanket of driving snow. His own face was as white as Versiac's had been. Inwardly he was boiling with fury.

"That's it," Brionne grunted behind him. "I've done what I wanted to do, Phillipe; let's get home and get warm. *Hein?*"

Fortuna made no effort to restart the car. He merely sat with his back to René Brionne.

"Well?" Brionne asked. "What's the matter, Phillipe? Did that little episode disturb you? I'm sorry, but I had to get one back at Versiac. He's the bastard who took me in the first place."

"I've suspected for a long time that the story Durieux and Lemaire spun me about you wasn't true, René. If I'd known what you were in '42 when I sprung you out of the Santé, I wouldn't have risked my neck!"

Brionne looked his astonishment.

"But, hell, Phillipe, you found out all about me a long time ago. You eventually knew that that story about threat to the *Boches* was a load of rubbish. You must have, *mon ami!*"

"I suspected, but I didn't know," Fortuna replied quietly. "You and the others did your best to keep the real truth from me, didn't you? So we went on stealing and killing, 'for the Resistance'. And all the time we were stealing and killing for René Brionne!" While he was speaking Fortuna's voice had grown hot and angry.

Brionne smiled, and patted the young man on the shoulder.

"Phillipe, Phillipe," he soothed. "I like you like I would have liked my own son, if I ever had one. It was you who got me out of prison, and I'll never forget that, boy. Yes, we stole and we killed during the war, but remember, it wasn't all for René Brionne. Phillipe Fortuna has had his full share of the things money brings."

Fortuna slumped in his seat.

"So I'm caught," he said tonelessly. "The reluctant crook, that's me, René. You certainly caught me, and how!"

"There's nothing you can do about it," Brionne told him coolly. "There was never any pardon for you, Phillipe, for

springing me out of the *Santé*. Versiac will be able to pull you in for that job if he ever lays his hands on you. But we'll just have to make certain he doesn't, *mon fils*.

"Anyway, it's time the three of us were getting together again, and planning something new. The money isn't what it used to be a few months ago. Funds are getting low, Phillipe, my boy. It's time we were looking about for something with which to supplement our income!"

"Such as?" Fortuna asked.

"Such as something like a restaurant hold-up or a bank stick-up."

Fortuna laughed mirthlessly.

"It'll be just like old days, René. Except that this time we're going to show ourselves in our true colours. We will be pulling guns on Frenchmen instead of Germans!"

"You're in this whether you like it or not, Phillipe!" Brionne spat nastily. "Inspector Versiac will be out to get you as soon as he's back with the *Sûreté*. You'd better ride with me, boy, otherwise you could find yourself in a lot of trouble!"

Now for the first time Fortuna turned his head so that he was able to see Brionne's face.

"Is that a threat, René?" he asked coldly.

Brionne laughed and patted the younger man on the shoulder.

"Of course not, *mon ami*. Just a piece of friendly advice. Now forget all this blasted nonsense, and let's get back to your place where it's warmer. We'll have a drink together, and talk about the old days, *hein?*"

5

Violence In The Streets

TWO weeks later, René Brionne called a meeting of his two companions in crime at his own apartment, and while they sat in silence he outlined to them a plan he had formulated for the first of his post-war criminal operations.

"It's a restaurant in the Rue du Fauborg St. Honore," he said with a self-satisfied smile on his lean features. "I've been keeping an eye on the place for the last couple of weeks, and I reckon it'll be a pushover for the job I've got in mind. I've been around quite a bit, asking questions here and there of people I know, and this joint hasn't been hit since it was first opened up during

the Occupation. We'll be in and out so fast they'll never know what hit 'em."

"What sort of people go there, René?" little Lemaire wanted to know.

"The best," Brionne told him triumphantly. "The cream of society, Lemaire. Fat wallets and real jewellery, that's what congregates at the Café de la Paix every night - and we're going to get our share of it."

"What about guns?" Lemaire wanted to know.

"Don't worry about that," Brionne cackled. "Since the end of the war they're as easy to buy as cigarettes. I've got three English Sten-guns and three German Mausers. One of each for each of us."

He glanced in Fortuna's direction. The young man was frowning heavily and rubbing his chin thoughtfully. "Don't get worried, Phillippe; we won't use 'em unless it's absolutely necessary. And it won't be. When the average citizen sees the muzzle of a machine gun pointing at his guts he doesn't try doing anything brave - not even if he's dining out with his best girl! He hands over, and makes the best of a bad job. I've got a map here, and I've marked the getaway route on it. You'll be doing the driving, Lemaire, so I want you to familiarize yourself with it."

"And the car?" asked Fortuna.

"I've picked one out already," Brionne grinned. "It's a black Citroen. The owner leaves it outside a building in the Avenue Marigny every evening between eight and midnight. He's probably visiting his lady friend, so he won't be interested until we've done what we want and are well away. We ditch the car just off the Place de Clichy, and head for a hideout I've rented off the Rue Barbes where most of the *Ratons* hang out with their whores. Now let's take a look at this map!"

* * *

Two nights later, at a little after nine in the evening, a long, black Citroen purred to a stop by the pavement outside the brilliantly-lit entrance of the fashionable Café de la Paix in the Rue de Fauborg St. Honore. Three men climbed out, slammed the doors behind them, and walked up the white steps to the café entrance.

They were all wearing heavy overcoats, snap-brimmed hats, and kid gloves. Their overcoats had a bulky look to them as though

each man of the trio had something concealed under it.

Inside the door the uniformed commissioner raised his hand in a salute to the newcomers, and opened his mouth in the beginning of a greeting.

He didn't get the first word out. One of the trio, rat-faced Lemaire, whipped his Sten-gun out from under his overcoat and jammed the muzzle into the commissioner's belly.

"Walk in front of us into the restaurant, *salaud!*" snarled Lemaire icily. "One wrong move and I'll blow your backbone out through your belly!"

The commissioner swallowed hard, and his eyes almost popped out of his head at the sight of the gun.

René Brionne jerked his head over to the hat-girl behind her counter at the cloak room. Phillipe Fortuna nodded silently, and walked over to her.

The girl, pert and vivacious, smiled prettily at the handsome young blond-haired man.

"*Bon soir, m'sieur.* I will take your coat."

It was Fortuna's turn to flash his English made Sten-gun, one of thousands produced during the war and dropped into German occupied France for the use of the resistance.

When she saw it, the girl put her tiny hands up to her scarlet mouth in fright.

"Don't scream!" Fortuna warned her urgently. "I don't want to hurt you, *ma'amselle*, and I won't if you keep quiet. Please come out of there, and walk in front of me into the restaurant."

With the commissioner and the hat-girl walking in front of them, the three hold-up men made their way through the expensive curtains fronting the restaurant proper.

The interior was brightly lit, and luxuriantly furnished. The diners, the rich of the new Republic of France, were present in force, immaculately dressed in black and white, the women with them exhibiting a dazzling collection of jewellery.

At the far end of the room a string orchestra was playing a selection of Strauss waltzes. Everyone was happy and content tonight, even the perspiring head waiter who hurried over beaming from ear to ear.

"Ah, *m'sieur*," he murmured ingratiatingly. "It is a pleasure to have you visit us. You require a table, *m'sieur*?"

"*Non*, just money!" Brionne snapped. The head waiter saw the Sten gun in the gangster's hands, and he swayed unsteadily on his feet.

Over his shoulder Brionne snarled: "Phillipe, you stay here where you can keep your eyes on these three, and the entrance. If anyone comes in keep them here. Lemaire, you and I will relieve the patrons of their excess wealth!"

The hook-nosed man raised his voice above the lilting strains of the waltz, and shouted: "This is a hold-up, *messieurs et mesdames*. You will all please remain seated at your tables whilst my friend and I come among you to make a collection. It will save much time and trouble if you have your wallets and jewellery ready when we come to you!"

There were a few half-stifled screams from the women, and muttered curses from the men. But it was as Brionne had prophesied. No one made a threatening move, nobody tried to do anything other than what Brionne told them. The memories of the German Occupation were still too fresh in their minds for them to argue with a man holding a gun in his hands.

Brionne moved among the tables, smiling here, giving a word of thanks there. He was politeness personified – until he thought someone was trying to put one over on him.

He picked up a wallet from a snowy tablecloth, looked in it, then threw it back on the table with a crooked leer. He looked at the pasty-faced man in the dinner jacket who had proffered it, then raised his hand and smashed it into the diner's face.

As the startled man went over backwards, Brionne moved in fast, pulled him up by the front of his dinner jacket, and snarled in his face: "I want everything you've got, *m'sieur*. Don't try to palm me off with a few miserable francs or I'll have every last stitch of clothes off your back right here and now!"

The trembling diner thrust his hand into the inside pocket of his jacket, and came up with a thick wad of paper money.

"That's better," Brionne grinned as he took it from him. "Now don't you try fooling me if we ever meet up again!"

Inside five minutes it was over. Every single man and woman in the fashionable restaurant had been robbed of every franc and every item of valuable jewellery they had with them.

Still keeping them all covered with their guns, Brionne and Lemaire backed up to where Fortuna was standing.

"That's it!" Brionne snapped. "Let's get out of here. The place will be swarming with *flics* in ten minutes!"

The three men ran for the entrance. As they came out into the glare of the street lighting, two black cars slid slowly along the opposite side of the road from where they had been waiting.

Suddenly, the ugly snouts of Tommy-guns came poking out of the windows of the cars, and Brionne and Co. were made the targets of a vicious hail of red-hot lead!

* * *

The three dived hastily for the pavement as the steel-jacketed slugs hammered their way into the body of their own stolen Citroen, and innocent Parisians, out for their evening stroll on the boulevards, fled screaming for cover.

Phillipe Fortuna poked his head over the bonnet of the car and saw the cars parked on the other side. Lethal fire was glazing from their windows and the young man hastily ducked his head as the bullets whined over him.

"What the hell's happened?" he yelled to Brionne, who was trying to get the front car door open while lying flat on his belly. "Has somebody gone crazy?"

"Shut your trap and try to get inside!" Brionne roared back at him. "The *flics* will be here any second. We've got to get out, and fast!"

The three at last managed to get themselves inside the bullet-shattered car, and at that moment they heard the high-pitched, double-note whine of an approaching police car.

At once the two killer cars over on the other side of the Rue du Fauborg St. Honore, stepped hard on the gas and accelerated like scalded cats.

Rat-faced Lemaire, behind the wheel of the ripped-up Citroen, was cursing angrily as he tried to start up the engine. Eventually he turned to Brionne and shouted on a note of rising panic: "It's no good, René, the bloody heap's had it good and proper!"

Brionne threw open the nearside door, scrambling out on the pavement, shouting over his shoulder as he ran for safety: "Get out and scatter, *mes amis*. We'll meet tomorrow morning at my place. Hurry, the *flics* are almost here!"

Phillipe Fortuna needed no further urging. His long legs covered the *metres* along the street as the police car screeched to a halt in front of the raided restaurant.

A public-minded citizen who tried to prevent his getaway received an iron-hard fist in the middle of his face for his pains, and as he went sprawling in the gutter Fortuna leaped over his body and skidded round a corner into a deserted side street.

The detectives from the car, nothing daunted by the dis-

appearance of their quarry, drew their guns and blazed away at everything in sight. By this time the manager of the restaurant, together with his staff and most of the patrons of his establishment, was out on the pavement shouting and gesticulating, and adding to the general scene of confusion.

Under these circumstances it would have been surprising if the fugitives hadn't been able to get away to safety unscathed.

Fortuna dropped down to a steady walk as soon as he was off the Rue du Fauborg St. Honore. He wiped the sweat from his face with his handkerchief, and tried to look the part of an honest citizen out for a stroll with nothing more in mind than a glass of *pernod* at the next *bistro* he passed.

