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(VOL. 19 NO. 79 DECEMBER, 1968)

CROOKS IN BOOKS

A quarterly review of some of the finest mystery and detective books recently published appears on PAGE 119

Printed in England by HAZELL WATSON & VINEY LTD AYLESBURY, BUCKS
THE LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION

Our opening story by John Tavener may be gruesome but as it happens it is authenticated as being possible by the medical friend to whom the author submits his plots. That this may be spare-parts surgery of the most awful form we do not argue, but that Mr. Tavener has done a piece of first-class original writing no one can dispute.

If you prefer your stories less macabre, turn to another brilliant contribution from G. E. Fox on page 43. Here is the highest skill of plot and manoeuvre, yet never do we have a nasty taste in the mouth. Again the situation is completely contemporary and highly original.

For excellent description and high courage, Peter Brixham’s “The Boulder” touches the heart as well as the imagination. We hope to publish more from this author.

To-day it is difficult to find the ghost story or the tale of supersensory perception that really has the ring of credulity in it—but by sheer skill of writing David Eames does pull off the strange and improbable in his “White Car”; and in Maureen Tweedy’s “Tilley’s Cottage” I am sure quite a number of readers will find the crying of the babies in the night not too difficult to believe.

So now it is Christmas again—and we wish that we could produce for you the Christmas Ghost story to outlive all ghost stories—but instead we suggest you arm yourself with this issue—No. 79 and in proper sepulchral voice; getting the right atmosphere to precede the happier celebrations start reading aloud Dinah Castle’s “A Ghost on the Train...”

The Editor.

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“I’ve always wanted to be a dress designer. I used to do all my own clothes before the accident. Sometimes now I look at the fashions and I know I could do just as well. If I had my hands.”

(Sheila, 18)
EXACTLY at 8.25 p.m. on a balmy June night the squad car pulled into the parking area in front of St. John’s Hospital. Logan eased his bulky frame out of the car, cursed his aching feet as he climbed the short flight of worn steps, and went through the main entrance to the reception desk.

“I’m Superintendent Logan from the Yard,” he said, showing his warrant card to the pretty girl behind the desk. “I’ve an appointment with Professor Strang.”

The girl nodded, and pressed a buzzer. “The duty porter will show you the way, Superintendent.”

A plump, bald porter waddled up and the girl said: “Take Superintendent Logan to Professor Strang’s office in Research.”

The porter led him down a corridor, turned right, and then they
went down another long corridor that ended in a closed door. Screwed
to the door was a square signboard stating: Research Wing. Authorized
Staff Only Beyond This Point.

The porter pressed a bell-push, and a minute later the Yale lock
clicked and the door swung open to reveal a tall, gangling young man
in a white jacket. The young man peered at them myopically through
pebble-lensed spectacles.

"Superintendent Logan to see Professor Strang," said Logan's guide
before he left them.

"I'm Doctor Mayhew, Superintendent," said the young man. "This
way, please."

As Logan followed Mayhew he noted the newness of the Research
Wing; the new plastic floor covering, all the frosted-glass windows set
in chrome-steel frames; everything in sharp contrast with the main
grimy block that had been constructed in the first few years of Victoria's
reign. Mayhew stopped in front of a white-painted door and knocked.

"Come in," said a deep voice from within.

"I must get back to the lab now," said Mayhew with a friendly nod,
and went off down the passage.

Cedric Strang looked up from behind his desk and smiled as Logan
came into the room. Strang was a tall man with thin ascetic features,
and bushy black eyebrows that contrasted with his mane of white
hair. The whole face was dominated by a pair of coldly-penetrating
black eyes.

"Sit down, Ben," said Strang, gesturing to a chair in front of the
desk. "Good to see you again. It must be more than a year?"

"Eighteen months," said Logan, lowering his bulk warily into the
modern tubular steel chair. "How are you, Cedric?"

"As you can see, the Finance Committee have done me proud with
the new Wing," said Strang.

Logan's eyes ranged over the spacious office. Everything was chrome
steel and black leather; desk, chairs, examination couch—even the
bench supporting six gleaming microscopes was chromed. He recog-
nized a huge fluoroscope in one corner, but he'd no idea what the rest
of the equipment was used for . . .

"I'm sorry I couldn't see you before. . . . Is this a social visit or police
stuff?" said Strang, pushing a silver cigarette box across the desk.

"Half and half," said Logan, lighting his cigarette.

Strang glanced at his watch. "Please don't think I'm not glad to see
you, Ben, but I'm really pushed for time . . ."

"I'll be frank with you, Cedric," said Logan. "The Assistant Commissioner asked me to have a word with you because you and I were up at Cambridge together and we've been friends ever since . . ."

"You never were dainty, Ben. Get to the point, please."

"I understand from the Assistant Commissioner that a certain amount of—er—friction exists between the Home Secretary and the British Medical Council on the subject of transplants. I've come—"

"I fail to understand how this subject enters into the Yard's sphere of influence," said Strang stiffly, his knuckles whitening as he gripped the edge of the desk.

"Neither do I, really," said Logan, uncomfortably. "It's—"

"Tell me," said Strang, leaning forward. "Is this another ham-fisted attempt by the Home Secretary to warn me off?"

Logan hesitated, and then nodded. "That's just about it. . . . As I understand it, he's worried about the time factor between the donor's legal and actual death in terms of the excision of the particular organ."

"The Home Secretary has no scientific background at all. He's a fetish-ridden ignoramus who's quite incapable of appreciating leaps forward by this important branch of science," said Strang savagely. "But I know the real reason for his interference . . ."

"Would you care to tell me about it?"

Strang stared at him for some moments with a speculative look in his penetrating black eyes, then the speculation in his eyes was supplanted by glittering excitement. He sat bolt upright in his chair.

"You're probably aware of the world-wide acclaim I've already received for my research on transplants," said Strang, and there was a faint note of condescension in his voice. "But what you can't know is that I've performed the absolute ultimate in transplants. . . . Soon it'll hit the front page of every newspaper in the world . . ."

"Where does the Home Secretary come into this?"

Strang's thin lips curled in a sneer. "One of my assistants talked in his cups a few weeks ago, and the Home Secretary got word of it. . . . What I've succeeded at has disturbed his narrow mean soul . . ."

"What exactly have you done, Cedric?"

Strang stood up. "Come . . . I'll show you . . . A privilege I'm only extending to you because of our long friendship. But I trust you'll not leak a word of it to anyone. . . . The results of my work will be sent in for publication next week . . ."
They went down the corridor to a closed door at the end. Strang gently opened the door, and they stepped into a large airy room. Gay chintz curtains flapped at the open windows, and a big man was sitting up in the lone bed. He was eating a steak and scrambled eggs, and he was gazing with bored blue eyes at a large television set in the corner of the comfortably-furnished room.

“Good evening, Timothy. I’ve brought my friend to see you,” said Strang, turning down the sound volume of the television set.

“A welcome change from watching this rubbish,” said the man called Timothy, and smiled to reveal perfect white teeth. “Most of this stuff is produced for the consumption of morons.”

Logan studied the man in bed. Timothy was an extremely handsome man with fair hair, clear blue eyes, a square jaw and a slightly sensual mouth. His face was tanned a golden brown, and his open pyjama jacket revealed a well-muscled broad chest. His good looks were only slightly marred by a thin blue scar running around the base of his neck.

“Let me introduce you to Superintendent Logan of the Yard,” said Strang. “This is Timothy Day, Ben. . . .”

Timothy’s clear blue eyes flickered momentarily, and then steadied.

“How do you do, Superintendent,” said Timothy in a cultured voice, and shook Logan’s hand with a calloused powerful hand.

“How are you feeling tonight, Timothy?” said Strang, studying the charts at the end of the bed.

“On top form, Professor,” said Timothy. “This afternoon on the machine I cycled the equivalent of twenty miles. . . . When will I be ready for discharge? I’m as fit as a fiddle. . . .”

“Soon now. Very soon,” said Strang, smiling benignly.

“What’s been your trouble?” said Logan.

“No questions, please,” said Strang hurriedly. “I’ll see you in the morning, Timothy. The nurse’ll be in to see you shortly.”

Back in Strang’s office, they sat down and Strang said: “Well, what do you think of my patient?”

“He seems to be one hundred per cent fit,” said Logan. “What’s been wrong with him?”

Strang’s black eyes glittered. “A few statistics first . . . Timothy Day is six feet three inches tall and weighs two hundred and twenty pounds. He’s immensely strong and all his internal organs are in perfect condition. . . . Add to this that he has the brilliant mind of an honours graduate in mathematics. . . .”
"Then what's he doing here in Research?"

"His head belongs to him," said Strang. "But that magnificent trunk came from the body of an ignorant Irish labourer called Sean O'Donnel."

Logan's eyes widened and his chin dropped. "Good God!" he breathed.

Strang seemed pleased with his reaction. "Nine months ago two men were admitted to the Emergency Ward. One of them, a window-cleaner called Sean O'Donnel, had fallen from an office window in the West End. He'd suffered multiple fractures to the skull. A hopeless case..."

"And the other?"

"Timothy Day. Honours Graduate from Oxford, then employed on statistics by the Minister of Economics," said Strang. "The night of November twenty-first last was foggy. Day stepped off the pavements in Cranston Street nearby, and he was run down by a 69 bus... His chest, pelvis and vertebrae were crushed beyond repair..."

"And then?" said Logan, sickened but fascinated.

" Seriously injured patients are automatically tissue-typed and blood-typed on admission to this Hospital," explained Strang. "One of my assistants typed them both. They matched. ... This was the opportunity I'd been waiting for for years. And what an opportunity! Now I was in the position to graft the head of a mathematical genius on to the trunk of an athlete. And the result? An Adonis with a superior mind..."

Logan stared dumbfounded at Strang.

"I had a certain amount of luck," admitted Strang. "You read about the discovery of D.N.A. by those two young scientists eight months ago? When they laid bare the secrets of molecular structures in the human body?"

Logan nodded, and Strang went on. "Using D.N.A. as a basis I developed a drug that hastens the growth of nerve ends. Nerve ends grow at the rate of approximately a centimetre per month, and at that rate it would have been four or five years before I could have observed the results of my work. As well there would have been severe muscular atrophying... Now, because of the drug, Timothy will return to the world within a week, and then we'll have the fascinating task of observing and tabulating his rehabilitation..."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Timothy Day was born a hunchback and he had a twisted leg," said
Strang. "Can you imagine what he'll feel like when he steps out of this Hospital with the body of a Greek god? Timothy Day has never had any sexual experience. . . . He was always shunned and laughed at by members of the opposite sex. . . . Also I've good reason to believe that he was denied well-merited promotion in the Ministry because of his handicap . . ."

"This is the strangest story I've ever heard," muttered Logan.

"You may inform your Assistant Commissioner that the Home Secretary has my assurance that this is my last transplant, although I trust you not to divulge any details," said Strang, coldly imperious. "One cannot improve on perfection, thus, when the work has been published, I shall immediately retire. . . ."

Outside the Hospital, Logan went over to the squad car and said to the driver. "I need some fresh air. I'll walk back to the Yard. . . ."

Logan ambled slowly through the teeming streets and breathed deeply. His mind was still reeling from the impact of all he'd seen and heard. Without doubt Strang's operation had been brilliantly performed and doubtless he'd be awarded the Nobel prize—but at the same time there was something horrific about it. . . . As though Strang had usurped the ultimate power of God. . . .

Suddenly, he stopped dead in his tracks. He was in Cranston Street . . . Cranston Street where Timothy Day had been run down . . . Cranston Street? November twenty-first last? A tiny cell in his memory opened its door. . . . He hailed a passing taxi and told the driver to take him to the Yard.

He sat down at his desk and picked up the telephone.

"Put me through to Records, please . . . Hello, Records? . . . Logan here. Send me up the file on Maddocks, Smith, Leslie and Brown . . . ."

While he waited for the file Logan told himself that his memory might well be playing tricks on him. . . . There were hundreds of streets in London and the suburbs that had similar-sounding names. . . . But even if his memory was not at fault, why on earth should there be any tie-up between the two?

One glance at the file confirmed that his memory was not at fault. He picked up the telephone.

"Who's the duty officer in charge of Fingerprints Section tonight? . . . Inspector Fenton? Right, put me through to him, please. . . . Logan here, Fenton. . . . Can you drop everything and do a quick job for me? . . . Good, see you at the main entrance . . . ."
Horace Fenton was a tall, very thin man with a strangely-white complexion and deep-sunken lugubrious eyes. He was known at the Yard as The Undertaker. He climbed into the squad car beside Logan and placed his worn black suitcase between his knees.