* * *

Phillipe Fortuna reached his apartment safely, and, on the following morning, turned up as instructed for the meeting with Brionne and Lemaire.

Something had gone very wrong last night, and Fortuna wanted to know what it was before he tripped gaily out on any more hold-ups in Paris. They had been fired upon as they came out of the restaurant with their loot – and it hadn't been the *flics* doing the shooting.

If there was some kind of French vigilance committee out at night, protecting the interests of restaurant owners, then Fortuna wanted them out of the way before he exposed himself to any more hazards in his unchosen career in crime.

6

Plans Are Laid

BRIONNE was seated in a comfortable armchair when Fortuna came into the room, and little Lemaire was pacing up and down wearing a furrow in the carpet, and cursing under his breath.

René Brionne looked as though he hadn't had much rest during the night, and, as he was to explain to Fortuna in a moment, there was a reason for that.

The young Provençal lit up a cigarette, and surveyed Brionne with cold eyes.

"Well, René," he wanted to know. "Who had the stuff when we

came out of the restaurant last night? Don't tell me it was left behind on the pavement!"

Brionne shook his head, and nodded towards a cabinet under the curtained window.

"No, it's all right, Phillipe. Your share is in there."

Fortuna nodded his satisfaction then sat down in a chair opposite the hook-nosed leader.

"Well, René, what went wrong? Do you know who it was gunning for us?"

René Brionne's lips tightened to a cold, thin line, and his eyes blazed hatred. His voice when he spoke trembled ever so slightly, and it wasn't through fear. Brionne didn't scare easily.

"I did some checking up last night, Phillipe. Matter of fact I've been out all night. I only got home an hour ago."

"Well?" prompted Fortuna harshly. "Let's have it, René. If there's somebody in Paris eager to put a bullet in me then I want to know who he is, and quick!"

"His name is Carsacci, Emile Carsacci," Brionne said in a voice that dripped venom. "He's a Corsican, Phillipe, and I was in the Santé Prison with him when the war was on. We didn't get on too well together." Brionne smiled slightly. "He tried to kill me on one occasion, and I returned the compliment in the mess hall at supper one night. Carsacci hates my guts, and I hate his."

Fortuna nodded slowly. He was beginning to understand now.

"So this Emile Carsacci's out of prison now, operating in Paris, and after your blood, René."

"*Oui*. I found out about him last night when I made a tour of Montmartre after the hold-up. He came out a few months ago, and he's come to Paris with a score of Corsican thugs who used to follow him in Marseilles before the war, when he was mixed up with the big-racket boys down there. He's taken over a smart little bar in the Barbes-Rochechouart *quartier*, and runs his headquarters from there. He's got a sister and the bar's in her name. That's just a front of course. He's still in the rackets, I hear, running heroin to the Channel ports for export to the United States, and sending French girls to south Algeria for the native brothel market."

"How did he find out about our job last night?" Fortuna demanded.

At this, Brionne looked sheepish, and Lemaire sneered openly.

"Don't tell me, let me guess!" Fortuna said. "You opened your

mouth too wide, René. You boasted what a big boy you were in the hold-up game, and what place you were going to hit next. You're a bloody fool, René – you ought to know the stool-pigeons have got their big ears flapping at every bar and *bistro* in Paris. This boy, Carsacci, must have passed the word around that he was anxious to know about you, and some dirty bastard passed the information along. Why the hell don't you learn to keep your trap shut?"

"What I want to know is what we're going to do now?" Lemaire growled behind his raised hand. "If this Carsacci is after René, the best thing we can do is mount to Marseilles and pray that the *flics* soon put this crummy Corsican back inside again."

"I don't know." Brionne was thoughtful. "If Carsacci is out to get me for good and all, he isn't the kind to let up just because I've moved out of his Paris territory. He's too keen for that. He'll send his trigger-men after us; you can be certain of that, no matter where we go."

"I don't fancy being dumped in the *Vieux Port* one dark night," Fortuna said, "just because Carsacci's got a personal score to settle with you, René."

René nodded his agreement. "And that's why it's no use running, Phillipe. We've got to stay here, and beat Carsacci at his own dirty game."

"Make it plain, René," Fortuna said.

"Get Carsacci before he gets me. It's as plain as that," Brionne told him.

Lemaire brayed like a donkey, and when Brionne turned upon him, scowling his displeasure, the little man snorted: "Maybe you've forgotten something, René. Carsacci's got a big organisation behind him – the Corsicans from Marseilles, remember? A bunch of trigger-happy thugs who'd think no more of filling us full of lead than they would of stamping on a beetle. They've already tried it once."

"I've got an ace up my sleeve," Brionne grunted. He jerked a grimy thumb at Fortuna. "Carsacci doesn't know about young Phillipe here. The talk I heard last night was that Carsacci thinks my two companions on the hold-up job were you, Lemaire, and old Durieux."

"So?" said Fortuna slowly.

"So, you go along to Carsacci's bar in the Barbes-Rochechouart and make friends with Carsacci. You're from Marseilles, so it shouldn't be too difficult for you. Get in with the gang, and set

Emile Carsacci up for me where I can put a bullet in his damned guts!"

"You're crazy," Fortuna breathed.

"No, listen to me, Phillipe." Brionne moved in closer and put his hand on Fortuna's shoulder in friendly fashion. "I've had plenty of time to work it all out in detail. You listen to me, *mon fils*, and there'll be plenty in it for all of us."

* * *

In his office on the Rue Bassano, Inspector Guy Versiac of the *Sûreté Nationale* heard the news of the gunfight outside the restaurant on the Rue de Fauborg St. Honore with grim satisfaction, and when Sergeant Martin, his second-in-command, asked what he intended doing about it his answer was firm and to the point.

"Do about it, *sergeant*? Why, nothing of course. If the scum of Paris want to shoot at each other, it's okay by me. I've done a bit of checking up through the officers of the *Police Judiciaire* who were on the spot just after the hold-up and the battle occurred, and I have satisfied myself as to the parties concerned."

The small policeman who had spent years in a Nazi concentration camp, and who was now re-instated as a guardian of the law, smiled briefly, and leaned back in his upholstered chair. "There is no doubt that the man who planned and led the hold-up was none other than my old friend, René Brionne. With him, was an old pre-war crook companion named Lemaire, and a third man I met when I came back to Paris. A young *Marsiale* named Phillipe Fortuna.

"The others, who tried to gun the trio down when they came rushing out of the restaurant, were gunmen in the employ of a particularly nasty Corsican hoodlum named Emile Carsacci. Carsacci and Brionne were deadly enemies in prison; they each had a go at killing each other inside. Carsacci was released a few months ago, and came to Paris with a horde of Corsicans to control the Paris end of the drug and white slave traffic. There's no doubt in my mind that he's out to get Brionne, and as soon as René Brionne realises what's happening - and that won't be long if I know René - he'll do his best to get his bullets in first . . . I think I'll just wait awhile, let one kill the other - and then pull the victor in on a charge of murder!"

Sergeant Martin nodded his head approvingly.

"I've certainly got to hand it to you, *patron*," he said with

admiration in his voice. "When it comes to crooks and killers you know what to do and when to do it!"

* * *

A few nights later, Phillipe Fortuna drove his car into a park up on the Barbes-Rochechouart *quartier*, climbed out into the cold frosty air, and pulled his coat collar high about his broad shoulders.

He called to a ragged wanderer who was hurrying along under a high wall. "Hey, which way to the Bar Leonore, *mon ami*?"

The ragged one shot a furtive glance over his shoulder and, seeing the rich dress and the swanky car Fortuna stood beside, answered up smartly: "You can't miss it, *m'sieur*. First turning on the left."

"*Merci*." Fortuna tossed a coin to the ragged informant, and went on his way.

There was indeed no chance of missing the Bar Leonore. Its name was blazing in garish lights over an ornamented doorway where a tough-looking Corsican bouncer stood on guard. From inside came the sound of music, and the murmur of voices. Occasionally a woman laughed loudly, a high-pitched, hysterical kind of sound which told Fortuna all he wanted to know about the sort of place it was.

At the doorway the Corsican stopped him with a word.

"Thinking of going in, friend?"

Fortuna turned, surveyed the doorman with cold eyes.

"That was the general idea," he said. "Why?"

The Corsican quickly sized up the stranger, and recognised him for what he was. Even though he couldn't see the tell-tale bulge of the shoulder holster at Fortuna's left arm-pit, he knew it was there.

He shrugged padded shoulders.

"Go in, and welcome. But watch your step. Any trouble and you'll be out in the street faster than you can pull a trigger. There's plenty more like me," he added ominously.

Fortuna nodded.

"I'll remember it, friend," he said tonelessly.

The inside of the Bar Leonore was typical of a hundred others in the tough *quartier* of the Barbes-Rochechouart. Plenty of bright lights, plenty of women, and plenty of booze. The bar ran the whole length of one side of the room, and there were

three hard cases in white jackets to serve the customers, and incidentally to rob them when they were too drunk to know or care.

The furnishings were expensive. Whatever Emile Carsacci might lack as a citizen of the French capital, money was no part of it. He had certainly splashed the francs around in outfitting this den of iniquity which he ran in his sister's name.

His sister. Yes, it would be interesting to see what *Ma'amselle* Leonore Carsacci was like, thought Fortuna, as he made his way to an unoccupied table by the wall. He pictured a hard-faced Corsican woman, heavily painted, and just as quick to go for a hidden gun as her trigger-happy brother.

A waiter brought the young *Marsiale* a double whisky laced with soda, and as he was about to take his first sip a honeyed voice asked him quietly: "You are a stranger here, *m'sieur*? I trust you will enjoy yourself."

Fortuna glanced up with a scowl on his handsome face. It was no part of his evening's plan to get mixed up with a drink scrounging whore. Tell her to get the hell out of it . . .

Fortuna's mouth opened - and stayed that way.

The woman who stood at his table was a raven-haired beauty of the first order. If she was painted, it was hard to tell where the artificiality ended and the natural loveliness began. Her lips formed a cupid's bow as she smiled down at him, and her dark gipsy eyes flashed with undisguised merriment at his obvious astonishment.

Fortuna noticed that the dress she was wearing was a gorgeous creation that couldn't have come from any place but one of the leading fashion houses, snuggling close in all the right places; revealing, but without revealing too much.

With an attempt at gallantry, Fortuna rose to his feet. He realised his mouth was still hanging open, and he closed it with a snap. Then he smiled, and indicated the chair opposite.

Damn Brionne's plan of ingratiating himself with Carsacci's mob!

Tonight he was going to enjoy himself.

7

In Carsacci's Den

"**M**ERCI, *ma'amselle*," said Phillipe Fortuna. "Yes, I am enjoying myself. And now that I have found you, my enjoyment is complete. I would be honoured if you will take a drink with me."

"*Merci, m'sieur*. You are courteous." The beautiful girl sat opposite Fortuna, and smiled winningly at him with a flash of even, white teeth. "It is a grace sadly lacking in most of my regular patrons."

Fortuna blinked.

"*Your patrons?*" he echoed in astonishment. "Why, don't tell me that you are *Ma'amselle Leonore Carsacci?*"

Leonore laughed. To Fortuna's ears, the sound was the tinkling of crystal water in a stream.

"Is that so terrible, *m'sieur?*" she asked. "Did you expect me to be some kind of witch?"

Fortuna laughed, a little embarrassed, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I - I hardly know what I expected, *ma'amselle*. Certainly it wasn't such a vision of loveliness as you are."

A waiter, hovering close, brought a bottle and two glasses to the table. Leonore dismissed him with a nod. She filled the glasses, handed one to Fortuna, and raised the other to her lips.

"To our continued acquaintance, *m'sieur - m'sieur?*"

Fortuna hastily repaired the omission.

"Fortuna, *ma'amselle*. Phillipe Fortuna, at your service at any time."

And Fortuna meant what he said. For the first time in his whole life, the young gangster had been knocked head over heels by a pretty girl. Right now nothing else mattered to him, not René Brionne or Emile Carsacci or any of the Corsican killer's tough hoodlums scowling in his direction from every part of the bar.

In fact as far as the young *Marsiale* was concerned there was no one in the place except himself and the beautiful young island girl.

He was soon, however, made aware of the presence of unfriendly feelings. One of the gun-toting Corsicans walked over to the table

where Fortuna was talking, and put his hand on Leonore's bare shoulder.

"You shouldn't be talking to strangers, *Ma'amselle* Carsacci," he warned her in a low voice. "Your brother wouldn't like it."

Leonore flushed, and tried to brush the offending hand away with her own.

"Mind your own business, Courtois," she answered firmly. "Whom I wish to speak with is my affair, not yours."

"It is my business, *ma'amselle*," the hood persisted. "I am responsible to Emile for your safety."

"I am in no danger. Now please go away!"

Phillipe Fortuna rose to his feet slowly. He remembered now that it was no part of Brionne's plan that he should come here to become involved in a brawl, and yet he could not sit quietly by while this lovely young girl was pestered by a blue-jowled Corsican baboon.

He was as tall as the Corsican when he faced him, though maybe not as heavily built, and his eyes were on a level with those of the man named Courtois when he said in an ominously quiet voice: "You are no gentleman, *mon ami*. How many times does the lady have to tell you to go away and leave her alone?"

The Corsican scowled angrily. He wasn't used to being spoken to like this by a scummy French crook.

"Take some advice and beat it, boy, while you're still in one piece!"

"Take your hand from the lady's shoulder!" Fortuna snapped.

The gangster obliged. Just that and no more.

"Get out now!" he rasped icily. "You open your trap to me once more, and I'll fill it with something you won't like the taste of!"

Ignoring him, Fortuna looked down at Leonore Carsacci, and asked her: "Shall we move to a less crowded table, *ma'amselle*?"

And at that precise moment the Corsican moved with the speed of lightning. His clenched fist shot out from the level of his padded shoulder, and if it had connected with its intended target, it would certainly have ended Fortuna's spirited defence of the lady for the evening.

But it did not connect. Fast as Courtois moved, Fortuna was faster. As the fist sped towards him the young *Marsiale* spun round on his toes so that he was facing the same way as his attacker. His steel-hard fingers closed over the Corsican's wrist and arm against the joint, he moved forward and downward in

one blurring movement, and *M'sieur* Courtois flew over his left shoulder – to crash in a welter of arms and legs on top of a glass-littered table at the other end of the bar.

Not giving his opponent time to recover himself, Fortuna leapt forward with the speed of a panther at the moment of the kill. As Courtois staggered up from the table's splintered wreckage with startled patrons scattering in all directions, Fortuna hit him hard in the pit of the stomach, and as the dazed Corsican jack-knifed over in acute agony, the young *Marsiale* brought his clenched hands down with all the strength he could muster to the back of the hoodlum's neck.

Courtois collapsed like a sack of potatoes at Fortuna's feet, and lay without moving a muscle, and, as the young man turned, he found himself gazing into the muzzles of three automatics in the capable hands of three determined-looking Corsican gangsters.

"You don't get away with that sort of thing in the Bar Leonore," one of them growled menacingly. He jerked the barrel of his gun in the direction of the nearest exit. "Outside in the alley, dog. We'll deal with you there!"

Fortuna hesitated for a brief moment, trying to decide whether he had time to go for his own concealed shoulder gun, get it in his hand, dive for cover and start shooting, before the Corsicans gunned him down. Even while he thought about it he knew he didn't stand a chance in hell. These three thugs would fill him with lead before his own hand touched the butt of the Mauser under his coat.

As Fortuna shrugged briefly and started to walk, a new voice rose above the hubbub of the excitement, a voice of command.

"Hold it where you are!"

Fortuna turned his head; the three gangsters turned their heads.

* * *

The man who was walking towards them from an open doorway behind the bar was wearing an expensive dinner suit, and smoking a long cigar. He was dark-skinned and his hair showed crinkly in spite of the fact that it was well greased with heavily scented pomade.

Fortuna guessed at once that this was the Boss. *M'sieur* Emile Carsacci himself had arrived on the scene. Obediently, the Corsicans lowered their guns as Carsacci glanced down at the now

writhing figure on the floor, and then at the wreckage of broken glassware and table.

He then looked up at Fortuna who stood with his hands at his sides, and asked: "He do this?"

"Sure, Emile," one of the thugs answered smartly. "He come in here looking for trouble. He pasted Courtois."

"I don't need anybody to tell me that," Carsacci grunted. "Okay, what really happened here?"

"I'll tell you what happened, Emile." It was Leonore who had walked forward softly until now she stood at her brother's side, the crown of her dark head barely reaching to the gang leader's shoulder. "I was talking to this gentleman. Courtois interfered, and refused to go away when I told him. This gentleman came courteously to my assistance, and when Courtois tried to attack him from behind, he defended himself."

Carsacci nodded his head, chewed savagely on his cigar and told the hoods to beat it. He told Leonore he would see her later, patted her affectionately on the arm, and ordered Fortuna to follow him into his office.

Alone in the luxuriously appointed room behind the bar, Emile Carsacci seated himself behind his wide desk, and told the young man to find himself a chair. He offered him a cigar, and then said: "Looks like you can look after yourself, pal. Courtois is a pretty tough customer. What's your name, and where do you come from?"

"My home is Marseilles, my name's Fortuna, Phillipe Fortuna."

"I see you carry a gun, Fortuna. Ever use it?"

"Only if I have to," Fortuna replied easily. "Mostly I find I can get what I want merely by flashing it around a piece."

"Well, Leonore seems to like you, Fortuna, and she's usually a good judge of character. You working for anybody in Paris?"

"No."

"I can always use a good man. If I check up on you, boy, and find out you're okay, how'd you like to go to work for me?"

Fortuna smiled winningly. In spite of everything it seemed that things were going the way he wanted them to. Brionne was going to be tickled pink when he heard this story.

"Sure I'd work for you, *M'sieur* Carsacci. I've heard about you before. A man can go a long way in the rackets I'm told."

8

Gang War

"IT'S just like I've always said, Phillipe," René Brionne purred with satisfaction. "You're a kid with brains."

Fortuna had come to see Brionne with the news that he had become a member of Emile Carsacci's organisation. Nothing fancy about it mind, just a hired trigger man with orders to hang around the Bar Leonore until he was needed for a job.

Not that Phillipe Fortuna needed any encouragement to stay at the Bar Leonore. The more he saw of Carsacci's beautiful sister, Leonore, the more he was convinced that she was the one woman for him – that is, if she felt the same way.

Up to now, Fortuna wasn't sure. Leonore Carsacci was pleasant, and always seemed to be ready to talk to the young *Marsiale*. Her laughter when Fortuna tripped over his words and blushed like a teenage boy sounded like music to his ears. It had never been this way with the other girls he'd known during the war when he was fighting the Germans. As they had come, so he'd taken them, and then forgot all about it.

This time it was different – and the only black cloud on his blue horizon was the fact that Leonore was Emile Carsacci's sister.

"You've been away for a week, Phillipe," Brionne said as he lit a cigarette. "Have you ever heard Carsacci talk about me?"

Fortuna smiled.

"You'll be pleased to know you're his favourite subject, René. He's out to get you one way or another, and he won't be satisfied until you're stone cold dead. You must have hated each other's guts in the Santé."

"He *did* pull that job on us at the restaurant, didn't he, Phillipe?" Brionne growled.

Fortuna nodded. His normally good-looking face hardened and grew ugly.

"Yes, he did, the *sacré cochon!*" he said in a low voice. "He had information, René. Somebody squealed."

"Somebody's always ready to squeal, Phillipe, if the price is right," Brionne told him. "And Carsacci was there himself, *hein?*"

"Yes. He certainly hates you. He wants to be there, and to

pull the trigger himself. I reckon it will be easy to set him up for you, René. All you've got to do is set the time and the place for the next job."

"And to make quite sure that Carsacci knows about it . . ." Brionne mused. He laughed an evil little laugh. "*M'sieur* Carsacci is in for a bloody big shock in the very near future. I'm recruiting my own trigger men, Phillipe, and they will be on hand when they are needed to fill those Corsican bastards with lead!"

* * *

A few days later, Fortuna was one of those present in Emile Carsacci's private office at the Bar Leonore when the dark-skinned Corsican gangster told them of René Brionne's next job.

The room was filled with a deep blue haze of tobacco smoke, and tough-looking men gathered round the boss's desk when he unfolded a large map in front of them.

"I have received a piece of interesting information, boys." Carsacci grinned as he seated himself in his well-upholstered chair, and surveyed the faces around him. "You all know the way I feel about that bastard René Brionne, that jumped-up little squirt who thinks he can run Paris to suit himself. Well, like I said, I've had some information. Brionne and his two *copains* have planned to hold up the post office on the Rue Claude Bernard on the South Bank on the fifteenth; that's in three days from now. I know the time they plan to do the job, and I reckon it's going to be a golden opportunity for me to settle an old score." He looked up at Fortuna who was watching him eagerly. "I'll want you in on this job, Phillipe. You've got to prove yourself to me some time, eh, *mon vieux*?"

Fortuna grinned.

"You couldn't have kept me away, Emile."

"*Bon*. You won't come to any harm, I'll see to that. Leonore would make my life a living hell if I let anything happen to you."

He laughed merrily, and the others laughed, too. They all knew the way Fortuna felt about the boss's sister, and the way she spent most of her time in his company.

Fortuna smiled and said nothing.

"Now, business!" Carsacci snapped. "Listen closely, all of you, because I don't want any slip-ups this time. There are only three of them, and there's going to be ten of us."

That's all you know about it, Fortuna thought happily. As

René had remarked, the Corsicans were in for a shock when the time came, because René Brionne's newly-hired gunmen were going to have the Rue Claude Bernard bottled up so tight that not even a mouse would get through the rain of bullets they'd put up.

Emile Carsacci didn't know it yet but he was being set up for the tightest ambush since the end of the war.

* * *

When the day came, the inside of the Bar Leonore resembled more of a military headquarters than a high class dive where you could go to get a drink, a gamble, and if you needed one, a woman.

Everywhere the Corsicans were checking their Tommy guns and pistols. Outside in the alley, the hoods who would be doing the driving were making sure there was nothing wrong with the two Citroen cars from which their own ambush would take place.

In the back office, Emile Carsacci was issuing last minute instructions to the men who were going with him to level the score with Brionne. With him was Phillipe Fortuna, listening intently to all that was being said, praying that the Corsican chief wouldn't change any of his plans at the last minute thereby upsetting René Brionne's arrangements.

The way he felt about Carsacci's young sister, Fortuna had moments of guilt. Somehow it wasn't right that he should be sending the brother of the woman he loved to almost certain death. If Leonore ever found out who he was, and the double game he was playing, she would never even look at him again. And when Emile Carsacci was killed - well, what Leonore might do about that didn't bear thinking about.

Removing the cigar from his lips, Carsacci looked at Fortuna, and grinned.

"Hey, what's the matter, Phillipe? You look as though you was going to a funeral!"

Fortuna smiled wryly, and replied: "In a way it is, isn't it, Emile?"

Carsacci cackled with amusement, and banged his fist down on top of the desk.

"*Oui*, so we are, *mon brave*, so we are. I wasn't thinking of that. Brionne's funeral, *hein*? This is the last hold-up that hook-nosed bastard will ever pull in Paris!"

Later, when Carsacci was out in the alley supervising the loading of the cars with spare weapons and ammunition, Fortuna found a minute to be alone with Leonore.