"Where's the job?" said Fenton as they drew out of the Yard.

"It may not be still there. But if it is, you're not going to like this one," said Logan. "It's in the pickle vats of St. John's Hospital."

"That should do my peptic ulcer a power of good," said Fenton sepulchrally.

"I'm just hoping that they haven't dissected the body..."

Logan led the way up to the desk and the pretty receptionist nodded.

"Back again so soon, Superintendent?" she said.

Logan smiled and said: "Different job this time. We've a check to make on an inmate in B.S.V."

The pretty girl wrinkled her nose. "Rather you than me... I'll get you a porter."

"Don't bother. I know the way...

They went down the cold stone steps which were illuminated from above by naked electricity bulbs, and their nostrils were assailed by a composite odour of disinfectant, formalin and brine that overlay a cloying smell of corruption.

The large room was tiled from floor to ceiling, and the whole of one side was taken up by big glass tanks set in steel frames. Granite slabs on uprights were spaced down the centre of the room, and on the far one lay a small man in stained overalls. He was lying flat on his back and he was snoring.

Logan shook the small man gently. "Wake up, Grimes. We need your help, my lad."

Grimes sat up, knuckled his china blue eyes, and yawned cavernously to reveal toothless gums. Logan caught a strong whiff of beery breath.

"'ello, Super. Wotcher after tonight?" said Grimes sleepily.

Logan handed him a slip of paper. "Is this one still in stock? Or has it been dissected?"

Grimes glanced at the slip of paper and nodded. "He's still in the tank... No-one seems to want 'im... Perhaps it's because the poor codger ain't got no 'ead," he said with a cackle.

"Get him out, please. We want his dabs," said Logan.

Grimes slid off the slab, picked up a wooden pole with a steel loop at the end, and went over to the centre tank. He leaned over the top
of the murky tank, and probed inside. Swiftly, he hauled out a dripping, headless corpse.

Grimes lay the corpse on the nearest slab. The headless body had a pronounced hunch between the shoulder-blades and the right leg was twisted. The whole trunk was a deep mahogany colour after its long immersion in formalin and brine.

Fenton opened his suitcase and took out a small piece of polished marble and a roller. He inked the marble with the roller, then pressed the fingertips and palms of the corpse on the marble. Then he carefully pressed the hands on to a sheet of Watman’s matt-surfaced paper.

Logan extracted a photo-copy of fingerprints from his file and handed it to Fenton. Fenton brought out a large magnifying-glass and compared the two sets of fingerprints.

“Well, Fenton?” said Logan, stewing with impatience.

Fenton looked up, and said: “They’re identical. . . .”

“Are you positive?”

Fenton looked hurt. “I don’t make mistakes. . . .”

Logan turned to Grimes. “Put him back in pickle. But on no account will you send him up to Dissection. I’ll send you round a typed order as soon as I get back to the Yard. . . .”

Big Ben was booming the midnight hour when Sir Guy Redvers, the Assistant Commissioner, strode into Logan’s office. Redvers was a lean man with silvery hair and sleepy blue eyes that belied an astute brain. He was wearing immaculate dinner-dress.

“Sorry to have called you away from your party, sir,” said Logan. “But we’re landed with a pretty kettle of fish over what’s been going on in Cedric Strang’s research laboratory.”

“What’s he been up to?” said Redvers.

Logan gave him an account of his visit to Strang, and when he’d finished Redvers’ lips curled in distaste. “A fantastic surgical feat. . . . but the whole thing sounds most repulsive to me. . . .”

“There’s something far more repulsive than that, sir,” said Logan grimly. “You see, the head he grafted on to the Irishman’s trunk belongs to a murderer—a pathological murderer at that!”

“What the devil are you talking about?” said Redvers.

“Remember the unsolved case of the four Axe Murders? The last one occurred on the night of November 21st last in Cranston Street. That was the same day and place that Timothy Day was run over by the bus,” explained Logan. “I believe that Day was running away from
the scene of his crime. . . . Strang gave me the date and place and this put me on to it. . . ."

"What makes you so sure?" said Redvers.

"We only recovered one of the four murder weapons, and we lifted a clear set of dabs from the haft of the axe," said Logan. "Then, fortunately for us, we found that the trunk of Timothy Day hadn't been dissected. We hauled it out of pickle and Fenton took his prints. . . . The prints were identical with those on the haft of the axe. . . ."

Redvers stared broodingly at Logan for some moments, and then he said slowly: "So you want my permission to take out a warrant for the arrest of Timothy Day? Knowing that this will wreck Strang's hopes?"

"Unfortunately, sir, things aren't as clear-cut as that," said Logan, scowling.

"What do you mean, Logan?"

"Who would we be arresting, sir? Timothy Day or Sean O'Donnel? Is the head always responsible for the body's actions? Or is murder sometimes committed by a bodily impulse?" Logan paused, and then: "Also there's one other point. . . . If he's found guilty, who will go to Broadmoor or gaol? Day or O'Donnel?"

Redvers' eyes mirrored his bewilderment. "This is really one for the book," he said with a snort. "You'd better take Crown Counsel's opinion first thing in the morning. . . . Though a pound will get you ten that the legal eagle will take a month of Sundays to unravel this problem. . . ."

After Redvers had gone, Logan rifled idly through the thick file on the Axe Murders. He was about to close the file when his tired eyes came to rest on a particular paragraph. It read as follows:

Note by Doctor H. K. Simpson, Home Office Pathologist. All four murders were committed on or around the time of the full moon. Little is known to science about the effects of light on human or animal behaviour beyond the following:

1. Chickens in batteries when subjected to twenty-four hours of light (or conversely, when they are deprived of darkness) lay more eggs than those who are not.

2. Fertility rites, during the period of the full moon, have and are carried out in many parts of the world. Experiments are presently being carried out at Carlington (U.S.A.) on female volunteers who work and sleep under artificial light. Preliminary results indicate that more ova are released under these conditions than normal.
3. Genes, or the hereditary factors which are transmitted by each parent to offspring, can be radically changed when the rats are constantly subjected to light. Male rats are prone to fight under these conditions, even to destroying their female partners. Moon madness—hence the origin of lunacy—has been recorded at various times, and it may well be that certain types of humans experience a form of mental change during the period of the full moon. But there is, at present, no proof to support this.

Concluding note: The fact that all four murders were committed during periods of the full moon may be purely fortuitous. The salient link between the four crimes may lie in one common denominator—all four victims were comparatively brilliant mathematicians.

Logan glanced at his desk diary. A small circle had been inscribed beside the date, and within it 1.45 p.m. Strang would probably bite his head off, thought Logan wryly, but he'd better warn him...

Logan strode through the main entrance to St. John's Hospital, and the pretty receptionist said: "Back yet again, Superintendent?"

"Yes... I'll find my way," said Logan over his shoulder as he hurried down the corridor.

He pressed the bell-push. No-one answered, and he pressed it again. Still no answer. He hesitated, then took out a stiff sheet of celluloid, slid it between the crack of the Yale lock, and pushed. The door swung back silently on its hinges.

He halted outside Strang's office, and was about to knock when he heard a voice coming from within. It was Strang's and it was high-pitched with fear.

"Listen to me, Day! For the love of God please listen!" Strang was crying out. "Don't you appreciate what I've done for you? I've given you the body of— Don't do it!" Strang's scream ended abruptly with the sound of a sickening crunch.

Logan turned the handle. The door was locked. He drew back, and launched his sixteen stones at the door. The door crashed open with a splintering of timbers. Logan stumbled into the room and his stomach muscles tightened convulsively.

The room looked like a charnel house. Strang's assistant, Mayhew, lay sprawled in a corner with a gaping red wound in his throat. Strang lay over the bed with a ghastly spouting gap in his head, and towering over him was the still, bronzed frame of Timothy Day who was clutching a dripping fire-axe. Day was only wearing pyjama trousers, and
the trousers and magnificent bare chest were bespattered with blood.

Day turned slowly and stared at Logan with vacant blue eyes. Then a quivering smile appeared on his foam-flecked lips, and he advanced on Logan with the dripping axe raised on high.

"Put it down, Day!" shouted Logan, fighting down his fear.

Day's mad grin widened, and he leapt at Logan. Logan ducked away from the blow, and the axe shattered the glass screen of the fluoroscope. As Day lifted the axe, Logan sprang forward and chopped Day's wrist with the hard edge of his hand. The axe whirled out of the madman's hand and crashed through the window with a tinkling of broken glass.

Day stared stupidly at his empty hand, then turned on his heel and ran out of the room. Logan chased after him, but Day seemed to have an animal-like fleetness of foot; his bare feet slapping on the polished linoleum as he tore down the corridor.

The receptionist cried out as Day fled past her into the night. Logan thrust his whistle between his teeth as he ran out of the Hospital and blew a shrill blast. The driver got hurriedly out of the squad car and joined in the chase.

There were few people about as Day plunged down a turning, and the distance between him and his pursuers was increasing. Day turned right, and Logan's whistle shrilled again and again in the still night. A young pedestrian joined in the chase.

A group of late-night revellers barred Day's path. Day, running at full stretch, swerved off into the road. Then the blaze of headlights, a screech of tortured tyres, a horrible bump-bump as the off-side wheels rose.

Chest heaving, Logan stared down at Day's ruined body; Strang's ultimate triumph—and failure. Suddenly, Logan realized where he was. He was in Cranston Street.

This, Logan thought wearily, is where I came in. Or rather, where Timothy Day went out—for the second and last time.
"Play her along" he thought "it makes it all the more enjoyable in the end". He knew he must kill her...

Within the shadows of the tall buildings something stirred, gently, cautiously. He stood searching the emptiness of the long, lonely street for signs of life. He shivered as the swirling mist reached out and touched his face like the fingers of a cold grey hand.

Sounds of distant traffic came faintly to his ears. Although the heart of the city was still throbbing with arterial life, the outskirts were silent and dead. He stood waiting, watching. The street-lamps cast yellow pools of light against the backcloth of darkness.

Suddenly, the faint, steady beating of high heels echoed down the long causeway. He turned his head and listened intently. The sound of the heels grew more distinct. He strained his eyes to try and pierce the darkness. A gust of wind moaned eerily between the overhead telephone wires. The sound of the heels came closer and in the distance he made out a splash of colour against the night. As the girl came nearer he drew further back into the deep shadows. He studied her as she passed under the lamps along the opposite side of the street. Her hair glistened as the lights caught the damp droplets which clung to it. He could hear the PVC raincoat which she wore crackle faintly to the movement of her limbs.

He wondered what her face was like. He had caught a glimpse of it under one of the lamps but had not been able to form a complete picture of it. It piqued him that he would not know what she really looked like until she was dead. He was tempted to overtake her and talk to her but he knew that would be dangerous. He studied the movement of her long, graceful legs. His mouth was suddenly dry. He knew he had to have her tonight. Still keeping to the shadows, he moved to follow her. The hunt was on!

He made his footsteps sound loud and purposeful. "Play her along," he thought. "It makes it all the more enjoyable at the end." His footsteps sounded flat and heavy. He saw her turn her head a little but she
did not alter her pace. The clack, clack of her high heels echoed off into the black void. He made his footsteps louder.

She slowed her pace and he saw her glance over her shoulder in a half puzzled, half frightened way. He made his footsteps more purposeful, more definite. Suddenly she stopped and spun round quickly. He halted in the shadows on the opposite side of the road. He watched her stare into the darkness around her. She stood still, breathing deeply.

He took one of the small pebbles which he carried from his pocket and aimed carefully. It flew silently over her head and rattled the darkened windows behind her. She started nervously and took a step backwards. He laughed to himself. Then he threw back his head and howled like a wolf on the trail of its prey. This time she really jumped. The echo of the howl made it impossible to tell from which direction it came. She started to walk again, quickening her pace. He matched his footsteps with hers. His excitement was shown by the faint gleam of sweat on his brow. "This one was going to be the best yet. Better than any of the others." He felt his heart beating in time to his footsteps.

He saw the girl's pace was almost a run now. Her high heels tapping out a staccato rhythm. He kept his pace purposeful, definite, full of menace. He lusted for her blood. He wanted to feel her soft body struggling under his strong, bony hands. He knew he must kill her. "But not yet," he thought. "Not just yet!"

She stopped again and looked round. She could see nothing, except the street stretching away into the darkness. He stopped and saw that she was listening intently, moving her head from side to side trying to define the direction from which the footsteps had been coming. He knew that the echo made this impossible. He started walking again, making his footsteps louder. He saw her stiffen instantly and for a moment he thought she had caught sight of him, but it was only fright which had made her start like that. She could see nothing. She could only hear the footsteps coming closer and closer. Steady, purposeful, deadly, nearer and nearer.

He saw her turn and run. Her high heels frantically beating the cold pavement. Her long, blonde hair streaming out behind her. She stumbled and fell headlong on to the pavement. He quickened his pace so as to close the gap between them but she was up and running as hard as she could. The high heels made her stumble every few yards. He was gaining on her quickly now. There was no escape. The road stretched on and on. She suddenly turned into an alley. He slowed to a walking
pace. He knew he had her now.

As she turned into the alley she saw, ahead of her, a blank wall . . . and a door. She stopped, trying to catch her breath. The blood was pounding in her head. The footsteps behind her echoed back and forth off the high buildings. She ran for the door and frantically wrenched at it. It opened slowly, oh so slowly. She saw ahead of her, a flight of stairs leading upwards into the darkness. She dived for them, dragging the door shut behind her. It was pitch black. She could see nothing.

She felt her way up the stairs, taking them two at a time as quickly as she dared. Suddenly the stairs were no more. She grasped at the stair rail, pulling herself back from the abyss into which she had nearly fallen. All she stood on was a jutting piece of landing. She turned slowly. The bottom of the stairway was obscured by the blackness. She stood silently, waiting.

The footsteps came closer. Although muffled by the wall of the building they were still audible. They stopped. There was no sound except the noise made by her own breathing. The door began to creak slowly open. It opened wide. For a brief moment he was framed in the doorway. Then, the door slammed shut. The blackness was once again complete. She could see nothing except the first four or five steps of the stairway.

The footsteps moved from the door towards the foot of the stairs. She heard them mount the stairway. Although still purposeful, still slow, there seemed to be a sense of urgency to them now. She could now hear his breathing which was harsh and heavy. His figure loomed into sight and lunged towards her.

There was a scuffle. She felt his hot, fetid breath on her face. He felt her soft body, squirming under his hands. They swayed to and fro at the top of the stairs.

There was a scream, choked off by the sickening thud of a body hitting the cold concrete below. Silence!

Steps sounded down the stairs and made their way towards the body. The killer stood looking down at the twisted remains. Then, slowly, turned away and walked through the door into the alley. Only the clicking of the high stiletto heels, echoing against the high walls, broke the unearthly silence. Already she was making plans for her next victim!
"But suppose," he said, staring at me with his ice-blue eyes, "that two people saw the same ghost?" I wanted to tell him to shut up. . . .

With a sharp run I just managed to catch the last train back to Brighton after a date with another girl at the Festival Hall. I got in the rear coach and thought I was going to have the compartment to myself, but just before the train moved off, a man got in and took the corner seat opposite mine.

I was trying to read the programme of the ballet which had been super, but the light was very dim. I looked up and saw that the lamps had been damaged and only one was functioning. Vandalism, I supposed, it was simply disgraceful. "I'm afraid the light is poor," the man said; "but at least it keeps us from seeing how dirty the train is."

He was in his forties, I judged. A tuft of greying hair stuck forward over one of his bushy eyebrows. His eyes, even in that light, looked almost colourless, a sort of ice-blue. Although the day had been hot and the night still seemed stuffy, he was wearing a raincoat and had his hands plunged deep in the pockets. We smiled at each other and began to talk.

He told me he had been to a funeral that afternoon. "I'd never been to one before. I must say I found it extraordinarily impressive. I suppose in your short life you've never had occasion to attend one?"

I told him I had been to the funeral of an aunt some years ago. He was extremely interested and wanted to know whether it had been a cremation or an interment. He asked me if I were a religious person and believed in life after death. Rather guardedly I said that I supposed I did in a way.

"The people at the ceremony today seemed united in believing that the individual goes on living after death. You say that you believe that, too. Would you, then, be very surprised or disturbed, if you saw someone, or the shade of someone, whom you knew to be dead?"

"You mean a ghost? I don't believe in them. I should just think I was imagining it."
"But suppose," he said, staring at me with his ice-blue eyes, "that two people saw the same ghost? That couldn't be imagination, could it?"

I replied that it would be a case of telepathy or auto-suggestion or some such. While we were talking a small woman dressed in black slipped quietly in from the corridor and sank into the farther corner of the seat opposite mine.

"If they live on they must be somewhere," the man was still looking intently at me, "why shouldn't they be here among us? You might be one of those people who has the gift of being able to see them."

"A gift I could well do without, thanks!" I said, thinking he was joking.

"Well—" he leaned over and spoke quietly, jerking his head slightly towards the woman in the far corner; "what about her, then? Would you say she was flesh and blood?"

It was the way he said that—flesh and blood. I was still startled. I looked at the woman who was sitting very still. In the poorly lighted compartment the skin of her face seemed a dull yellow. She wore a turned down hat, old and dusty. She had gathered the folds of a voluminous coat about herself and her black-gloved hands rested on a shapeless black handbag. A very thin matchstick leg showed in a wrinkled black stocking and dusty shoe. She looked as though her clothes had been taken from a cupboard where they had been stored for a long time. I began to have a curious pricking sensation over my scalp and the palms of my hands.

"You see?" The man was looking at me with an expression of triumph in his cold eyes. "You don't really think, do you, that inside those stockings and shoes, there's a real leg, a human foot?" he whispered.

I wanted to tell him to shut up. I licked my lips but couldn't speak. I deliberately stared into the blackness of the window, seeing a few lights from distant buildings here and there. I saw my own pale face and frightened eyes. I focused beyond and saw the outline of the woman's figure. I had to turn and look at her again. Now I saw to my horror that the pallid face was gleaming with drops of moisture—a dribble was oozing from the closed but swollen lids. I was conscious of a smell, too, warm and damp, like a room that has been long unoccupied.

To say that I was frightened is totally inadequate. An awful feeling
of sickness came over me. All the clichés about cold sweat, shivers
down spine, hair raising on one’s head—I felt them all. My knees and
hands were shaking, too. Yet I had only to leap to my feet and rush
from the compartment: I had only to stretch out my hand to reach
the communication cord; yet, as in a nightmare, when one wants to cry
out and one’s vocal chords are paralysed, so now I was incapable of
any movement.

“You don’t have to worry,” the man said quite casually, “she isn’t
able to injure you or me.”

I clenched my hands round my handbag to stop them trembling. I
forced myself to summon up some courage. After all, I wasn’t alone
with this awful thing, and this man, strange as he was, didn’t seem at
all afraid. Another thought struck me: he knew her! He had described
her without once looking in her direction. I realized that between these
two there was a connection—she could not have been there but for
him.

“You know her!” I jerked out.

“Oh yes—she’s my mother.”

A new wave of disgust swept over me as he went on. “My mother—
the terror of my childhood. You wouldn’t believe how those small
hands could pinch and cuff. How she watched me, locked me in,
prayed for me! That was the worst of all. Have you ever been prayed
for, my dear? If anything could have made me worse than I was, it
was being prayed for by my mother and the Brethren in her chapel.”

The train stopped at an intermediate station. We were right at the
rear and no one passed our windows. We sat motionless, the three of
us. Everything was quiet, the platform deserted. The train moved on
again.

He motioned with a slight movement of his head towards the still
figure in the other corner. “They didn’t know what to do with me,
when I was a lad. She was the only person who understood me. She
was also the only person who ever loved me.” He kept his cold eyes on
me as he talked. “Even when I was a grown man she still dominated
me. Made me go everywhere with her. One day we were in a train, go-
ing up to London to see a doctor. It was the middle of the day and
there were not many people about. We were alone in our compart-
ment, and I killed her.” He drew his hands out of his pockets and held
them out as if he wanted me to see them. “I dislocated her neck. It was
so easy that I remember wondering why I hadn’t done it before.”
I had been watching him in the way a rabbit is said to stare motionless at a stoat. Then I shot one more terrified glance at the woman in black. At that moment her head lolled forward as though it was, indeed, loosely attached to the body. Then it jerked back into place and the figure remained motionless as before.

I now gave myself up to my terror. I cowered into my seat. In the effort to shut the situation out of my mind I fell into a kind of nightmarish sleep. Now and again I woke with a start as the train stopped and started. The journey went on and on. Once as I met the ice-blue eyes of the man before me, he leaned over: "I wish now that she could jump up and give me a good box on the ears. But she can’t, you know, she can’t." His crooked smile was like the grimace of a man in pain.

At last the end of the line. I was roused by the brightly lit platform; people were there, voices, doors were opening.

It was then that the woman in black sprang to life. She gathered herself together, gave a tug to her hat, rose to her feet. I had already jumped from the train. I looked back. She was an ordinary old woman! "My, I’ve had a good long sleep!" she said to me as she got out.

You idiot, I told myself. I had let myself be hypnotized by that beast of a man. I turned to vent my fury upon him. He wasn’t there. The porter was going along the empty train shutting doors. The few passengers were on their way to the exit. He wasn’t anywhere.

I caught up the woman. "That man—that man in our compartment—" I stammered.

"What man?" She stopped to look at me.

"When you came in—the man I was talking to—"

"There was only you," she answered. "I like to sit with another lady, that’s why I came in. I had a bad experience on a train once, a man tried to kill me. My own son, it was. Had a fit of madness, would have strangled me if help hadn’t been to hand."

"No!" A horrible suspicion had come into my mind.

"And now he’s dead," she went on. "I’ve been to his funeral today. Twenty years he lived in a Home. I’d have had him back—but they wouldn’t allow him out, not after that. He never came home no more."

She was fumbling for her ticket with shaky black-gloved hands and tears began to trickle from her puffy lids. She looked very old and worn and they were just ordinary tears.
Little Freddie was too young, really, to appreciate the meaning of it all. But his mam was thrilled to bits with Alfred; and so was his dad, in a way, although his dad had his reservations.

Alfred was the first to stir in the morning. He brought Mr. and Mrs. Bennet a cup of tea each in bed, and Freddie heard his mam declare that the tea was made just how she liked it. Then Alfred brought a glass of fruit-juice into Freddie’s bedroom, and ran the water until it was the ideal temperature for a child of his age to wash in.

After that, Alfred returned to the big bedroom and shaved Mr. Bennet. Freddie could hear his mam giggling, although she had stuffed the bedclothes in her mouth.

When the family came downstairs, Alfred was waiting for them. He looked very smart in his striped trousers and black jacket. Alfred
bowed respectfully, and led them into the kitchen where he had laid the table. He pulled a chair out for Mrs. Bennet.

"This is what I call living," Mrs. Bennet said, as she sat down.

Mr. Bennet tucked a corner of the unfamiliar serviette between the first and second buttons of his pyjama jacket. "Not 'arf," he said.

Alfred served them with smoked back bacon grilled to within a milli-second of its optimum preparation time. Then he coughed politely behind his hand, and asked them what clothes they intended to wear.

As Alfred went out with his instructions, Mrs. Bennet smiled complacently. "Do anything to oblige, won't he?" She turned to Freddie. "Not like your dad, is he?"

In the time it took them to finish their breakfast, Alfred had pressed Mr. Bennet's trousers with such precision that the creases didn't divagate by so much as a millimetre. And he polished Mrs. Bennet's thermoplastic shoes until they twinkled like First Magnitude stars.

When Alfred returned he stood stiffly at the side of the breakfast table. "Will that be all, modom?"

"Ta very much," said Mrs. Bennet.

Alfred hesitated, and his handsome face wrinkled with incomprehension.

Mrs. Bennet corrected herself. "Yes. Thank you, Alfred."

He clicked into action, and started to clear the table.

Mrs. Bennet leaned across the table to speak to her husband. "Worth every penny," she hissed.

Freddie thought his dad sounded doubtful. "I hope so," he mumbled.

When Alfred had cleared the table, and finished in the kitchen, he went out to the garage and started to wash the car. Mr. Bennet cheered up a bit.

Freddie watched Alfred through the window, and began to understand why his mam was so excited when Alfred arrived.

The box was shiny and white, and shaped like a coffin. When his dad opened the lid, his mam had squealed with delight. Alfred was even more splendid than his pictures in the catalogue.

There was a metal label nailed onto his chest. It said: Alfred—On Hire From House Robots Ltd. His dad took a pair of pincers and pulled out the long nails.