There was fear in the dark eyes of the young Corsican girl as she looked up into Fortuna's drawn face. He tried to smile, and tightened the grip of his strong arms about her slender waist.

"Now don't you worry about me, darling," he told her lightly. "Nothing's going to happen to me I promise you."

"I wish I could feel as certain of that as you do, *mon ange*," she sighed heavily. "You know, I have a feeling inside me that something is wrong. Please don't laugh, Phillipe. It may seem foolish to you but I cannot help feeling that terrible things are going to happen today out there in the streets."

"You bet they are," Fortuna cracked heartily. "Brionne and his cut-throats are going to end up with a belly full of lead!"

"Are they, Phillipe?" Leonore's eyes seemed to Fortuna to hold a special kind of secret knowledge. "Or is it you and Emile who will die?"

"Hey, don't start feeling like that," Fortuna told her gaily, though inside his heart felt as though it was made of lead. He bent his head and kissed her hard on the mouth. "Don't go talking to any good-looking strangers while I'm gone."

Emile Carsacci appeared in the doorway with one of his henchmen at his elbow. He smiled when he saw the two young people locked tight in each other's arms. Phillipe was a pretty good guy and could go far in the organisation if he wanted. And if Leonore happened to be really in love with the young *Marsiale* then he would do everything in his power to put him on the road to big-time crime operations.

"Hey, lovebirds," Carsacci said. "Time to go."

One more kiss and Fortuna broke away from Leonore. He turned to Carsacci, and said: "Ready when you are, Emile." His mouth felt dry and gritty, and there was a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. He felt the way he did when he pulled his first job; that was when he helped René Brionne escape from the Santé prison in 1942.

* * *

An hour later, the two black cars pulled easily off the Rue St. Jacques below the Seine, cruised at a steady pace round the Pantheon, and cut down to where the street opened out on the Rue Claude Bernard where, if Brionne's post office raid was going

according to schedule, guns would be flashing over the counter right at this moment.

The cars turned to the right into the Rue Claude Bernard, and right out in front of him Fortuna was able to see the towering façade of the post office. There were five or six cars standing outside stationary, and they weren't able to tell which one belonged to the gangsters. It was just a matter of waiting until Brionne and his companions came bursting out onto the street.

The cars manned by the armed Corsicans rolled to a halt at the kerb on the other side of the street and, beside the driver of the leading one, Emile Carsacci calmly opened his cigar case, and lit up. He held a submachine gun balanced easily across his knees. It was loaded, and the safety catch was off.

In the back with two Corsicans Fortuna leaned forward to keep his eyes on the wide entrance of the post office. His heart was pounding madly. He knew that his was an act of treachery, that he had set up Carsacci for Brionne, and that the cigar-smoking Corsican didn't have a hell of a lot of time left to live.

The street was not very crowded. Here and there pedestrians moved quietly about their business, occasionally a car cruised by, once a bus which momentarily obscured the all important view of the post office.

Fortuna noticed a *gendarme* some way down the street, standing outside a newsagent's shop. He was giving directions to a man and woman, pointing with outstretched arm down along to the Mosque.

If the *gendarme* interfered, he would be killed. Fortuna hoped that he would have enough sense to stay out of it while the gangs were fighting.

The young *Marsiale* scanned the pavements, trying to make out where Brionne's hired killers were waiting for the shooting to begin. He couldn't see any of them. That wasn't unusual. He would have been perturbed if he *had* been able to see them. If they were in the open, then Carsacci would be able to see them as well, and he might guess that everything was not as it should be.

"Here they come!" snapped Carsacci suddenly, jerking Fortuna out of his inner thoughts. "Right on time. When they reach the pavement let 'em have it, boys!"

Fortuna twisted his head, saw René Brionne with little Lemaire and another man running out of the post office entrance, down the wide steps to street level. All held guns in their hands, all

were carrying brown canvas sacks, no doubt filled with stolen money.

"Now!" Carsacci almost screamed.

The windows of the two Citroens erupted in flame. The good people of Paris scattered in terror when they heard the dull *rat-a-tat-tat* of the machine guns. Fortuna wasn't able to see what the *gendarme* was doing.

As they reached the pavement Brionne and Co. didn't wait for the sound of shooting. At a pre-arranged signal all three threw themselves flat on the ground where they were partially sheltered by the stationary vehicles.

Through the blue haze of gunsmoke, and over the ear-splitting din of the shooting, Fortuna heard Carsacci shout: "The hell with it, we can't get the bastards from here! Take the cars over closer!"

When the two Citroens moved out into the now deserted street with orange fire spitting from their windows as the machine gunners vainly sought out their victims, four men, overcoated and hatted, came out of an alleyway bordering the post office. They all held submachine guns crooked in their arms, and with the two black cars coming towards them, they opened fire.

Fortuna heard the windscreen of the car shatter into tiny fragments, hit by bullets. The driver screamed and released his hold on the wheel to clutch wildly at his forehead from which the blood was streaming.

Out of control, the Citroen careered crazily across the street, and came to a halt with a sickening crash into the fender of one of the stationary vehicles.

The occupants were thrown roughly to one side. The Corsican on Fortuna's left fell heavily against him, and when the *Marsiale* pushed him away he felt the warm stickiness of blood on his hand.

The trigger man had been cut almost in half across the chest.

Fortuna realised then that, although he was actually on the side of René Brionne, he was as much on the receiving end of Brionne's gunmen as any of Carsacci's hoods!

9

The Killing

IN the front, Emile Carsacci was already climbing out of the car, cursing madly and holding his Tommy gun ready for action.

The second Corsican car was completely out of action halfway across the road with smoke pouring from under the bonnet, and five dead men lying inside.

Now Brionne's hired killers were converging on the leading car from every direction. Of the lone *gendarme* there was no sign. Deeming discretion to be the better part of valour, he had made himself scarce as soon as he realised that here was a full scale gang battle in full swing. When gangsters started killing each other off, the police usually managed to stay out of the way until it was all over.

Heaving himself over another occupant of the car who was dead, Fortuna wrenched open the nearside door, and immediately threw himself down flat in the road as a burst of savage machine gun fire cut long splinters of glass from the already broken window.

Above the roar of the battle, Emile Carsacci was standing upright, blazing away at the men advancing on him. He was spattered with blood from head to foot. But the end was near. A loud cry from behind the stationary cars caused the trigger men to ease up, and then a triumphant René Brionne poked his head over the bonnet of the nearest.

He held a blue-steeled Mauser in his fist; his mouth was twisted in a maniacal snarl as he screamed Carsacci's name, and when the dark-skinned Corsican wheeled to face him, Brionne emptied his magazine into his enemy's body.

"Take that yuh dirty Corsican bastard!" Brionne roared crazily. "And that, and that, and that! *Mon Dieu*, but I'll teach you not to pull tricks on René Brionne again!"

Carsacci's mouth opened wide, soundlessly, the machine gun spun from his grasp, and he clawed ineffectually at his face that had disintegrated into a scarlet ruin of smashed bone and mangled flesh!

When he fell his body almost hit Fortuna who was rising to his feet. The young *Marsiale* came up fast, waved one arm above his head, and yelled to Brionne to stop firing.

The next moment Fortuna knew that he had been hit. It felt

as though a sledgehammer had hit him in the shoulder, and there was the hot trickle of blood down his arm. He staggered drunkenly, and cannoned into one of the cars by the post office. René Brionne and Lemaire were only a couple of *metres* away from him, and they must have seen him.

"Hold it, René - it's me, Phillipe! I've been hit. Stop shooting, damn you!"

Over the loud roaring in his ears Fortuna heard the double whining note of an approaching police car, and panic hit him like a physical blow.

"René, it's me, Phillipe! Help me, *mon ami!*"

His head spun with the terrible pain in his shoulder. The scene of bloodshed broke up before his eyes and dissolved in a meaningless pattern of sparkling colour.

When he hit the ground by the side of the bloodsoaked corpse of Emile Carsacci, Phillipe Fortuna felt no more pain. He was unconscious.

Alive yes, but only just.

* * *

When the Paris police arrived on the scene in answer to a frantic call for help by the *gendarme* on duty in the Rue Claude Bernard, they found very little to do but sweep up the *débris* and get ambulances to carry the corpses away.

The street in front of the post office was a shambles with blood spilled everywhere. The two Citroen cars used by Emile Carsacci for his ambush were completely wrecked, and of the ten men who had taken part, only three were still alive, one of these being Phillipe Fortuna who had a nasty bullet wound in his shoulder.

Emile Carsacci had been hit more than twenty times by machine gun and automatic pistol bullets. Half of these would have proved fatal alone.

But of René Brionne there was no sign. Brionne and his killers, all except the four who had fallen to the accurate shooting of the Corsicans, had fled at the first sound of the police siren. Inspector Guy Versiac of the *Sûreté Nationale*, who was on the scene with officers of the Paris *Police Judiciaire*, realised that his old adversary had given him the slip once again.

But he had Phillipe Fortuna. Yes, Inspector Versiac remembered the young, fair-headed *Marsiale* from the day when he had

arrived back home from his sojourn in a Nazi concentration camp. It was Fortuna who was driving René Brionne's car that day when the hook-nosed gangster had crowed over his triumph in getting free from the Santé Prison, and told of his free pardon for his gallant work with the Resistance Movement.

After talking with the *gendarme* who had given the alarm, Versiac shook his head slowly from side to side.

"This I do not understand," he said at length to his subordinate Sergeant Martin. "When I came home from Germany and met Brionne, this young man Fortuna was driving the car. They were friends it seemed – and yet from the account given me by the *gendarme*, Fortuna was in one of the cars with the Corsicans. Hmm, I think I must have a word or two with Phillippe Fortuna when they have finished sewing him up at the hospital."

10

The Wisdom Of Guy Versiac

A WEEK had passed since the day of the gun battle in the Rue Claude Bernard. Fortuna, his shoulder bandaged, and his arm in a sling lay in bed in a private ward in the hospital. The ward was being paid for by Inspector Versiac who didn't want the crook coming into any contact with anyone but himself.

A uniformed *gendarme* was on guard in the corridor outside, and no one but members of the hospital staff were permitted to go into the ward.

In the days during which he had been lying in bed with nothing to do other than nurse his aching arm, Fortuna had done a hell of a lot of thinking.

He'd done what he set out to do: set up Emile Carsacci for Brionne's hired killers. They had told him Carsacci was dead with most of his Paris gang. But what of René Brionne? Fortuna frowned deeply. Brionne must have recognised him when he was shooting at Carsacci, and yet he'd done nothing to help him when he was hit in the shoulder. What kind of friendship was that supposed to be?

Fortuna was aroused from his reverie as the door of the room was opened, and Inspector Guy Versiac came in. Small and dapper as always, the officer of the *Sûreté* walked over to Fortuna's bed and sat down on a chair.

Fortuna stared hard at him for a moment, then pointed and said: "I remember you. You're the *flic* Brionne picked up at the station when you came back from Germany!"

Versiac smiled gently, and nodded his head.

"That's right, Phillipe. I'm Inspector Versiac. And now I would like to talk to you, if you feel strong enough. Cigarette?" He offered his case to Fortuna who accepted gratefully.

"I'm not saying anything," he grunted when Versiac lit his cigarette.

"I'm sure you're not, *mon ami*." Versiac smiled amiably. "I bet you don't even talk when they take you out to the guillotine and place your head in the *lunette*."

Fortuna blinked in surprise.

"The guillotine!" he exclaimed. "What for? I've never killed anyone!"

"I'm sure you haven't," Versiac agreed with him. "We checked the gun you were holding after the battle in the Rue Claude Bernard. It hadn't even been fired. But you were there with intent to kill, weren't you? And you were in with Brionne on that restaurant job some weeks ago. You could get sent to the guillotine quite easily you know. By the way what happened between you and René Brionne? I thought you were the best of friends when you picked me up that time."