Alfred immediately sat up, and stepped out of the box. He bowed to Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, and said "At your service." Then he smiled at little Freddie in the most friendly way, and patted him on the head.
“An absolute bargain,” said Mrs. Bennet.

Mr. Bennet frowned. “We’ll have to wait and see. The rental is pretty steep.”

But Alfred was marvellous. He was completely self-maintained, and gave no trouble at all. He plugged himself in regularly every night at the mains, and although he didn’t eat he polished his teeth every morning with emery paper.

Alfred was always immaculate, and tried to keep Mr. Bennet the same. He was always pressing Mr. Bennet’s suits, and laundering his shirts. It seemed to Freddie that his mam smartened herself up of her own accord. She did her hair differently, and put things on her face.

Alfred did all the shopping. When he walked back from the supermarket, he always whistled a tune.

On Mondays he whistled Highlights from the Ballet by Tchaikovsky, and on Tuesdays it was always Selected Waltzes from Strauss. And on other days he whistled other things, which Mr. and Mrs. Bennet weren’t sure whether they had heard before. But it was always something with a bit of class about it.

Mrs. Bennet was impressed. “I reckon our Alfred knocks spots off anything in this street. I’ll bet Mrs. Wilkins could spit when she compares our Alfred with their Henry.” Mrs. Bennet sniffed. “Their Henry whistles pop-songs.”

“You’re right there,” said Mr. Bennet. “He’s got superior ways, has our Alf.”

Mrs. Bennet glared. “I’ll not have him called Alf. It’s common. His name’s Alfred.”

Alfred spoke very nicely, too. Fred noticed that his mam started to talk in a different way, as if she had something in her mouth; and she shouted at dad when he dropped his aitches.

Mrs. Bennet pretended to be pleasantly surprised when that snooty Mrs. Wilkins paid a call. Mrs. Wilkins tried to talk of this and that, but it was obvious that she had really come round for a closer look at Alfred.

“Alfred is cooking dinner at the moment,” said Mrs. Bennet. “Tonight it’s going to be Burf Strongenough. Very keen on his French sauces and that, is our Alfred.”

Mrs. Wilkins couldn’t hide her interest.

Mrs. Bennet turned to Freddie. “Go and tell Alfred to come into the lounge a minute.”
Freddie scampered away, and returned with Alfred, who gave his programmed smile, and displayed his glistening teeth.

Mr. Wilkins struggled not to show how impressed she was. "Well." She swallowed. 'He’s certainly a fine looking specimen."

Mrs. Bennet smiled. "He’s what they call a technical breakthrough." She dismissed Alfred with a cabin-class gesture, and smiled maliciously at Mrs. Wilkins. "It’s a pity about your Henry’s bumps, isn’t it?"

"What bumps?"

"The two big bumps he has, one on each side of his head."

Mrs. Wilkins rose to her feet, and her eyes flashed. "Those protuberances are necessary, because they contain Henry’s monitoring devices."

Mrs. Bennet smiled again. She had made her point. Alfred was without blemish.

Mrs. Wilkins paused at the front door. "Of course, we’ll soon be trading Henry in." She tilted her head superciliously. "We change ours every year."

Mrs. Bennet bit her lip.

Mrs. Wilkins slotted a second Parthian arrow to her bow-string. "I suppose you can buy the new ones, as well as rent them?"

Mrs. Bennet flushed. "Oh yes." Fury sharpened her tongue. "And you can get them on HP, like your Henry."

Mrs. Bennet slammed the door, and returned to the lounge. She had the irritable feeling that although she’d had the last word, the victory could have been more conclusive. Mrs. Wilkins’ visit had made her realize how important Alfred had become to her. She needed him to maintain her self-respect.

Mrs. Bennet had no sooner formulated this thought, than Alfred came in, bearing a cocktail of his own devising.

"I don’t know what I’d do without you, Alfred."

"Thank you, modom."

Mr. Bennet entered in his shirt sleeves and braces. "’Ere, Alf," he bawled. "Get us a pale ale from the fridge."

Mrs. Bennet began to shout. She told her husband that he was uneducated, and that he should take a leaf out of Alfred’s book. That made Mr. Bennet very wild indeed.

"I’ve had enough of this," he yelled. "Freddie. You get off to bed. I’ve a few things to say to your mam."
Freddie crept up the stairs. He looked over the banisters and saw Alfred knocking at the lounge door, while he balanced a bottle of pale ale on a tray.

Alfred wakened Freddie early in the morning, and said his mother had a nice surprise for him.

Freddie discovered that they were leaving for a holiday abroad, but that his dad was staying behind. The house was very quiet. While Alfred and his mam finished packing, Freddie sneaked away to say goodbye to his dad.

Freddie was only a very little boy, but he felt uneasy about it all. He was uneasy all the way to the jetbase, and even the excitement of being aboard a huge autojet didn’t stop him thinking about the other things.

He twisted round in his seat, and saw that Alfred and his mam were holding hands. Alfred was whispering in his mam’s ear, and she was giggling.

It was strange. But it had been even more strange to see his dad lying in Alfred’s shiny, white box. He couldn’t help wondering whether it had hurt when they fixed the metal label to his dad’s chest with those long nails.
Four times he whipped his flagging strength to thrust at the imprisoning boulder, and four times he sank back defeated.

He heaved himself up over the crumbling lip of the barren promontory, dropped his lobster-hook, net and canvas bag, and sat down on the loose shale for a breather. He cupped his gnarled hands against the buffeting wind to light a cigarette, and scanned the great sweep of yellow beach spread out below him. His eyes settled on a man crouched over a rock half-hidden by the sea; a figure dwarfed by distance. He shook his fist at the crouching man, and breathed a curse into the wind.

He threw away the stub of his cigarette, and rose to his feet. There was enough time left to probe the last hole before the tide turned. He picked up his tackle, and followed the path to a lone, stunted tree struggling for existence in the thin soil at the edge of the cliff. He stopped, and peered over the edge. Yes, this was the place.

Some sixty feet below him a shallow pool sparkled in the afternoon sun; a sandy-bottomed pool impounded in a triangular formation of limpet-covered rocks. Even from this height he could see the dark-blue discolorations on the yellow sand in the apex of the triangle; a fairly sure sign of lobster. He slung the heavy canvas bag over his shoulder, and eased himself carefully over the edge; his scrabbling feet searching for the tiny track angling down the cliff.

He worked his way slowly down the near-vertical face of the cliff, and used his lobster hook to test the footholds ahead of him. Two-thirds of the way down, he paused at a solitary boulder marking the end of the most difficult part of the descent. It was a large boulder that thrust its worn head out of the shale like an aged tortoise.

He sat on the boulder, and the ground erupted under him; a brief, mad tobogganing on the boulder, and then a whirling, tearing descent; a nightmare of the boulder hurling after him to crush him in an explosion of blackness shot with tendrils of red.

Pain dragged him back to the edge of consciousness; a cauldron of
pain engulfing his bowels and right thigh. Reluctantly, his eyes flickered open, and he tried to focus his gaze on the bulk of the weather-stained boulder. The rhythmic throbbing of pain increased its tempo, and then darkness welled up to free him from it.

He opened his eyes again, and forced his brain to separate itself from the pain. The boulder was lying athwart his pelvis and right thigh; pressing him into the soft sand of the shallow pool. The surface of the pool was reddening from a wound in his scalp.

He struggled to sit up, but the boulder had him firmly pinioned. He worked his hands under the boulder, and strained to release his body; strained until the pain renewed its assault in hot waves; strained until the trembling muscles of his arms and pectorals clamoured for relief. Gasping, he released his hold.

Four times he whipped his flagging strength to thrust at the imprisoning boulder, and four times he sank back in defeat.

Numbed, he lay staring at the black-tinged cumulus clouds come racing over the sea. The forerunner of wind arrived, and the surface of the water around him dimpled into ripples. It'll blow a gale soon, he thought, and after it will come the rain... Cold soaking rain... but it wouldn't make any difference to him... he was cold now... very cold... but perhaps the cold was a good thing... it had chilled the pain... .

The turning tide whispered a warning, and he turned his head towards the tiny entrance to the pool. The volume of water trickling into the pool had increased, and its colour was a darker green now; a menacing shade. He gauged the depth of water with his extended fingers. His nose and mouth were four or five inches above the present level of the water.

It's a neap-tide, he thought. What's the exact rise and fall of it? But anyway it's all a waste of time... . Face it, in another hour and a half you'll be lying quietly under the water... just another carcass for the things of the sea to feast on... . And Gareth would grin when he heard... not openly, mind you, but to himself... . Yes, Gareth would laugh deep inside himself... even when she and he sat together with their heads bowed in the chapel while the parson prayed for his soul.

He shuddered as he felt the water creep up his throat, and fear expanded his lungs.

"Help! Heeelp! Heeelp!" he shouted, his voice rising in panic.

The echo of his cries rebounded from the cliffs to mock him, and a colony of gulls rose into the air with melancholy screams.

The shadows lengthened as the watery sun sank lower over the hori-
zon, and he watched a solitary gull bank and turn above him; wings motionless as it planed without seeming effort; a perfect aerofoil of grey and white. The bird fluttered to a landing on a rock some ten feet away, and studied him with cold beady eyes above a yellow beak.

"Go away, you bloody scavenger!" he cried. But the bird seemed to realize he was helpless, and continued to stare at him with unblinking, predatory eyes.

A scrambling noise from the face of the cliff frightened the gull, and it flew off to join the rest of the colony planing and circling high above. He turned his head, and saw a figure slithering down the track.

Hope flooded his mind, but quickly drained away when he recognized Gareth. He began to curse weakly and impotently.

Gareth, tall and broad-shouldered, jumped into the pool, and splashed towards him.

"Huw! How did this happen?"
He turned his head, and his lips curled back in a snarl.
"Come to crow, is it, Gareth?"
Garth shook his darkly handsome head in puzzlement.
"Sweetness was never your strong-point, Huw! You get sourer as the years go by."
The old, hot rage smouldered up inside him.
"Leave me be, you two-faced treacherous git!" he grated.
Gareth smiled; a tight smile barely revealing the white, even teeth.
"I'm going to get you out of this—whether you like it or not, Huw," Gareth said softly, and, straddling the boulder with long legs, he grasped it in his calloused hands.
Huw watched him gather his strength to lift the boulder; teeth gritted, and neck muscles and veins standing out like cords; thick biceps coiling and bulging spasmodically in the effort. The boulder shook, and Huw screamed out in agony.

Gareth was glaring down at him, his chest heaving and the sweat dripping from his brow on to Huw's face.
"You'll have to help, Huw! It's too heavy for me," he gasped.
"Leave me be! I'll take nothing from you, you scut!"
Gareth leaned over him; his eyes wild and urgent.
"The tide, you stubborn fool! Another quarter of an hour and you'll drown!"
Mule-like pride rode roughshod over his pain.
"I'll accept nothing from you, Gareth. Nothing! Send help from
the village when you get back.”
He watched Gareth frown as desperation took over from anxiety.
“You know damn fine the sea will be over you long before they could get here, Huw.”
“Go back to her! Go and laugh together in your fine warm bed!” said Huw, and spat in his face.
Gareth wiped away the fleck of phlegm, and the wrinkles around his eyes were more finely etched now.
“You and I grew up together, and we used to be the best of friends. We always seemed to understand each other so well. But, Huw, there’s one thing you don’t seem to understand—or is it that you don’t know?”
Huw failed to hide his curiosity, and said: “What’s that?”
Gareth laughed; a dry, humourless laugh.
“We were friends all right—you and I! And then she came between us! Megan with the dark curls and cherry-red mouth! Megan with the tiny waist and the dancing walk! We fought over her like dogs—and she fooled both of us! But it’s me who has to pay the piper—not you, Huw!” Gareth said savagely.
Huw felt the bitterness ebb away.
“Pay for what, Gareth?”
Gareth shrugged his heavy shoulders.
“She’s played the whore on me, Huw. Not once—but twice I’ve caught her! Remember how Rees of Llanrhidian used to cast his greedy eyes on her?”
“She prefers Rees to you?” asked Huw incredulously.
“Aye. But after today I’m going to get shot of her.”
“And what’s today got to do with it?”
Gareth met his gaze.
“She’s no good. Maybe if I get rid of her, you and I could—could play on the same side again,” he said, with a question in his eyes.
Huw looked away.
“Depends on whether we can shift this rock—between us, that is,” he said gruffly, and heard Gareth sigh with relief.
“Right. . . . But wait until I give the word to push,” Gareth said, and bent to seize the boulder.
Huw worked his hands under the boulder.
“I’m afraid I can manage only one go at it, Gareth. So put everything you’ve got into the first effort.”
“Are you ready, Huw? Well—now!”
The jagged edges of his broken bones ground together, and searing pain shot hotly through him; the sweat pouring out of him to join the rising sea; his mind a tortured animal running wild within his skull.

* * *

He felt the spiky moorland grass piercing his sodden clothing, and he opened his eyes to see the sun lowering itself into the sullen sea. Gareth was lying flat on his back beside him, and painful, croaking gasps erupted from his mouth:

“My God! You got me up the cliff-face, Gareth?”

Gareth turned an empurpled face to him.

“Y—yesss! And what a pig weight you are!” he wheezed.

“Leave me here now, and go for help. You’ve done enough.”

Gareth clambered shakily to his feet.

“I’ve done the hard part, and I can manage the rest. Come on, Huwboy, up on my shoulders with you,” he said, and bent to lift him.

His head hung over Gareth’s back, and his senses swam. He felt Gareth’s legs totter under the double load, and then they steadied into a lurching walk.

Gareth was staggering and weaving when they passed the tiny chapel on the outskirts of the village.

“Put me down, and rest awhile, Gareth.”

“If I did, I’d never pick you up again. Another hundred yards and we’ll be at the Doctor’s cottage,” panted Gareth.

“Gareth—”

“What?”

“You lied to me about Megan. Didn’t you?” Huw whispered.

Gareth staggered another ten paces before he answered.

“Yes, I lied. She’s—she’s been a fine wife to me, Huw.”

Five more paces.

“You lied to make me push that rock. Didn’t you, Gareth?”

Gareth laid him gently on the turf outside the Doctor’s cottage.

“Aye, Huw. That’s right. And that puts us back where we were?”

“No, Gareth,” he said slowly. “You see, I lied to you—and mine was the bigger lie. . . .”

“What do you mean?”

“I lied to you when I said I wanted you to leave me trapped there in the pool. . . . I knew all the time I didn’t have the courage to watch you walk away from me,” said Huw, and held out his hand.
ILLEGAL DIVORCE

LOUIS ALLEGRI

He had been in prison for exactly a year and a day when Alicia came to visit him. He was more than a little surprised. Alicia was his secret—knew his secret too.

The lawyer looked anxious: "You are late, Mrs. Carmichael. However, no matter, there's still one case in front of us to be heard. Counsel's late as well. Are you feeling all right?"

"Oh, Mr. Weldon—!

"Please try and not distress yourself so much. Don't want your nerves to get on top of you again, do we? It'll soon be over. Take a pew by the table there. What the devil's happened to Counsel—?"

"You do look wretched, my dear. . . . Sorry if this sounds a little callous, but it will be much better if you can remain calm—old Judge Blenkinsop is an irascible old cove and can't stand tearful women in the witness box."

"Oh God help me, I feel so— Oh, I've waited so long for this day and now—"

"There, there now, of course you feel concerned, but we should have little difficulty in substantiating your allegations of adultery and cruelty, it's quite straightforward!"

"I tried so hard to make a go of it, but he was such a cruel, vindictive man—"

"I know, I know, my dear. It has been hard for you. Now, as soon as Counsel arrives he'll want to go through your statement very briefly—not that he'll have time to do otherwise at this late stage—just to jog your memory a little. He's a very experienced man, Mr. Chunter, so don't worry too much about forgetting dates and so on, he'll find a way of prompting you in the Court."

"He came back last night. . . ."

"What?"

"My husband—came home last night—"

"He stayed?"

"Yes."

"Damn! "

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“He just wouldn’t leave, Mr. Weldon. Wouldn’t go. Said I wasn’t to divorce him. He——”

“Stop! Huh... We don’t want to complicate matters at this stage—do we, Mrs. Carmichael? And this could very well do so, you know... I’m a little hard of hearing, actually.”

“But—!”

“Don’t want to upset the apple cart, do we? Just take my advice and leave things to me now—— You haven’t been reconciled or anything——?”

“Oh no!”

“Right. Leave the worrying to me. Oh Lord. And I can see I’ve got some. Don’t tell me they’ve sent a kid along?”

“Mr. Weldon?”

“Hmm, hmm.”

“I’m awfully sorry, but Mr. Chunter had to go before the Privy Council at the last minute, and I’ve been asked to take his place. I’m Mr. Lovey——”

“Short notice, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I’m afraid it just couldn’t be helped.”

“This is the third time recently your chambers have—— However, not your fault as you say, Mr. Lovey. But it’s a bit steep all the same. This is Mrs. Carmichael. We’ll have to go in very shortly.”

“Good morning, Mrs. Carmichael. I’d like, if I may, to go through your statement very briefly. On the grounds of cruelty, isn’t it, Mr. Weldon?”

“No—I mean yes, but there’s adultery as well!”

“I’m sorry, I was only handed the papers a short time ago.”

“Help me!”

“Pardon?”

“Nothing. Nothing, Mr. Lovey.”

“Now, Mrs. Carmichael, you were married on the——?”

“They’re calling for us, Mr. Lovey.”

“Yes, yes. You refer to three specific occasions when your husband struck you, the week before you were forced to leave him—and shortly afterwards you attended a hospital for—nervous disorders——?”

“It was terrible! Terrible!”

“Yes, Mrs. Carmichael, I’m sure. Now——”

“He was a cruel, vindictive man. He hadn’t changed, last night. Just the same——”
"Pardon?"
"We must go in now, Mr. Lovey."
"But Mrs. Carmichael said—"
"The last night—before she ran away. Isn’t that right, my dear?"
"But—"
"No time for ifs and buts now, dear. Let’s go into Court. Keep near the end of the row, it’ll be more convenient for you to reach the witness box. Speak to the judge not Counsel. Address him as My Lord."
"Oh God. Mr. Weldon!"
"Now, now. Time to go. Should be over in half an hour."
"There, there, Mrs. Carmichael. All over now. Here, use my hanky. Thank you, Mr. Lovey."
"Sorry I made a mess of the cruelty evidence."
"Ah well. Not to worry. We got our decree and that’s what matters. Blenkinsop certainly wasn’t much help. He reminds me of a vast lizard: when he licks his lips and gulps he’s digested that particular point and to go on is disastrous. Well, goodbye, Mr. Lovey. Bye."
"Now, my dear Mrs. Carmichael. What do you say to a nice drop of brandy, hmm? We can go down to the crypt—or what used to be the crypt before progress desecrated it. My word, I must say you looked rough in the witness box. Yes indeed!"
"Don’t look so worried! You’ve got your Decree Nisi, and in three months time I’ll apply for it to be made absolute—Just a formality. Then you’ll be as free as the proverbial bird. . . . What’s the matter?"
"It’s all so mad!"
"Oh...? Well, I agree it has its ridiculous side?"
"I waited such a long time. Just had to come to Court—especially when I saw that taxi passing."
"Sorry, not with you?"
"And I wanted to see you as well, Mr. Weldon. You’ve shown such kindness to me. I’m glad now you talked me into going through with it."
"I—"
"You wouldn’t let me explain, and I’m grateful now."
"Sorry if I seem a bit dim, my dear? Perhaps you’d like to sit down a moment?"
"No...! No, I’m all right now. . . . My husband was a brute. He hadn’t changed last night, and this morning wouldn’t let me out of the house for my divorce. I—I’ve never felt so much hate for anyone—"
Never, never! In the struggle... My scissors! He's dead, Mr. Weldon!"

"Good God...!"

"It might seem silly to you, but do you know it was such a great relief to me when the judge granted my divorce. It meant such a lot. Oh please, do sit down, dear Mr. Weldon. It must be a bit of a shock...? I won't need that Decree Absolute now, will I—? Why are you laughing, Mr. Weldon...? Mr. Weldon. Please it's not—?

"Blenkinsop! Old Judge Blenkinsop—!

"Please do stop laughing, Mr. Weldon—?

"Oh God! I can't, when I think of that irascible old critter solemnly divorcing a dead man...!"
THE RIFLE

J. H. BOLTON

A clinking noise stopped him dead. Somebody was inside the cave . . . he laid an arrow across his bow, tipping it with poison.

ROWTAK stumbled down the dusty track, his shoulders aching and sore from the rawhide pack straps. He was a half-breed Chonta, tall and heavy-boned from his white father, yet lithe and light-footed with the dogged perseverance of his red ancestors. His black hair hung lank and greasy beneath the wide straight-brimmed hat, and flapped around his shoulders, as he walked, an effective means of freeing his face of the flies attracted to his stinking sweated body. The pack contained a season's pelts, mostly fox and beaver. It had been a poor year in the big timber, yet the pack was heavy. For nine long days he had trudged from the high hunting grounds to the trading post at Buffalo Creek, and now even the Indian in him was exhausted. His moccasined feet were cut and bleeding, the cuts a magnet for the flies.

Rounding the bluff, he could see smoke from the settlement, still a good four hours distant across the marshlands of the Rapid River. But marsh meant flies, and Crowtak dreaded the crossing. The normal trail flies he could ignore, but Rapid River mosquitoes were a torture in themselves. Easing his pack against a stump he attended to his feet, rubbing marrick leaves on the cuts to staunch the blood. Pulling a few rawhide strips from his pack, he bound up the moccasins, and struck out across the flats.

The crossing took a little more than six hours, for he was very weary and the water level was high this year, at times up to his knees. When he emerged from the water, he dropped on to the still damp ground exhausted. With the light fading fast, he smothered his body in a tattered bed roll and slept until dawn.

As the morning sun flooded the valley, he pressed on across the rock-strewn terrace land to Buffalo Creek, his journey almost over. The few men in the single street gave his stinking body a wide berth, though they themselves were none too savoury. With his back bent low beneath the pack, he reached the log cabin that was the only contact
with the outside world for a hundred-mile radius of Buffalo Creek.

The trading post was already busy, despite the early hour. Crowtak dropped his pack, heaved it on to the side bench, and waited. For more than an hour he stood there, with the innate patience of his forebears, until MacKiver swaggered down towards him, the whiskey bottle in his fist already half empty. In silence, Crowtak unstrapped the pack, tipping out the pelts on to the bench. MacKiver sifted through the skins, wrinkling his nose at the stench of them.

"Twenty-five dollars, Injun. Real gold!"

Crowtak held out his hand and took the gold pieces readily, little knowing that the true value of the skins was three times that amount. Without a word he picked up the pack, and turned away, away towards the far end of the store, where a long rack of flint-lock rifles reached the full width of the building. Crowtak stood beneath the rack, and gazed longingly at the guns. His life's ambition was to own one of these rifles, and enough powder and shot to last him through the year. For three seasons already he had been hoarding his money, little by little, deep inside a cave way up in the big timber. Another season and he might have enough. He glanced at the dollars in his hand as though they were the passport to eternity.

Turning from the rifles for another year, he again stood by the counter, waiting his turn. Every customer was personally served by MacKiver, and he served them in his own good time. At last it was the turn of the stinking Indian, and he bought chewing tobacco, flour and coffee, as much as he could carry in his pack. The precious dollars dwindled. Now there were fifteen.

He walked out of the trading post, his pack again heavy against his shoulders. Crossing the dust road, he ordered fifty iron arrow-heads from the blacksmith, producing an arrow from the quiver at his waist for size. The iron heads were very small; the game he shot was usually small stuff. To cater for larger beasts, the heads had a channel near the tip, to which he applied root poison. Lounging in the shade, he waited until the blacksmith shouted, collected his iron heads, and left Buffalo Creek as he had entered.

The return journey took Crowtak eleven days, as he climbed higher and higher into the big timber. And for eleven days he thought about nothing but the rifle he was going to buy. He thought of how he would shoot moose and bear, usually out of range of his arrows. He thought of the smaller game he was too slow for with the bow. It took time to
flight an arrow, too much time when for enough pieces of the yellow metal he could have immediate action. After his arrow-heads, he had ten dollars left from the proceeds of a season’s traps. Ten more golden discs to add to the collection in the cave.

On the eleventh day out from Buffalo Creek, he reached the great sequoia that marked to him the edge of his territory. With renewed energy he plodded off on the last hour’s march of his annual journey. In no time at all, he was close to the cave. Dropping the pack, he continued unburdened, up the long and steep scree slope to the cave.