"We still are!" Fortuna snapped automatically. "He would have got me away after the battle if there'd been time. I -"

He stopped suddenly when he realised what he was saying.

"I thought as much," Versiac nodded. "You were with Carsacci but still friends with Brionne, *hein*? You set Carsacci up for the killing in the Claude Bernard! What good did it do you? Brionne could have dragged you off with him if he wanted. But he didn't. You'd served your purpose, Phillipe. As far as he was concerned you weren't necessary to his plans any longer. He is a big boy since that battle last week. The Corsicans are scared of him and the trigger men he's bought and is hanging on to."

"René wouldn't do that to me!" Fortuna cried. "You're a damn liar, Versiac!"

"Am I?" Versiac smiled. "Do you really think so, boy? How did you really get into all this in the first place? You aren't the criminal kind. I've checked on you since you were brought in here, and up to the time you helped spring Brionne from the Santé you didn't have a stain on your record."

"I - I - " Fortuna licked his dry lips, cursed and stubbed

out his cigarette on the tray by his bed. "René told me that I had committed a crime by helping him to escape from prison. At that time I was pretending to work for the *Boches*, and passing on information to the Resistance. His two men told me René Brionne was an enemy of the Nazis, that they put him in prison because they were scared of him. I was able to help because I could get hold of the necessary uniforms and the papers."

Versiac shook his head sadly.

"Brionne was lying, Phillipe. You couldn't have been convicted for such a mistake, especially after your gallant work with the *Maquis* in the south. You were easy to fool, Phillipe, and because Brionne thought you could be useful to him, he fooled you."

Fortuna lay back and stared at the white ceiling above. After a time he said slowly: "It's hard to believe all you are saying to me, Inspector." Versiac noted with satisfaction that he was being a little more polite now. "I always thought of René Brionne as a good friend and *copain*."

"Did you?" Versiac remarked dryly. Then: "I have another visitor for you, Phillipe. She has tried to get in to see you every day since the shooting. Would you like to see her?"

Fortuna sat bolt upright in his bed, and stared wide eyed at the policeman.

"You - you don't mean, Leonore?"

"*Oui*, Leonore Carsacci. She is in the corridor. Would you like to speak with her?"

Fortuna looked frightened.

"She must hate me for what happened. Does she know, Inspector? Has she been told anything about me - and Brionne?"

"She knows, and she doesn't hate you, Phillipe," Versiac told him. "I think you should see her."

The officer of the *Sûreté* waited with bated breath for the young *Marsiale's* answer. It was upon Leonore's visit that so much depended now. What she had to say, might persuade young Fortuna to really alter his mind about René Brionne. And it was Brionne, the once-convicted murderer, that the Inspector wanted to get his hands on, not this youngster who was fundamentally honest.

"Please ask *Mademoiselle* Carsacci to come in," Fortuna said weakly.

Versiac rose, went to the door, spoke to someone outside, then went out. Seconds later, Leonore Carsacci came into the room, and Fortuna's heart went out to her.

She was dressed in unrelieved black. It befitted a devoted sister who had but recently attended the funeral of her brother. To Phillipe Fortuna she had never been more lovely, more desirable than at that moment.

He hesitatingly held out his one good arm to her, and spoke her name slowly as though he was scared.

There was no need to be. The young Corsican girl came to him swiftly, sat on the chair recently vacated by Guy Versiac, buried her face against Fortuna's broad chest, and wept bitterly.

Fortuna let her cry. It was better to get it all out; then they would be able to talk seriously. Five minutes later, Leonore dried her eyes on a wisp of lace handkerchief, and smiled down at her fair-haired lover.

"You - you have heard what I did, *cherie*?" Fortuna asked gently. "About your brother, and René Brionne?"

"*Oui*, Phillipe. Inspector Versiac told me his suspicions, and when he came out into the corridor he confirmed them."

"I set Emile up for the kill," Fortuna said bitterly. "Then René Brionne left me for the *flics*! You cannot love me after this, Leonore."

Leonore looked at him intently, her beautiful face serious now.

"My brother was good to me, Phillipe. He was an evil man, I know, and a leader of killers. His whole life was violent. I knew that when my mother died in Corsica and he asked me to come with him to Paris when he was released from prison. I came because there was nowhere else for me to go. I managed the bar for him in the Montmartre. He was bad; René Brionne his enemy is bad; and you Phillipe, you have been bad also. But I still love you. My darling, please believe that. After all, it was Brionne who killed my brother, not you. If you had been killed too, that day in the Claude Bernard, I think I would have died also."

"*Cherie*," Fortuna murmured. He held her close in one good arm. "I have been bad, but that is all over now. I must be punished for the crime I have committed. I know I must go to prison, perhaps for many years -"

"I will wait, Phillipe," she interrupted him fiercely. "I will wait for ever if need be. I must leave Paris though, now. I will try to find somewhere to live where I will be safe, and there I will wait for you until you are a free man."

Fortuna frowned, and held her away from him so that he could look into her eyes.

"What do you mean - safe? You will be safe in Paris, *cherie*."

Leonore shook her head sadly.

"No, Phillipe. The night after the battle, a grenade was thrown through the door of the Bar Leonore. A man was killed. The place was closed and I moved to a small apartment on the Rue de Flandre. Two days ago, when I returned from Emile's funeral, one of René Brionne's men was waiting for me. He told me to get out of Paris and stay out. If I refused to go I would regret it, he said. He even hinted that you might be murdered once you had been tried and sent to prison. I have to be out of my apartment by tomorrow night."

"But are you certain he was one of Brionne's gang?" Fortuna cried aghast. "It could have been somebody else!"

"He was a little man, a little weasel-face man very well dressed. He told me his name. I think it was -"

"Lemaire?" Fortuna said.

"*Oui*, Phillipe, Lemaire. That was his name."

Quick as a flash, Fortuna was out of bed. Three long strides took him to the door of the room, and he tore the door wide open. A hard faced *gendarme* stood staring at him, gun in hand, and behind him Inspector Guy Versiac.

"Damn you, Versiac!" Fortuna snapped. "Why didn't you tell me that Leonore had been threatened by Lemaire? You've got to give her police protection! I demand that you do, twenty-four hours of the day!"

"Sorry, Fortuna," the Inspector told him regretfully. "It can't be done I'm afraid. But I'll tell you what can be done." He caught Fortuna by the front of his pyjama coat. "Tell me the places where Brionne is likely to be hanging out. I'll pull him in so fast, he'll think he's sprouted wings. Start talking, boy!"

"Nothing doing!" Fortuna retorted angrily. "I've done some pretty stinking things in the last few years, but it's all finished now. Yes, even squealing on a rat like Brionne."

"What about Leonore?" Versiac wanted to know.

"Leave that to me!" Fortuna said grimly. "I'll square the account with Brionne myself!"

"You won't be squaring accounts with anybody, except society," Versiac reminded him bluntly. "It'll be a few years before you'll be a free man again, Fortuna!"

"That's what you think!" Fortuna told him. "I'm going to get

Brionne for what he did to me, and before he gets a chance to hurt Leonore!"

At gunpoint, the *gendarme* thrust Fortuna back into his room, and into bed. The Inspector escorted Leonore into the corridor. She was frightened until she looked up into the cunning policeman's face. He was smiling broadly, and when he told her to go home to her apartment he patted her gently on the arm, and told her not to worry.

"You will be protected, *ma'amselle*. A detective will be keeping an eye on you all the time. You won't see him, but he'll be there."

Leonore shook her head.

"I don't understand, Inspector. You told Phillipe -"

"I know that, my dear. You see, Phillipe would never squeal, not even on the man who has done him so much wrong. He has accepted that part of the criminal code. But that doesn't mean he won't be out to get Brionne himself. He'll try, and when he does, we will let him escape. But I'll be certain that I'm not very far behind him - and when he does find René Brionne, I will be the man who gives the orders. Now go home, Leonore, and try not to worry. With a bit of luck all this will be over in a very short time."

"And Phillipe?" Leonore wanted to know.

"Phillipe?" echoed the Inspector. "If he leads me to René Brionne, I'll move heaven and earth to get your lover a Not Proven verdict in court."

"You mean he might go free?" Leonore breathed, hardly daring to believe the hope Versiac was holding out to her.

"There is a possibility," Versiac smiled.

11

Fortuna Takes A Chance

OVER a long thought-out process of past events and their effect on the present situation, René Brionne had ceased to be a friend in Phillipe Fortuna's estimation, and had indeed become a bitter enemy.

Brionne, knowing he was wounded, had left him as easy prey for the police, and had then threatened Leonore Carsacci with evil things if she didn't leave Paris immediately.

Fortuna knew he had to act fast if he was to save the girl he

loved from the roused animal hatred of the hook-nosed killer – and the first job was to get out of hospital. Then he could go to the place where he was certain Brionne would be hiding until the heat was off that resulted from the Claude Bernard gun battle.

Carefully, he pulled his arm out of the sling, and tested it gingerly. It hurt a bit when he bent it, and his shoulder ached. It couldn't be helped. The young *Marsiale* drew the sling over his head, then stepped out of his bed.

He wore only pyjamas. Not the thing to go un-noticed in a busy Paris street. He was going to have to get hold of something to wear, and also to dispose of the *gendarme* stationed outside in the corridor to prevent his escape.

Fortuna pulled back the curtain and looked out of the window. The ward was on the third storey with a sheer drop of twenty feet to the ground. There was no way out there – and yet . . .

Fortuna smiled. It was dark outside, and the street lamps were lit. No one was in the near vicinity, so no one could get hurt by falling glass.

He was taking a desperate chance but time was not on his side. Brionne might decide to strike any time at Leonore, and he didn't use half measures as was proved by the grenade thrown through the door of the Bar Leonore.

Fortuna picked up the one chair in the room, took a deep breath, and hurled it at the window. Even as the glass shattered into tiny fragments, he was hurrying over to the door, taking a stand behind it where anyone entering wouldn't see him until it was too late.

Almost before the sound died away, the door flew open and the *gendarme* stood framed in the entrance. Gun in hand, he stared in horror at the flapping curtain and the broken glass.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he exclaimed, and stepped forward. As he did so Fortuna moved out from hiding. Before the unfortunate *gendarme* had time to bring his gun to bear, the *Marsiale* brought his good hand down in a vicious chopping cut to the policeman's wrist.

He howled with pain, and the gun spun from his numbed fingers to the floor. Before he could make a move to retrieve it, Fortuna had scooped it up, and was covering him.

Grim-faced, he thumbed back the hammer.

"*Sacré bleu!*" the pale *gendarme* exclaimed. "I thought you had jumped out of the window!"

"I'm not that crazy," Fortuna told him. He closed the door which was behind him, and jammed the muzzle of the revolver

into the *gendarme's* belly. "Now get your uniform off, quick!"

"My uniform?" the *gendarme* echoed aghast. "Now look here, Fortuna -"

"I don't have any time to argue with you. Now get that uniform off or I'll put a bullet in you!"

The *gendarme* hastened to comply with the order. Right now, Fortuna looked as though he meant every word of what he said. His orders from Inspector Versiac were to let Fortuna go if he tried to make a break for it, but to inform the detective waiting downstairs at the hospital's information desk, so that the vengeance-bound *Marsiale* could be tailed. But his uniform! What the hell was he going to do in his underclothes?

As soon as he had shed his blue uniform, Fortuna jerked his gun in the direction of the long cupboard standing in one corner of the room.

"Get in there. I'm going to lock the door on the outside, though I'm certain it won't take you long to kick your way out. But I'm warning you, pal - don't try it too soon! If I'm still in here when you come out I'll put a lump of lead right in the middle of your guts!"