A clinking noise stopped him dead. Somebody was inside the cave. Crouching on his haunches, he laid an arrow across his bow, tipping it with root poison from the elk-horn at his belt. He scanned the ground for tracks, but he knew nothing would show on the scree. The loose rock hid everything. Like a shadow, Crowtak inched his way up the slope. The clinking continued. His face creased into an angry silent snarl. Someone was stealing his rifle-money! The thought burned into his brain, sparking the old xenophobia, fostering the urge to kill.

From the cave mouth above him, a figure appeared. In anger, Crowtak loosed the arrow too soon. The man above caught the movement, and dived back into the cave. But the arrow found its mark, biting deep into the intruder’s thigh as he leaped for cover. With a grunt he crashed on to the hard earth in the cave mouth, and cried out in pain as he dragged his leg into the darkness.

Cursing, Crowtak dropped to the rock, and slid down to the base of the scree, crouching expectantly behind the large rocks. He was just in time. A rifle ball cracked against the rock in front of him, and flattened by the impact, ricocheted off into the pines. So he still had his gun. The half-breed looked contemptuously at his bow. What use was this against powder and lead?

But, he realized, the bow had served its purpose. The White had taken the arrow. Soon the poison would begin to strike, atrophying the muscles. How long it would take he could not estimate, for root poison varied in strength. Perhaps if the man were strong, he could last half a day. He glanced at the sun, dropping behind the mountain. In an hour it would be dark. Then the man would have to try the scree. There was no other way down.

Cautiously Crowtak raised his hat above the rock. The rifleman wrenched it from his grasp with practised accuracy, the ball shattering a finger before it splintered a tree behind. The Indian smiled despite
the pain. Soon he would have that rifle.

He sucked the blood from his finger, and crawled back for his hat. Picking up a stick, he again raised it above the rock. And again the man hit it, a good two hundred yards from the cave. For the next hour Crowtak repeated the performance, once every ten minutes or so. Just enough to keep the man on edge. Soon the poison would bite.

Through the twilight he heard a voice.

"Damn you, Injun, you've poisoned this arrow! Help me, I'm going stiff!"

Crowtak peered over the rock. He heard the clatter of the gun being thrown down the scree, saw the long shape glistening in the half-light.

"You crawl, down, head first!" he shouted.

"O.K. O.K., but help me, quick! You're a rich man, Injun! Help me an' I'll tell you 'bout the gold!"

Crowtak failed to comprehend the last words, but the man sounded desperate. Cautiously he crept round the rock, and advanced up the scree, slowly and deliberately, every sense alert. The man had done as he had bidden, and was lying head-down on the scree. He was silent now, and the half-breed knew that in his weakened state the blood rushing to his head would have rendered him unconscious. He scrambled up the slope, picking up the gun as he passed it. He ripped open the man's trouser leg, and dug the arrow head out deftly with a long knife, taking care to keep his own wound clear of the deadly tip. Raising the head, he slapped the fellow's face, until consciousness returned.

The man opened his eyes and screamed with pain. He was past all help, but Crowtak would have killed him anyway. Panting heavily, the rifleman gasped a few words.

"Gold, a great vein in the cave! High class rock here, you're a rich man, Injun!"

Crowtak looked at him quizzically. Gold? The gold in the cave was his gun-money. The man must be half dead already. In a moment of compassion, a legacy from his white father, Crowtak smashed the man's skull with the rifle butt, despatched him as he would an animal. Lovingly he rubbed the gun barrel, watched it glisten in the growing moonlight. Now at last he had a gun! Forgetting the hidden money, he slid joyously down the scree amidst a crashing rumble of disturbed rocks. What cared he for gold? All the world was now his!
SOME OTHER GANG

G. E. FOX

They always made a ceremony of saying goodnight to each other as if reluctant to separate even for a few hours. As usual, they shook hands all round, wished each other luck, confirmed future arrangements and as usual the ceremony took place under the portico, with the warm yellow light of the hanging lamps above them accentuating the shadows on their faces. Tonight, there was starlight beyond the colonnade and a blue-black darkness across the countryside.

Apart from the emphatic shadows across their features, which seemed to etch each face into lines of ruthlessness, they looked what they were—three middle-aged country gentlemen, who lived quiet, comfortable lives, each in his own way. Ventnor liked to fish, Vincent liked to shoot and Thomson liked to read. Their friendship had begun on the Western
Desert twenty-five years ago, when as tank commanders they had competed vigorously and often hilariously in hunting down German and Italian tanks. After the war it was inevitable that they should continue a friendship formed under such stimulating and competitive circumstances so Vincent bought a small stud farm near Ventnor’s small country estate and Thomson, who was something of a scholar with the means to indulge his passion for books, bought a raftered cottage in a nearby village and settled down to a study of the classics.

“A lovely night,” Ventnor commented, glancing at the stars he could see through the columns of the portico. “Such a sky takes me back a few years. Those cool desert nights, you know.”

Vincent nodded appreciatively.

Thomson shook his head angrily. “Damn it, Michael! Must you be so bloody sentimental about——”


To change the subject Vincent asked, “Maggie all right?”

Of the three only Ventnor had married and was now a widower with a daughter of twenty-two. At Vincent’s question his face clouded a little. Maggie had left home a year ago to set up on her own in London. “I must do something useful, Father. I’m thinking of going up to London to make a career. Journalism or designing or something,” she had said vaguely.

He had agreed reluctantly, but she was of age to suit herself and she certainly had a point. An intelligent young woman should not be cooped up all her life in the country despite its many attractions. She should be allowed at least a glimpse of the bright lights and the excitement of the city and a chance to exploit its opportunities. Unhappily Maggie hadn’t found London quite so glamorous as she had anticipated and in her letters home there had been occasional outbursts of despondency and lately something more. Bitterness? Humiliation? He could not define the mood of these later letters exactly. He had seen her frequently, of course, sometimes in London, and on her occasional visits home and he had noticed moments of introspection uncharacteristic of her. If she was not happy in London why did she not return home? Was it pride that kept her in London? Was she too proud to admit defeat? He could understand that and refrained from suggesting that she returned.
“Oh yes,” he replied to Vincent’s inquiry. “I don’t pester her with questions about her job. She has the income Anne left her so I don’t worry about her physical welfare.” Why had he said that? Why had he stressed physical welfare as if subconsciously he were troubled about her spiritual welfare? He pushed the thought out of his mind as unworthy. Maggie wasn’t a person to be led astray easily.

“A very pleasant evening, Michael,” said Thompson. “Thank you. My place as usual on Saturday evening?”

“Oh course,” said Ventnor laughing. “Do we ever vary it?”

Vincent held the door of his car for Thomson, lightly resting his other hand on the latter’s elbow.

“Thanks,” said Thomson somewhat ironically, pointedly turning his head in the direction of Vincent’s helping hand.

“Sorry!” murmured Vincent, grimacing up at Ventnor on the steps of the portico.

“How the devil do you squeeze that six foot seven of yours into Vincent’s car, Johnny?” called Ventnor. “Do you curl up like a python?” It was an old joke, but it eased the sudden tension. Thomson was getting touchy lately. Understandable, he supposed, now that age was catching up with them all. The miracle was that Thomson had borne that ghastly war injury so long. For a moment Ventnor saw the erupting, searing ball of white flame bursting from a tank’s turret and Thomson leaping——. He snapped a dark shutter in his mind down on the picture forming there. “Goodnight!” he called and there was suppressed anger in his voice.

When they had gone he returned to his study where the three had spent the evening talking country matters over glasses of his fine old whisky and generally being middle-aged and complacent in each other’s company. He thought briefly of those cold, bright nights on the Western Desert, which the starlight outside had momentarily recalled. In those days they had been young, resilient and tough, uncaring about an uncertain future; now, they were set in their ways and the future was no longer a nebulous uncertainty for they could see it as a formal pattern to the last twist in the thread that ended it.

It was at that moment that he heard the car in the drive. Vincent and Thomson back? He glanced around quickly to see if anything had been left by one of them—a bunch of keys, a wallet, a driving licence—but there was nothing of such a nature to be seen amongst the whisky glasses and the ash trays. His man had gone to bed so he made for the
hall door to open it himself after another cursory glance around.

At the foot of the portico steps was a tiny sports car and Maggie was just scrambling out of it.

"Maggie!" he exclaimed delightedly, but when he saw the look on her face his tone changed. "My dear, what on earth is wrong?"

She ran up the steps, a slim figure in a short coat, bareheaded, her long blonde hair gleaming palely in the starlight like silver filigree. Her eyes were a little wild and she had grime and tear stains on her cheeks.

They embraced quickly without words. "We'll go to the study," he said. "There's whisky there. You look as if you need a stiff one. Then you can tell me all about it." He sensed more than distress in her. There was fear and a terrible need for protection.

Against what? he wondered.

They had never been very emotional in their relationship and he was not unduly surprised when she began without preamble or appeal of any sort.

"Father, I've made a colossal mess of things."

"We all do, Maggie—sometime or other."

"Only some make a bigger mess of it than others. That's me," she said bitterly.

"That's to be seen——"

"I fell rather heavily for a man I met at a party." She saw by his look that he had expected something of this nature. "Oh I know, but you are wrong. He didn't jilt me. I jilted him. He was everything a girl looks for. Good looking, kind, considerate, generous—but they all are, aren't they? At first anyway. I got mixed up with what I thought was just a gay crowd in my bloody simplicity. One thing led to another——"

"You became his mistress?" he asked quietly.

"Oh yes. I don't blame him for that. I was as much to blame. We were in love. Both of us. It makes a difference, doesn't it?" she pleaded.

"Yes, naturally, but I don't quite follow. It's not just a lovers' quarrel, Maggie, is it? These things are soon mended you know."

"I loathe him now. Truly, I promise you. I discovered what he was. They say love is blind. What sickening nonsense! There are some things that kill love—just like that!" She snapped her fingers sharply and angrily.

"Well—so you parted and that was that."

He was relieved it was no worse. It was distressing naturally, but nowadays such affairs were more lightly taken than they had been in
previous generations. He felt pain that his daughter, who had seemed such a child when she left home for London had become so deeply involved with a man of obviously doubtful antecedents, but young people are not very discerning nowadays, he consoled himself.

“Yes, I have finished with him, but that’s the least of my troubles and far from the end of the story. I fell in love. I fell out of love, but that’s not all. His name is Peter Vale, by the way. He runs a night club in Soho.” She lowered her head and for a moment was silent, her fair hair falling over her face slightly so that he could not see her eyes, but he knew there were sudden tears in them, which she sought to conceal from him. He didn’t know what to do or say. His only emotion at that moment was thankfulness that she had returned home. Later, perhaps, he would feel indignation and some self-reproach that he had not foreseen such an eventuality to a young and unsophisticated girl alone in London.

“The night club is a façade.”
Again she was silent as if she were reluctant to go on.
“Some sort of a racket?” he suggested.
“Drugs,” she said tonelessly and in her face he detected distaste and even repugnance. He now understood her complete reversal of feeling for Peter Vale. Nothing could have effected so dramatic a change in her affections for him as the knowledge that he trafficked in such soul-destroying and vicious a commodity as drugs.
“Oh no, Maggie!”
“Everybody does it. It’s—it’s just—”
“Everybody?”
“At parties. It’s a sort of game. Adventure. Something new,” she stammered. “I—I had only a few—of those cigarettes.”
“Marijuana?”
“Nothing else. For kicks if you like.”
“This Vale fellow, Maggie. What about him?”
“That’s it. He says he won’t let me go, Father. I have told him I no longer have any feeling whatsoever for him, unless it is contempt. It makes no difference, he just sneers and talks about my presumably Victorian upbringing. Victorian! Oh I could laugh if it were not all so tragic and sordid. The things I found out. He even boasted that I was his bird—girl and he wasn’t letting me go. He said I knew too much. I suppose that was true though I couldn’t have proved anything against him. It was all hearsay if you like. The police probably would know
as much as I, but even they can do nothing. Not yet at any rate. The people who take drugs won’t talk, the people who sell them—the ‘pushers’ they call them—daren’t talk. I was right in the middle of it and I didn’t realize.”

“We’ll go to the police.”

“No!” she exclaimed with some vehemence. “It wouldn’t help. Peter’s organization is strong and powerful. The police couldn’t move without a long investigation and in the meantime they’d retaliate on me. On you. Peter said as much, quite indifferently, as if it were just a matter of course. ‘You’ll come back if you value your skin—or Daddy’s.’ That’s the way he put it. He’ll come for me and he’ll do things—you don’t know them. You have no idea how clever and smooth and vicious they are. That’s what makes them so terrifying. Oh God, Father, what can we do? They’ll take me back.”

He laughed at that. The idea was so utterly preposterous. He could not imagine anybody presuming they could take his daughter from under his roof without his consent.

“I’d like to see them try! No, my dear, you are safe enough now. Nothing is going to happen to you here, I promise you. I’ll soon deal with Mr. Vale and company.”

“Oh Father, how?” she asked, and her voice held a note of despair he did not fail to notice. “They are so utterly unscrupulous and younger than you. You just don’t understand what we are up against.”

“Am I so ancient?” he asked her ruefully. “Maggie, they just can’t abduct you. And as for threats, we do live in a civilized country.”

“They can force me to return to London with them. They make all sorts of people do things against their wills. Shopkeepers, dance-club owners, bookmakers, prostitutes——”

“You’ve discovered a lot,” he said wonderingly.

“I was Peter Vale’s girl, remember, and his ‘boys’ as he called them began to boast—tell me things—their girls friends talked. That’s how I found out. I couldn’t believe it at first——” Her voice was toneless and yet he sensed her bitterness.

“Well, I’m not a person to be intimidated. I’m no half-scared shopkeeper in a Soho market.”

“They use acid and razors. People who fail to pay gambling debts are beaten, girls who don’t do as they are told are disfigured; they control hundreds of men who peddle various types of drug—mainly to teenagers.”
“As bad as that, is it?” he asked suddenly very grim. “I see. I have heard of such viciousness, but here in the country it seems unreal—fantastic. One can’t really imagine it to be possible. But, Maggie, how on earth did you get involved? Surely these men look what they are. Instinctively one can scent evil.”

“Can one?” she asked. “Do you really believe that? But I was not—as you put it—involved. They—Peter—was so likeable, just a very charming person. He did not show his other side. When it dawned upon me things weren’t what they seemed—when I discovered some of his activities, he just laughed sort of boyishly, and said I was bound to find out sooner or later. Anyway what did it matter. I was one of them now. It was a lie. I was not! Who would believe it though? I was so often with Peter.”

“So you think they’ll come down here for you, Maggie? I can’t believe it, even after all you have told me.”

“Please, Father, don’t underestimate Peter. He’ll come. I’m his property and Peter hates to part with what he thinks is his own.” She said this without bitterness. She was merely stating an incontrovertible fact. “They will easily guess I have come down here.”

He was suddenly angry. “Such vermin should be exterminated! As mercilessly as country people exterminate pests.”

She laughed at his anger—a little satirically. “With hounds and horses or with guns, Father?”

“Can we not?” he said softly. “I’m not so sure, Maggie. A twelve bore is a pretty intimidating weapon.”

“Oh Father, you are hopeless! It sounds so melodramatic. They would laugh at your shot gun. Or the local bobby if you called him in.”

“Well, my dear, perhaps you are right. There seems nothing much I can do.” He was ironical, but Maggie failed to notice his irony for her expression of hopelessness did not change. “Go to bed now and forget it for the time being. I’ll think of a way to deal with these gangsters. Please trust me, Maggie.”

“I do—that’s why I came back—but—”

“No ‘buts’. I promise you they will not take you back to London.”

“And no twelve bores?”

“My dear, I haven’t a shot gun in the place. My hobby is fishing. Maybe I could try a rod and line on them.”

She regarded him dubiously for a moment, a little disapproving of his levity. “They are younger than you, Father, don’t take it lightly.”
“Sorry! I see your point. Indeed, what good would a middle-aged gentleman, slightly thick in the waist, be against a mob of tough youngsters? Off you go to bed. Sleep on it and leave me to work something out. I am not a complete idiot you know, Maggie.”

“But you are a middle-aged gentleman and you are not dealing with gentlemen,” she retorted with a slight hysteria in her voice.

“So I am, but not so long ago I knew some quite ungentlemanly tricks. I think in an emergency I could be quite unscrupulously ungentlemanly,” he said dryly, and after a moment added whimsically, “without much personal risk.”

Unsmilingly she said goodnight. Immediately she had left the study he made two telephone calls and within the hour Vincent and Thomson were back. When they left, the dawn was streaming across the countryside, paling the portico lamps and causing the columns to glow sultry red as if they had cores of dull fire. The three friends all looked rather grey about the jowls, but their lips were thin and taut and their eyes as cold as the dawn around them. Ventnor shivered a little as he looked at the grey faces and taut mouths of his friends. It was an expression he knew well, from days long past. Strange that he had never lost that feeling of awe—almost bordering on dread—at that pitiless coldness he could see in men’s faces on certain occasions. That he knew his face and eyes were set in a similar relentless expression added only to his awe.

It was mid-morning when they came. When Adams, Ventnor’s man, announced “Three young men to see Miss Maggie, sir,” he requested they be shown into the study. Maggie was in her room and he told Adams to inform her of the visitors and on no account to come down.

“You didn’t tell them she was in the house?”

“No sir. I merely said I would inquire if she was about. To tell you the truth sir I wasn’t sure of them. They are well-dressed, but—well a bit too cocksure if you follow me, sir.”

“Quite, Adams. Please be emphatic with Miss Maggie. She has on no account to leave her room unless I send for her.”

When he entered the study he found the three sprawled negligently in chairs smoking and chatting as if they had established themselves in the house on terms of intimacy. None of them stood up on his entry.

“I know who you are,” said Ventnor. “We’ll cut out formalities.”

“Suits us,” said the one he assumed was Vale, a dark, self-assured young man of about twenty-three or four. He was good looking and
his smile had an insolent charm. Girls would fall for him, thought Ventnor. He recognized the type, for war brings such youngsters to the fore—unscrupulous, daring, not giving a damn for such niceties of behaviour as generosity to a beaten enemy, arrogant, self-sufficient and with no loyalties except those imposed by expediency and circumstance. The other two were big and athletic looking, one blond almost to whiteness, the other bald as a bat. Their eyes were remarkably alike—pale and concentrated like the eyes of a hunting stoat. They regarded him insolently, assessing his thickening figure and greying hair with contemptuous disparagement.

"You are Daddy," said Vale with calculated impertinence.

"Colonel Ventnor to you! You, I presume, are Vale?"

"You presume right, Colonel Daddy. We've come to take Maggie back to London. You any objection?"

"I suggest you go before I have you thrown out," said Ventnor coldly. He opened the door a little wider and stood waiting. He knew they would not go. Indeed, he felt they knew there were only Adams, his housekeeper and himself in the house to implement his threat. None of them moved, but Vale said in a sardonically reasonable tone of voice: "Of her own free will, of course. I am sure if you were to put it to her, she would have no objections. Where is she, by the way? I rather expected her to greet me with open arms. We are—er—sort of engaged you know."

There was no point in countering Vale's insolence with anger or useless threats. He must keep cool and make his moves softly and skilfully. He must play them as carefully as he would a particularly wily old trout.

"If it's money you want—" he said, knowing it sounded like the resort of an ineffectual and harassed parent, deliberately misleading them into false premises.

"Money, Colonel Daddy! Why we could buy and sell you a dozen times if this cottage is the extent of your wealth." His two companions laughed ironically. Vale gave them a wink. "No, it's Maggie I want. She is old enough to make her own decisions, I believe."

"Yes—yes—of course," he conceded.

"Well then why try to tie her to your apron strings, Daddy?"

"The point is she doesn't wish to return with you. She has said as much."

"Now isn't that like a woman?" said Vale, grinning at the other two,
who promptly gave loud satirical guffaws. "Why, I guarantee she'd say just the opposite if she were here, right now."

"No, you are quite mistaken," said Ventnor quietly. Now was the time to antagonize them, to put them off balance a little. "You see, Vale, she's rather a fastidious girl. Some things she doesn't like."

"Such as—"

"Vermin. Rats, lice, ticks, pimps, blackmailers—things that crawl about the London gutters. I admit she was taken in with you, Vale, at first."

Vale's face flushed darkly and he half rose to his feet. The other two looked at him questioningly.

"Shall we do him over?" said the bald-headed one with a swift, significant gesture of his right hand towards his inner breast pocket.

"Later, old boy," said Vale softly, his voice full of venom. "We'll find Maggie first. If she's in the house, it won't take long. Then we'll see eh? Go and search, Archie. You too, Len. I'll amuse Daddy here."

"You can save yourselves the trouble. She's not in the house and for your information my man has already phoned the local police. I gave him the order to do so in the eventuality of your paying me this visit. He has asked for the inspector and two men to come over. As for Maggie she is out riding in the coppice you can see beyond the drive and I have no doubt she will ride you down without compunction if you try to molest her. I suggest you take yourselves off. You are wasting your time and mine."

It sounded futile—the sort of half-hearted threatening a weak man might make in an emergency, but that is what he wished them to believe. Vale looked at him derisively. "Would Maggie do such a naughty thing?"

"I warn you, Vale, Maggie would be more than a match for you—all three of you—on a horse."

"Who said we were going into your bloody coppice, Daddy?"

"I am not joking, Vale. Maggie is in a dangerous frame of mind, thanks to you. She despises you sufficiently to ride you down on sight—"

"Is she now? Come on boys let's go. See you, Daddy Colonel sir."

They rose together, swiftly and lithe as alley cats. The blond Archie, with cool effrontery stubbed out his cigarette on the polished surface of Ventnor's bureau and the bald-headed Len deliberately and arrogantly brushed so close to Ventnor as he passed that the latter
instinctively stepped aside. "I'm sorry, Daddy! I just didn't see you," he said as Ventnor half-turned in sudden rage.

Then they were gone. They would not return. That's all that mattered. Ventnor's part of the operation was done; now it was for Vincent and Thomson to take over.

He followed them to the door and from the portico watched their car racing down the drive and heard it stop some little time later at the edge of the coppice. It was a large coppice, criss-crossed with grassy rides, screened by plantations of young trees from the neighbouring fields and lanes.

He waited, his face grey and set, his eyes unwaveringly fixed on the distant trees. Within him was a cold bleakness, which signified neither anticipation nor fear. Often in the distant past he had experienced that emptiness of emotion as his eyes had strained into the dust hazy over the sand dunes of the desert searching for the faint glint of enemy armour, aware that in the long gun he commanded below the hot turret, in which he stood, was violent and sudden death.

He had not told Adams to phone the police, but he had instructed him to phone Vincent giving the information that he had visitors that morning and would not be able to go to Vincent's farm as arranged. Vincent would then know who the visitors were after what Ventnor told him the previous night.

When the shooting started in the coppice he counted the distant detonations. Ten altogether. Somebody was making sure of a sizeable bag. At the end of half-an-hour the shooting stopped and though he stood in the portico another half-hour he heard nothing more from the coppice. Then he went up to Maggie and found her on her bed, white faced and staring blindly at the ceiling.

"They have gone, Maggie. They won't come back."

"That shooting—"

"Somebody shooting in the coppice, that's all."

"Why are you sure they won't come back? Did you go after them with a gun?"

"No. They went an hour ago. I have no gun and I have not left the house."

"Oh," she whispered in mournful indecision. "They won't leave it at that. I was frightened for you, but I did as you said. I would go back if I thought they would harm you."

"They won't harm me—or you," he said reassuringly.
The Chief Constable of the County read through the file with a sour expression on his otherwise pleasant features. The case was a plain stinker. He had had to call in Scotland Yard and that had not pleased him greatly, though he had to admit London had more than an academic interest in the case, which had every evidence of being one of gang warfare between London gangs. Why choose Hunters’ Coppice for it, heaven alone knew! Three men shot dead in the coppice—the effrontery of it, to bring vendetta to his more or less well-behaved territories! His indignation was profound and more so since there was no clue whatsoever as to the identity of the rival gang.

To add confusion to mystery there was Detective Inspector Glover of the Yard with a wild and improbable theory, which never could be proved in a month of Sundays. The Chief Constable lifted the telephone. “Send in Detective Inspector Glover,” he snapped.

“We haven’t got far,” he said when the Yard man was seated. He flicked the file in front of him with mild exasperation. “All this questioning of local people. I grant you, it had to be done but, I ask you.”

“It’s going to get us nowhere, I admit, but it is to my mind the only explanation.”

“Fantastic!”

“Yes,” admitted Glover, “so it is, to you, but I’m an outsider, as it were, and I don’t know these men. My impressions are not clouded over with intimate details of their lives—exemplary lives, I might add. Yours are. I see them as men only, not as friends and associates. You dine with them. You meet them at functions and so you think you understand them well enough to be quite convinced in your own mind they are not the sort of men capable of shooting down three men in an English wood. I believe they are and were quite capable of it, but I can’t prove it.”