He slammed the door of the cupboard on the unfortunate policeman, then hurriedly dressed himself in the discarded uniform. He gave a final tug to the leather belt, shoved the revolver back into its holster, placed the *kepi* at a jaunty angle on the side of his head, and went out into the corridor.

He slammed the door behind him, and hearing the sound the imprisoned *gendarme* made frantic efforts to escape from his flimsy prison.

The cupboard was thin, and when the *gendarme* rocked it violently it plunged over on its side, splintering wide open, and tossing the surprised policeman in his white underwear out on to the floor.

Immediately he rushed for the door, remembered in time that it wasn't seemly for an officer of the *Gendarmerie Nationale* to be seen in his underwear, and went back to collect a blanket off Fortuna's bed.

Looking more like an American Indian than a French policeman, the *gendarme* rushed out into the corridor, pushed past a couple of startled nurses, and reached the telephone at the head of the stairway.

"Give me the information desk!" he snapped as he raised the receiver, and then, "Charron? This is Recamier. Fortuna left his

room a couple of minutes ago. He must be on his way downstairs. You can't miss him - he's wearing my uniform!" A short pause and then: "Okay, smart guy, I can do without the cracks. Get on to Versiac at once!"

* * *

When Fortuna passed the information desk in the hospital entrance, he didn't notice the insignificant young man in the dark grey suit standing reading a newspaper. But as soon as he was outside the detective was after him, watching his every move, and then making a signal with his arm to a black Citroen stationed a little way up the street.

A citizen was about to get out of his Renault car when Fortuna crossed the pavement, touched the peak of his *kepi*, and spoke politely but firmly to him.

"I'm sorry *m'sieur*, but I have to commandeer your automobile for important police work."

"Eh?" said the man with surprise. "Here, what are you -?"

But Fortuna was already climbing in behind the wheel and switching the engine on.

"You be careful - that's a new motor!" the man shouted anxiously as the car shot away from the pavement to join the traffic heading north.

Grimly intent on his mission of vengeance, Fortuna did not notice the black Citroen pull in close behind him, and stay there. The police were keeping a close watch on their ex-prisoner, and already a detective of the *Judiciare* was getting through to headquarters on the car radio.

Inside two minutes police headquarters were in contact with Inspector Guy Versiac at his office, and the Inspector was running down the stairs with his faithful subordinate, Sergeant Martin.

"Fortuna's driving north across the Seine, and one of our cars is tailing him!" Versiac called over his shoulder. "Put a bit of speed on, *sergeant*, or our foolish young *Marsiale* will have his head shot off before we can help him!"

Travelling fast along the Boulevard de Sebastapol, through the Porte St. Denis, Boulevard de Strasbourg, Fortuna kept his eyes glued to the road in front, overtaking wherever possible, and taking chances that made even the iron-nerved Parisian taxi drivers call out after him in voices filled partly with rage and partly with admiration.

With his booted foot pressed down hard on the accelerator Fortuna swung northwest on to the busy Boulevard de Magenta. He was moving now up into the gangland territory of the northern *arrondissements*.

He knew exactly where he was going. René Brionne had often spoken of the place he would turn into his headquarters if ever he decided to blossom out into a full gang boss with trigger men at his beck and call.

The area behind the Place Blanche and the renowned Moulin Rouge was a veritable honeycomb of back alleys and towering tenement buildings where policemen never ventured unless they were in force. Here were to be found the hideouts of the vicious *Ratons*, the dark-skinned Algerian gangsters, the trigger-happy Corsicans always ready to hire out to the highest bidder, and the white-suited, pencil-line-moustached French pimps who ran the city's prostitutes from their headquarters in the Rue François.

Fortuna braked his 'borrowed' auto to a stop at the entrance to a narrow tenement alley whose upper windows were festooned with lines of grubby washing, where grimy children still played in the gutter although it was almost eleven o'clock, and rough, unshaven characters lounged against the damp walls with their hands in their pockets.

Fortuna knew he was taking one hell of a chance by entering the alley alone. He was wearing the uniform of a *gendarme*, and the police were never welcomed in this district of Paris. When he passed the first group of lounging idlers, one of whom deliberately spat after him, there was an unpleasant tingling sensation between his shoulder blades as though he expected to feel the burning thud of a thrown knife there at any second.

But his fears were not justified. Perhaps the inhabitants of the back street were too astonished at the sight of a lone *gendarme* to do any more but stand gaping and undecided.

A drunken woman with a bottle in her claw sat on the doorstep of her slum dwelling, and called after him to come with her for ten minutes on the bed.

"Five francs, *m'sieur le gendarme!*" she cackled horribly. "Anything yuh like for five francs!"

Fortuna didn't even hear her or the obscenities she screamed after him, or the laughter of the children in the gutter.

He had reached his destination, and he knew immediately that his hunch had been correct. Proof that René Brionne was in

residence was evident by the two burly men lounging by the doorway.

They straightened suspiciously as Fortuna approached them. One of them dropped his hand menacingly to his hip pocket. To them he was a *flic*, a bastard of the first order who was asking for trouble in a big way.

"You want somethin', *m'sieur*?" growled one of them as Fortuna advanced towards the door. They moved to stand shoulder to shoulder, barring his way.

"I want René Brionne!" Fortuna replied coldly. "Get out of my way!"

One of the trigger men grinned unpleasantly.

"I don't know of any business *M'sieur* Brionne could have with a *flic*," he said coldly. "You tell your business to me and Jean here, and we'll try to settle it for you."

Fortuna's hand dropped to the holster on his belt as he answered, in a voice hardly above a whisper: "My business with Brionne is death. Now either stand to one side or I'll blow your heads off your shoulders!"

The gangsters blinked in stupefied amazement. They'd never had a bloody *flic* speak like that to them before. Anger gradually replaced their surprise, and one of them dropped in the typical killer's crouch. Behind Fortuna the alley cleared as quickly as if a magic wand had caused everyone to vanish.

"You scum!" snarled the crouching hood.

In one lightning-fast movement, Fortuna's revolver cleared leather. Two guns roared as one, and Fortuna felt the searing heat of flame singeing his eyebrows. The crouching trigger man would never kill again. His automatic hung limply in his drooping hand, and there was an ever-widening red stain on the front of his shirt just above the V formed by the lapels of his coat.

Even as he tumbled over onto the slimy cobbles, Fortuna was pushing past him to ram his gun barrel hard into the second man's quaking belly.

"I don't give no trouble, *m'sieur*!" the hoodlum squealed in terror. "I know when I'm losin'!"

Fortuna snarled, and hit the killer hard across the temple with the barrel of his gun. He didn't even bother to see what happened to him after that. His only real objective in coming to this district tonight was to get René Brionne, and get him good. The rest of the hoods were immaterial. If they got in his way, he would shoot.

The sound of the shooting had aroused the other occupants of

the dirty tenement. As Fortuna went through the front door into a dirty hallway where the paper was peeling off the walls with the damp, and cockroaches crawled on the floor, a small group of men appeared at the head of the stairway which was directly facing the door.

Fortuna heard a shout of: "A bloody *flic!*" and then he hurled himself to one side as a fusillade of lead roared down the bare stairs, splintering woodwork and scoring shallow furrows in the crumbling walls.

His own gun blazed in answer, and huddled together at the top of the stairs as they were, the trigger men of Brionne's new organisation didn't have a chance to get out of the way.

Through the haze of powder-smoke in front of him Fortuna saw two of them huddled on the floor, out of action, whilst the others were running for cover.

A voice shouted from somewhere up there, out of sight, and Fortuna recognised it at once as belonging to René Brionne.

"Hey, what the hell's going on down there? What's all the shooting about?"

Before any of his subordinates had time to answer Fortuna yelled loudly: "It's me, Brionne, Phillippe Fortuna. You left me for the *flics* after I set Carsacci up for you in the Rue Claude Bernard. You owe me something, Brionne, and I'm coming up to get it!"

12

The Showdown

THERE followed a short pause, and then the unseen Brionne replied: "Don't be a damn fool, Phillippe. I didn't leave you deliberately. Your share of the money is up here waiting for you. I'm your friend, Phillippe. I always have been!"

"My friends don't leave me for the *flics*, Brionne. They don't threaten to kill my woman. I'm coming for you, Brionne!"

Brionne's voice changed suddenly. Now it was harsh, and ending with a snarl.

"Okay stupid, come on up and I'll blast you to hell where you belong. I don't need you any longer, Fortuna, and I've got a bullet with your number on it!"

Fortuna climbed that first flight of stairs so quickly that Brionne's hired trigger men hardly saw him coming. He was close

to the landing before they even aimed their pistols in his direction.

Fortuna threw himself low to avoid the hastily thrown lead. His injured shoulder was entirely forgotten now as he rolled over and over until he came up with a bump against the frail wooden banister on the landing, and then he pumped shot after shot into the murky darkness where the bullet flashes of his enemies had come from.

Up on the second landing he could hear Brionne almost screaming to his henchmen to finish the *sacré* bastard off before he could do any more damage.

When his hammer fell on an empty chamber, Fortuna hastily reloaded from the spare bullets in the pocket of his *gendarme's* tunic.

And then he made a rush. Fire lanced from the muzzle of his gun as he drove the cursing gangsters up the stairs before him. An answering slug cut a furrow in his cheek, but he hardly felt the fiery pain, or the hot blood coursing down the side of his face as he mounted the creaking stairs in the face of what seemed to be impossible odds.

"Get the bastard!" he could hear Brionne shouting wildly out of the darkness of the second landing. "Get him before he gets me!"

Then something gave in the mind of one of the wide-eyed trigger men on the landing in front of Brionne's door.

He slammed his smoking automatic back into the holster under his arm, and yelled at Brionne without turning his head from the hard-faced avenger climbing the stairs: "To hell with yuh, Brionne. I didn't join your mob to get cut to pieces by some bloody madman. You want the bastard killed, you come out and do it yourself. I'm going."

He fled along the landing towards a narrow flight of stairs, and after the briefest hesitation the others followed him. They intended to get out while the going was good. All this shooting was going to bring the *flics* here. They'd be swarming all over the place like bees in no time at all, and God help anybody they found with a gun in his hand on the premises, especially with all the dead and wounded now lying around the joint. Somebody's head would end up under the knife of the guillotine. None of Brionne's trigger men were anxious for that head to be his.

Suddenly, Phillipe Fortuna found the road to René Brionne clear in front of him. Three steps and a narrow landing were all that separated him from his revenge now. His eyes were hard and

without any trace of mercy now as he climbed those last three stairs.

He reached the closed door on the far side of the landing, and stopped. For the first time he became aware of the blood on his face, and reached up to wipe it away.

Then he raised his booted foot, and slammed it hard against the door. The flimsy structure flew inwards to crash against the inner wall of the room, and even before he entered Fortuna could see René Brionne standing alone on the far side with a gun clenched in his fist.

* * *

Brionne was right in front of him; his henchmen had fled, and he must do his own fighting.

Fortuna took one step forward, and then another. Now he was inside the room which, unlike the rest of the building was extravagantly furnished with heavy drapes hanging from ceiling to floor to hide the drabness of the walls.

The two men faced each other. Both held loaded guns, each had the other covered.

At this moment Brionne made one last, frightened appeal.

"Phillipe, you can't fight me, boy. We've been together too long. Your share of the post office job is still here in the cabinet. I've kept it here for you. I knew those bloody *flics* couldn't hold you for long. Phillipe, you're my friend, you've always been my friend!"

For a second Fortuna's finger loosened on the trigger. He hesitated. Why, he didn't know. Perhaps Brionne's impassioned appeal had made some kind of effect on him. He didn't know. He hesitated, and almost lost his life.

"Now, Lemaire!" Brionne screamed, and Fortuna wheeled to face the new menace as little rat-faced Lemaire rose into view from behind a glass-fronted bookcase filled with bottles of wine and whiskey.

Fortuna had forgotten all about Lemaire. He should have known that where Brionne was, Lemaire would be with him. Lemaire was, and always had been, the perfect stooge. He and Brionne had been together for years, even before the war. And now at this last moment Lemaire was there with a gun in his hand to save his admired leader from harm.

The first bullet from his gun took Fortuna in the leg below the knee, but his second ploughed into the carpet a couple of inches from his own feet. Between the first and the second shot, Fortuna had switched aim from Brionne to this new menace, and pulled the trigger.

Lemaire toppled forward over the glass-fronted cabinet with blood pouring from a terrible wound in the middle of his face. The cabinet went with him, and to the accompaniment of breaking glass, dozens of bottles rolled gaily over the carpeted floor in all directions.

Cursing, Brionne stepped forward, trod on a bottle and lost his balance. His bullet cut a jagged streak in the ceiling of the apartment, and Fortuna leaped at him with murder written in his eyes.

The door of the apartment burst wide open again, and before Fortuna was fully aware what was happening the room was full of policemen, some uniformed, some in civilian dress, and leading them was none other than Inspector Guy Versiac of the *Sûreté*.

"All right, Fortuna, the fun's over!" Inspector Versiac snapped as he snatched the smoking revolver from the young *Marsiale's* shaking hand.

"Damn you!" Fortuna swore. "Give me Brionne. He belongs to me!"

"You're wrong," Versiac told him coolly. "René Brionne belongs to the Republic. I want him on a charge of murder!"

* * *

Two burly *gendarmes* were forced to use every ounce of their strength to hold Fortuna down, even though the young man was wounded badly in the leg and the face.

As Versiac's men pulled the struggling Brionne from the room, Fortuna yelled after him, almost in tears: "I'll find you, Brionne, even if it takes the rest of my life I'll find you and get you!"

"Wrong again," Versiac told him evenly. "The only person who is going to get René Brionne is *Madame la Guillotine*." He turned to Sergeant Martin who now entered the room. "Did you get them all, *sergent*?"

The sergeant smiled wryly.

"All who were not corpses. *M'sieur* Fortuna seems to have been very busy. Had we delayed our arrival a few more minutes, I do

not think there would have been any living gangsters for us to arrest, *mon patron*."

Fortuna had quietened somewhat, and now, as Inspector Versiac faced him, he held out his hands obediently for the handcuffs.

"All right, Inspector, put the *massonettes* on. I'm caught fair and square."

"Fair and square doing what?" Versiac raised his eyebrows in affected surprise. "Killing gangsters? I don't chain men up for doing that, Fortuna. It will be enough if you agree to come back to the hospital quietly." And as the young *Marsiale* staggered on his wounded leg: "I think you have need of further treatment there."

* * *

The trial of René Brionne and his associates did not take place until almost a year later. During that time Phillipe Fortuna, although in prison when he was considered fit to leave the hospital, was allowed the maximum possible freedom, and spent a certain part of each day in the company of the woman he loved.

Leonore was full of future plans, confident that Inspector Versiac would be true to his word, and try to get her lover a light sentence for his association with the hook-nosed assassin.

Fortuna wasn't so sure. He realised that the life he had led was wrong, and that he would probably have to pay for it no matter what Versiac promised. However, prison sentence or not, Leonore was prepared to wait for Phillipe.

The trial was spectacular, and so was the ending as far as the lovers were concerned.

René Brionne was this time sentenced to death for his part in the Carsacci massacre as were two others of his unholy crew. The rest received sentences ranging from life imprisonment down to a mere ten years' hard labour.

Phillipe Fortuna was the only exception. The verdict of the jury as far as the *Marsiale* was concerned, was that peculiar to France of 'Not Proven', and he was released after a strong lecture from the Judge on the advantages of leading a better life in the future.

As Fortuna gazed across the crowded courtroom, he knew that he needed no one to advise him of that. Among the sea of white faces he was looking eagerly for one that he knew and loved. From this moment on there was going to be no more upright,

more law-abiding citizen than *M'sieur* Phillipe Fortuna of Marseilles. Ah, there she was. He raised his hand to her.

There were tears in the eyes of the lovely Leonore, but she was smiling.

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LETTERS

IMPRESSED

Dear Sir,

I am greatly impressed by the quality of the material in the new *Edgar Wallace Mystery Magazine*, and realizing the risks involved in producing a magazine of this type, for they come and go as regularly as the seasons, I raise my hat to the genius who appended the name of the greatest writer of all time to your publication.

Mr. H. P. Quinn, 11 Leggatt Drive, Bramford, Ipswich, Suffolk.

BETTER STILL . . . ?

Dear Sir,

Long may EWMM flourish! Though, better still, I'd like to see the return of Sexton Blake. Perhaps, as my wish is voiced by many thousands more, we shall again see that long-awaited day.

Mr. Charles E. Gouge, "Woodside", Woodlands Caravan Estate, Blean, Kent.

There is good news for Mr. Gouge and the many other Blake fans who have lent their valuable support to EWMM. The famous detective character will shortly appear in a new series of two paperback novels per month, to be published both in the U.K. and the U.S.A. by Mayflower-Dell Books.

HIGH EDITORIAL STANDARD

Dear Sir,

I really do think you are doing the job well. You've set a standard, and that is a high one. So far you seem to better it, a little with each issue, which, after all, is the heart of all really good editing. Congratulations.

Mr. Nigel Morland, Seaspray, Canning Road, Felpham, near Bognor Regis, Sussex.

TRUE CRIME

The theft of Alexander Hare's concubines is one of the most amusing crimes in history . . .

THE WIFE STEALERS

**re-told by
Arthur Kent**

ALEXANDER HARE, self-styled monarch of five Pacific islands, stepped from his bamboo palace one balmy evening in 1833 and inspected his just completed wooden stockade. He looked suspiciously across the soft sandy beach to the neighbouring Deception Island, then he carefully padlocked the gate.

This done, he looked at his thinning bevy of Oriental concubines as they sat, chirping away happily in the sands, combing, plaiting, or decorating each other's long bluey-black hair.

"This will stop the bastards!" Hare said angrily, indicating the gate. One of the girls translated his remark to the others and they all broke out into bell-like laughter.

The tall and handsome London watchmaker's son ignored them. He sat down in the sand by the gate and waited. Night fell quickly, bringing with it a cooling breeze which rustled the fronds of the coconut trees in this south seas paradise.

Soon the girls moved. Ignoring their overlord and master, they tripped towards the palace, closed the door behind them and left Hare to his silent vigil. Hare had watched them go suspiciously and hungrily. But he had not bothered to count them. After all, none of them had been outside the

stockade, and whenever he checked the numbers remaining Hare felt miserable. For he had lost so many lovelies over the past few months.

Once he had been the envy of every rake and sailor in the Far East. With care, patience, and good taste, Alexander Hare had gathered around him the finest collection of Oriental beauties ever seen outside a Sultan's palace.

There were matching slant-eyed, dark-skinned creatures from Sumatra, Borneo, the Celebes, and Java. Olive-skinned armfuls from Bali, who danced and loved like dreams. Nicely contrasting, there were tall, willowy negroid belles from Papua and Africa, and to offset these, creamy-skinned, pint-sized Chinese babes and kohl-eyed pets from India.

Everything in the tropical garden had been lovely until Captain John Clunies-Ross had arrived in 1827, with his wife and children, ten Scottish sailors, and a group of Asiatic seamen to colonize the Cocos Group, which consists of five main islands, situated 600 miles south-west of Java. A descendant of Clunies-Ross still rules the Cocos Group today.

The ten Scots had had no women with them when they had settled on Home Island. Hare, obviously, had had too many. Soon there had been trouble.

* * *

Time passed by. Hare shifted uncomfortably in the sand. His eyes began to ache with the constant staring at the black hump of nearby Deception Island, where he knew Clunies-Ross's sex-starved sailors must be waiting. But the stockade would stop the women-rustlers.

Clouds passed across the sky, masking Deception and hiding the lagoon nearby where Hare was wont to frolic with his lovelies in daily bathing. Soon Hare, who had laboured all day with his male slaves on the stockade, slipped into uneasy sleep.

An hour passed. There was a slight splash towards the lagoon. Suddenly Hare was wide awake and sweating. He knew instinctively that something alien had awakened him. He listened. Silently he got to his feet and unlocked the gate. He cursed himself for not counting his concubines as they had glided laughingly into his palace.

The noise came again, a slight splash, from the direction of the lagoon. Hare went lumbering through the gate and, a big man,

he made a lot of noise crashing through the brush.

He reached the lagoon in time to see two figures flitting across the beach.

"Stop, thief!" he yelled. One was tall and burly, obviously a sailor; the other small and slender, one of his Oriental "wives".

Hand-in-hand, the couple rushed into the surging breakers and struck out for Deception. On the beach, Hare tore at his hair with impotent rage and yelled curses.

His swearing brought John Clunies-Ross out onto the beach of Deception.

"Hare!" The god-fearing Scot called, "I cannot tolerate such language. I have my wife and children near at hand."

"You cheat," Hare yelled back. "You promised me that when I gave your men pork and rum, they'd cease to kidnap from my household."

Clunies-Ross laughed. "You, Hare, don't you know that rum and roast pig are not a sailor's sole idea of Heaven?"

"Don't bandy words with me, John Clunies-Ross! Practise what you preach. Stop your men from stealing!"

The Scot only laughed again. "As I have told you before, Hare," he yelled back, "I am against slavery. And I cannot stop my men from freeing slaves and making honest women of them."

Hare stormed back to his stockade to check which one of his lovelies had gone forever. But this was only the beginning. There was worse to come.

* * *

Hare, the eldest son of a London watchmaker, was a restless giant. Handsome, devil-may-care and basically lazy, he had spent more time cutting capers with the Regency lovelies than cutting out a career. One affair had followed another until his hard-working, thrifty father, after a scandal involving a neighbour's wife, shipped him to Lisbon as a clerical officer with the old East India Company.

Catholic Portugal was a little too dull for Hare after bawdy London. Moreover, Hare was hearing so many travellers' tales about the wealth and beauties of the Orient, that he quickly persuaded his superiors to send him as agent to Calcutta.

There the giant, with months of frustration behind him in Portugal, quickly installed himself in quarters with a half-caste lovely and brought himself up to date. He found time enough to

carry out his not too onerous duties and ingratiate himself with Sir Stamford Raffles.

Raffles was beginning his meteoric career as an empire builder, taking and founding the colony of Singapore, seizing Java from the French, who were then trying to oust the Dutch, and opening up mineral and rubber-rich Malaya for British exploitation.

Hare's pleasing and devilish personality won him Raffles's patronage and in turn Lord Minto's, then the governor general's, and Hare was sent with the expedition which annexed Java.

But by this time, Hare had become completely hypnotised with the splendour of the east. Coming from a country where a man was allowed only one wife, who had the right (which she too often exercised) of answering back, Hare found himself visiting palaces and wealthy households where princes and the wealthy had beauties by the dozen and score at their beck and call.

"Did you see them?" an excited Hare would shout at his fellow negotiators as they left some splendid household. "All those lovelies in fine silks, sitting around and waiting for their master to crook his finger at them! This is living. This is for me."

The empire-builders only smiled. They had more important work. A little crazy Hare, what?

To get money to create his own household, Hare began to embezzle East India Company funds. He also opened his own agency on the side in competition with his Company.

His first attempt to acquire a harem was abortive. This was in Malacca where, accompanied by a major domo, the boggle-eyed Hare toured the slave market. With his money burning holes in his pockets, he stopped to finger the semi-nude dark-skinned lovelies on the selling blocks.

Before he realized what he was doing, Hare had bought himself five contrasting lovelies. Common sense caught up with him a couple of days later, for he realized that if he took them back to base with him, neither Lord Minto nor Sir Stamford Raffles would congratulate him. Keeping a mistress discreetly in one's quarters was one thing; trying to keep a harem was the quickest way possible to get shipped back to England in disgrace. Miserably, Hare kissed his slaves goodbye and sold them back to the traders at a loss.

* * *

Soon afterwards Hare got his chance. The Sultan of Banjarmasin, in Borneo, applying to Britain for protection against the

pirates who ravaged his country, asked that a British representative be attached to his palace. Alexander Hare got the job.

Away from his fellow colonists and their sharp-eyed, prudish English wives, Hare worked like a beaver. In no time at all he had his own residence, complete with 200 slaves – mostly hand-picked Asiatic lovelies. To pay for them and his new style of living, Hare began to graft at a phenomenal rate. As British representative he wielded despotic power. He imposed taxation on goods and slaves. He cheated and created monopolies. His old company, the famous East India, found themselves left out.

He accumulated hundreds of acres of land which had been depopulated by pirates. At the expense of the British Government he imported convict labourers from Java to cultivate it and clear the jungle. But while lining his own purse, he certainly modernized the country, and in doing so first met John Clunies-Ross, commander of H.M. gunboat *Olivia* on pirate patrol.

Clunies-Ross and Hare worked together on building a harbour at Banjarmasseem. They then went into the trading business together, with Clunies-Ross carrying spice through the Indies.

But life was too good to Hare for it to last. Rumour got back to the British Government, was investigated, and became fact. Hare was not only keeping slaves, which was officially frowned upon, but he was treating them abominably. Simultaneously, the East India Company, checking the books, discovered Hare had cheated them out of thousands of pounds.

Hare got wind of this and, just before he was axed, sailed for Java, with his harem and wealth intact. After five years of British rule, Java had been returned to the Dutch, and the authorities couldn't reach Hare there.

Hare was still in business with Clunies-Ross. They had built their own trading ship, the 400-ton *Borneo*, but they discovered a shrewd businessman was needed in their Capetown office. Hare decided to go himself and, unwisely courageous, he decided to take his harem beauties with him.

But before he could move, the British authorities cracked down. They ordered him to issue certificates of emancipation for all his slaves – including his harem lovelies.

"If they stay on with you," Hare was told, "they must do so only by their own will and they must be paid a reasonable wage."

But quick-thinking Alexander got around this one. He arranged it so that the "liberation papers" should be issued when his harem was already installed on the *Borneo*, in preparation for its

departure for Capetown. The officials came aboard to serve the papers while the ship was in Bencoolen harbour, in Java, and the British officials had no power to talk to the slaves directly. Hare said his slaves couldn't speak English but he managed to communicate with them in a pidgin version of their own tongues.

Obligingly, Hare told his slaves what the papers were about which the nasty officials had just served. It was directly opposite to emancipation. Hare told them individually that the certificates confirmed the fact that they were his property for life. Later, when the officials had left, he made them sign documents binding themselves and their children to him as slaves.

* * *

Hare sailed for Capetown. But a stiff reception awaited him there. The European population were horrified by the sight of Hare's scantily-dressed lovelies. The Bible-thumping Boers refused to meet the friendly Hare socially. Many, whatever it cost them, bluntly refused to do business with him.

When Hare walked abroad, followed by some of his dark-skinned lovelies, he could sense the hostility in the streets. There were incidents - booings, catcalls, brickbats aimed at his windows.

In the interests of variety, however, Hare had managed to add to his harem. Tall Zulu girls now blended nicely with the petite Chinese, Indian, and Javanese.

But Hare, easy-going and friendly, was terribly hurt by his treatment. Finally he concluded that if he was ever to have any tranquillity to enjoy the fruits of his years of hard work, he must find an uninhabited island, away from a European attitude of mind which was moving towards the prudish Victorian era.

Hare checked his maps and secretly made plans. He hired a brother of John Clunies-Ross, commander of the *Hippomenes*, to carry him and his entourage to a secret destination. It was Hare's intention to settle on Christmas Island, 530 miles east of the Cocos, but Robert Clunies-Ross refused to go so far.

After only a few days his crew became restless. Their commander soon saw the reason why. Those slant-eyed lovelies were making the crew miserable. There was an incident on deck. Hare knocked down a sailor who tried to converse in pidgin English with a Bali lovely.

Soon the crew were on the brink of mutiny. Clunies-Ross issued arms to his officers. Nightly Hare had to deny himself

sleep while he stood on guard at the door housing his harem.

Towards the end of 1825, Hare was dumped by the relieved Clunies-Ross on Deception Island. The King of Cocos cracked his whip, and soon his male slaves had built a wooden palace and cultivated the land. There were long, balmy tropical days with Hare lazing in a hammock, serenaded by his lovelies, while the men toiled.

But his paradise was short-lived. His former partner, John Clunies-Ross, arrived in the vicinity in 1827, looking for a suitable island along the trade routes where he could settle down and store his cargoes of spice. He was surprised to find his old partner there. He was horrified to see how he kept his people in serfdom.

There was soon trouble. Clunies-Ross's crew and Asiatic workmen had no wives on Home Island, where they had settled; on nearby Deception Hare had too many. And Clunies-Ross, a God-fearing man, was against slavery. He turned a blind eye to what was going on. . .

The unsuspecting Hare allowed his women to move freely about the island. Consequently, while Hare dozed in his hammock on hot afternoons, there were many furtive meetings and conversations in the bracken. Risking the sharks, the octopi, and the knife-sharp coral, Clunies-Ross's crew were swimming across. There were open kidnappings, heroic swims after dark. Clunies-Ross's party grew considerably larger, while Alexander Hare's kingdom shrank.

Hare was a score of slaves down before he realized what had happened. He was forced to "democratize" a little. No longer did he keep his male slaves toiling in the fields seven days a week. And his coloured overseers were ordered to go easy with their whips.

But Hare took no chance with his lovelies. These he confined at night in cellars which linked with his own rooms. But still desertions continued. Male slaves, and occasionally his concubines, began to disappear with amazing and monotonous regularity.

Hare became desperate. He tried negotiation with Clunies-Ross, but found the Scot unsympathetic. He bribed the sailors with rum and pork, and this stopped the depredations for a time. Finally he moved island. Leaving Deception, the better island, to the Scots, he settled on Pulu Bras, known to this day as "Prisoner's Island", where he confined his concubines - now down to forty - in his stockaded fort.

On the night of the day the stockade was completed, he lost a girl. More went over the next two or three years at the rate of one male slave a month and about four girls a year.

Finally, the Scots hatched a plot with Hare's remaining male slaves. One morning Hare came from his palace, after unlocking the harem door, to find his island paradise deserted. His labourers were gone, their huts empty.

The insult was added to the injury a few nights later. The deserters swam back and jumped Hare as he slept by his stockade. They tied him hand and foot and freed his wives, carrying them to Home and Deception Islands.

Wifeless, slaveless, alone, disliked, his dreams of an earthly Heaven shattered, Hare left the Cocos Islands in 1835.

But he was made of sterner stuff than his enemies gave him credit for. When last heard of, he was firmly installed in lovely Batavia surrounded by – guess what? – a score of chirping lovelies!

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NEW BOOKS

A GOOD opening is a *sine qua none* with any form of popular fiction, and a book that starts with a bang is one that will usually carry its readers a long way.

In **The Man who Sold Death** by James Munro, the bang comes from an explosive charge that blows an expensive Bristol car, plus occupants, to nightmarish smithereens. "I've never seen anything like it," says the man from the forensic lab . . . "We found pieces in a tree fifty yards away. And we had to cut them out. They were going like bullets."

Ex-naval officer, John Craig, owner of the car and intended victim of the outrage, runs for his life. His enemies are political fanatics whose wrath he has incurred by smuggling guns to the Algerian insurgents. We are told that arch-villain Colonel de St. Briac "had the hungry strength and pale eyes of a fanatic, and he looked at his visitor with the dangerous calm of a man single-minded to the point of mania. At his feet an Alsatian crouched, watching the newcomer warily, waiting the word to kill. St. Briac tugged gently at its ear and it was still."

This novel is a tough, Fleming-style thriller that keeps the reader on edge throughout. The trimmings are modern, but the basic element of blood-and-thunder is the same mainspring that gave propulsion to the livelier adventure fiction of the twenties and thirties. (Hammond, Hammond, 13s. 6d.).

The Fifth Bedside Mystery Book is another selection of excellent reading from the *John Creasey Mystery Magazine*. Like its four predecessors, this volume is a bargain for crime story readers – and an excellent gift book.

Besides the expectedly good items from front-rank "name" authors Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Marten Cumberland, J. J. Marrie and Roy Vickers, there is a fine supporting programme by the book's less-exalted contributors, including nothing weaker than an eight-page piece of "futuristic" nonsense by Nigel Morland. Flannel – and I see it here – is always objectionable. (Hodder & Stoughton, 16s.).

Jonathan Goodman's Hello Cruel World Goodbye is a novel of suspense which tells the story of Frank Verney, bank robber, who is released from jail, looking forward to collecting a £40,000 fortune in fivers. The money is the proceeds of the bank raid which he had disposed of before his arrest.

However, other people have other ideas; his four ex-partners-in-crime who want their share, the deceptively inadequate Inspector Langtry, and Verney's girl friend, Alice Minster, who says he should give the money up to its rightful owners. But it is with Alice's still-tongued father, George, that Verney had left the stolen money for safekeeping, and to his shock Verney learns that the man had died only a few days before his release. What, then, had happened to the loot? The answer – and the money – are soon found, but that is far from being the end of Verney's problems . . .

Characters are carefully and thoroughly drawn, and excitement is maintained right through to the unexpected climax. (John Long, 15s.).

Adventure and realism are the keynotes of **Cave of Bats** by **Robert MacLeod**.

The setting is present-day North Burma – “always a potential tinder-box, wedged as it (is) between India and Communist China.”

The hero of the story is Talos Cord, a hardened, muscular cheroot-smoking troubleshooter in the service of United Nations Field Reconnaissance. “People matter to me – not flags or politics.”

Cord's mission is to find out whose hand is working to wreck an important hydro-electric project in the isolated Thamaung Valley. He suspects that Chinese Communists have an interest in the unrest, which has reached its climax in the strike of the Pulos, the hill people who make up the best part of the scheme's labour force. But what rôle is played by Nam Ree, a renegade Pulo and leader of a band of hill rebels? Is *he* Peking's puppet . . . or is this another's secret identity?

Cord's investigations lead to a dramatic showdown and a violent conclusion in a labyrinth of natural caverns and galleries, the eerie “Cave of Bats” . . .

This is the second novel to appear under the “Robert MacLeod” pseudonym, although under his own name of Bill Knox, the author is firmly established for his crime novels with a Scottish

background; the distillation of twelve years' experience as a Glasgow crime reporter. (John Long, 15s.)

In terms of sales and output alone, John Creasey is now without question the most phenomenal writer of crime fiction we have ever known, while one critic of his work told us many years ago that "Mr. Creasey out-rivals Edgar Wallace in his flair for imaginative adventure."

More recently, his novels have been written with a polished skill and care such as was once almost unknown in popular fiction. *Guilt of Innocence* by John Creasey as Michael Halliday is a fair sample of the kind of work which has won countless devoted Creasey admirers, and is none the worse for containing several of the author's favourite themes and situations.

An innocent girl accused of murder, a wayward brother in fatal trouble involving art thefts and forgeries, romance and a man on the run . . . A crisply written piece of entertainment that I couldn't read fast enough. (Hodder & Stoughton, 15s.)

Christmas Greetings

to all Readers, and Sincere Wishes
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Keith Chapman,
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