“Go on,” said the Chief Constable. “I see your point. As you say I know them and like them and I cannot possibly see them engaged in a gun battle with three London gangsters under any circumstances. To begin with they are all middle-aged gentlemen and—well proceed. We’ll see if you can convince me.”

“Well, let’s start with motive.”

“Excellent idea,” said the Chief Constable slightly satirical. “Vale and the girl!”

“Not so good.”

“No? Vale we know about. We are only biding our time. The girl?
She was Vale’s girl—mistress probably. Vale was not the sort of man Ventnor would wish to have associating with his daughter and, as a matter of fact he was perfectly frank about it. He told me of the visit the three men made to him and their purpose. So we have Ventnor with a strong motive for killing Vale, at least. Hadn’t Vale wrecked his daughter’s life, more or less? Wasn’t he determined to have the girl back? By force or by intimidation?”

“Ventnor could have appealed to us.”

“He could,” said Glover dryly, “but he didn’t. However, Ventnor never possessed a twelve bore in his life. He was a fisherman. We have no records of his ever having possessed a gun of any sort. So Ventnor—motive, but no weapon.”

He paused and waited for comment from his companion. When there was none he added, “And no alibi! He said he never left the house, but nobody can corroborate this. A point in his favour, I think. If the killings were planned as I think they were, he would have arranged an alibi—that is if he had done the shooting.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“You’ll see, in a moment, sir. Now take Vincent.”

“But why Vincent?”

“There were plenty of owners of twelve bores in the district, but they all had irrefutable alibis except Vincent—Ventnor’s friend. We examined his guns of course. Impossible to say if any had been used recently. They were all immaculate, but any one of his twelve bores could have done the shooting in Hunters’ Coppice.”

“No spent cases?”

“None. Whoever did it, carefully pocketed them. Vincent, I admit, didn’t know Vale or the other two. Swears he had never set eyes on them in his life. I believed him—up to a point. He had never seen them until he saw them in the sights of his gun in a gun battle in the Coppice. He was just the man for it too. The best gun in the district and crafty as a fox when stalking game. Why shouldn’t he have done it as a favour to his friend Ventnor?”

“My dear Glover!” protested the Chief Constable. “A favour to kill three men! This is England, not Chicago!”

“I agree, sir,” Glover sighed. “Weapon, but no motive for Vincent then. But these are not ordinary men—but I’ll leave that for the moment! Now Thomson.”

“Ah Thomson! Now I should be interested, indeed, to hear you
explain his part in this affair!"

"Of course. I appreciate your incredulity, sir, but his footprints were all over the coppice. Behind trees, in soft patches under bushes, anywhere a clever stalker would place himself."

The Chief Constable's eyes had a whimsical look of interrogation in them, which was not lost on Glover.

"Well why not? Why should he not have been there? He was there! There are big men in the county hereabouts, but none so big as Thomson. Six feet seven. Size fourteen in boots of a particularly distinctive make. Those prints were easily traceable to Thomson, but I'd be laughed out of court if I accused him of shooting Vale and company in Hunters' Coppice! But I'll stake my life on it he stalked them in the wood."

"So what do you deduce?" asked the other sardonically.

"Thomson being in the wood at the same time as Vale had the opportunity." He made a grimace of frustration. "But Thomson, being blind, could not have aimed a gun!"

"Or stalked the three men."

"I'm not so sure of that. He reads voraciously in Braille; he gets about with the most extraordinary skill. An intelligent fellow. I'll bet he knows the coppice like the back of his hand. And what does it all add up to? Ventnor has the motive, Vincent the weapon and Thomson the opportunity, meaning that he went with Vincent and helped him with his extraordinary powers of hearing, in stalking Vale and his gang."

"Oh really—three responsible, kindly, quiet living, harmless—"

"—country gents, who once played hell across the Western Desert chasing Rommel's tanks, who collected two D.S.O.s and three Military Crosses, who learnt to kill without a pang of conscience—?"

"Go on!"

"Cool, trained, efficient killers and good friends, ready to help each other in an emergency. You never forget a skill you've learned well—and maybe enjoyed. Men like that have no scruples where an enemy is concerned. The whole battle in the coppice has the hall marks of a military manoeuvre."

For a moment they sat in silence, their eyes thoughtful.

"So what do we do?" asked the Chief Constable.

Detective Inspector Glover gave another long sigh of exasperation.

"So—it was a gang vendetta—just some other gang, unidentified."
She was fully aware of the reason for her inability to concentrate. It was that long illness she'd had a month before.

She was awakened abruptly at six o'clock that morning by the sound of a spade being driven forcibly into hard clay. She listened for a moment, not fully conscious, and when reality finally filtered in she was aware of an acute depression. Her husband was out there in the garden and he was digging again. She didn't have to move from the comparative comfort and safety of her warm bed to know just where he was digging. She visualized him standing at the foot of the garden, coatless, sleeves rolled up in the warmth of the morning sun, and that look of frenzied occupation upon his face.

He'd started digging there only three weeks before, and he worked an hour each day. The soil was hard, pebble-ridden, and he obviously had difficulty wielding a spade, but he never gave in.

At first she'd ventured down the garden and asked about his labours but he'd been non-committal.

"This is a garden, isn't it—only proper that I should dig."

"But a hole, Jules, why a hole?"

He'd made no reply for some time, then as she stood, shivering in the light breeze, "Go and change your vest," he'd advised.

He'd said those same words so often that she was confused. One day, on his instructions, she'd changed her vest no less than three times before the truth dawned upon her.

She was fully aware of the reason for her inability to concentrate. It was that long illness she'd had a month before. She'd never been quite the same person since, and now she wasn't able to understand many things that happened.

Also she'd been to the Doctor to complain about her spells of depression, and what Jules termed her 'hallucinations'. Doctor had given her tablets. "Just nerves," he'd averred. She'd shown Jules the tablets and he'd thrown them upon the fire.

"You'll be better quicker without tablets," he'd promised. "After all,
I’m here to help you, aren’t I?”
She’d looked up at him, big, bronzed, strong in body and mind, and nodded haplessly. She’d wished she could be more like Jules. So powerful, so confident.

She got out of bed, glanced briefly out of the window at his perspiring form bent almost double at his work.

She noted with an alarm she could barely suppress nor comprehend that the hole was very deep now indeed. Then she shook herself severely. Why should a mere hole in the garden frighten her? It wasn’t as if she really believed that Jules was going to murder her and bury her remains there. She’d thought out that prospect carefully some days before and dispensed with the notion as blatant stupidity.

After all, she was not a wealthy woman so he couldn’t hope to benefit by her death, and despite his build and strength, in middle age his face was not a prepossessing one, so she knew there could be no other woman.

She’d decided that it was simply what Doctor had implied—post-illness nerves.

She washed, dressed hurriedly and came down to breakfast. Jules had already eaten and had left her a share of porridge in the double pan.

When he came in from the garden a few minutes later, she looked up from her porridge. He removed his heavy boots and washed his hands meticulously before he spoke.

“I think I will take a rest from digging and start again this evening.”
“Is that necessary?” Her tone was anxious.
“Have you changed your vest?” he demanded.

She nodded. She was bound to have remembered this time as she’d only just come downstairs from the bathroom. She appreciated his zest for cleanliness, but she wished he would not be constantly nagging her about her own personal hygiene, it confused her so. She knew he was about to speak again, and pushing her plate aside, she waited in some trepidation.

“We will go for a nice walk,” he announced, “through the cemetery. We haven’t been there for some time.”

Immediately she began to protest. “We were there only last Friday, Jules. Must we go again?”

“You know we must—and you know why.”

When he went upstairs to change, she began clearing away the breakfast dishes and tried hard to think just why they had to go to the
cemetery. The usual reason was to place flowers upon a grave, but she knew this was not the purpose of their visit.

She plunged her hands into the warm, soapy washing-up water and closed her eyes. Her jumbled thoughts quickly marshalled themselves into judicious thinking. Now she remembered. She was quite pleased with the effort. Really, Jules had been right all along. She could recover all by herself if she tried hard enough. They went to the cemetery for the same reason as they visited the Chamber of Horrors; for the reason they walked up to the highest storey in buildings and climbed the furthest point of cliffs. It was all part of Jules’ plan to rid her of fear—and what did her fears mainly consist of? Death, largely.

“Never be afraid of death,” Jules had advised. “Look upon your ultimate end this way—at the worst it will be merely a beautiful adventure.”

She finished the dishes, rinsed her hands painstakingly, but as she reached for the towel the old feeling of acute depression returned. If only she had a friend to talk with, but Jules had never allowed her to make friends. If she went out he accompanied her, and always to the same terrifying places. If only, just for once, they could seek the solace of a park, or a beach.

Timidly she enquired about this when Jules came downstairs. All the while she spoke her eyes were upon him. She thought she’d never before seen a man so neatly attired, clean-shaven and fresh-smelling. It was a pity his nose was so predominating; his eyes so fierce.

“Haven’t I already explained,” he answered slowly, between large, clenched teeth. “I am taking great trouble with you, Sara. This is a kind of therapy. When we have rid you of your stupid neurosis then maybe we shall relax as you wish.” He straightened his tie. “I have had another idea,” he added thoughtfully, “another means of helping you.”

She tried to speak, but could not find her voice.

“Two ways, actually, Sara. On our walk to the cemetery we will go through the tunnel instead of walking over the bridge.”

She was swiftly jolted into speech. “But, Jules! The tunnel—it is so long and dark. Besides—the trains. And it will be trespassing.”

“There will be no one to see us and we’ll go between train times. Now, get your coat, Sara. Later, I’ll tell you about my other plan.”

Suddenly her legs betrayed her and she sat down heavily. He grimaced unpleasantly and went out of the room, returning with her coat and warm scarf.
He propelled her forcibly along the road. At times it seemed to her that he almost carried her bodily.

When they reached the entrance to the tunnel, he did not go ahead of her, but pushed her through before him. She stumbled onward in the darkness, the cold, dank air rushing into her stiff face, and stirring the tired, grey wisps of hair upon her brow. She moved as in a nightmare, plodding on aimlessly feeling only the powerful thrust of Jules' hand upon her back. Any moment now she was sure she'd hear the ominous whistle of an oncoming train.

When she was almost at breaking point, light penetrated the darkness and the end of the tunnel was in sight. She would have run forward in relief, but Jules held her back. She came into the light gasping painfully, and flung herself upon the bank side.

This had been the greatest trial of them all, but Jules had mentioned something more. As she wondered frenziedly what it could be, her mind formulated a plan. She would be ill again—that was the answer. When she was ill and in hospital she was safe from Jules and his trials of terror.

With this thought in mind, and following the terror of the tunnel, she didn't in the least object to the walk in the solitude of the cemetery. She even found it a soothing experience.

It was only when she arrived home that her nerves threatened to give way. She started trembling violently. She rushed up to her room out of Jules' reach. She thought he might follow and subject her to another of his lengthy tirades about her weakness, but she was wrong. When she was warmly settled in bed she heard his step upon the garden path, and soon the ring of his spade against the hard soil. He'd started digging again.

She had planned her movements carefully for the following day. Jules was up before her as usual, and brought her tea and toast upon a tray. She was about to complain of her illness and demand that he sent for Doctor when he revealed his other new idea.

"A flat?" she said in amazement.

He nodded "I thought a change of house might do you good. I have the keys—we'll go there this morning."

She could hardly believe this piece of good fortune. She had sorely misjudged Jules. He really was considering her after all. A new home—a modern flat. She couldn't object to this. For the first time in years she felt refreshed and energetic. She washed and changed carefully and
joined Jules, as immaculate as ever, in the kitchen. They took a bus to the new building site which was on the outskirts of town. It had been many years since she had been in this neighbourhood. It was changed out of all recognition. New houses had sprung up where derelect buildings had stood.

But it wasn’t at the newly-built smaller houses that Jules was staring. His gaze was riveted upon a high block of flats.

“We’ll take a lift,” he said. “The flat is upon the eleventh floor.” She began to protest but his hand was upon her firmly, and he was dragging her along.

He pushed her breathlessly into the lift. She huddled in a corner as they swept up, floor after floor. An eleventh floor flat! How could she possibly live at such a height? She’d die of fear.

She heard the lift swishing downwards. Jules had one hand tightly upon her arm while he opened the door of the flat with the other. The view from the window was all sky, until he opened a french window which led on to a balcony. At his bidding she ventured timidly on to the balcony and looked down. Her head swam. She could see nothing but a maze of roof tops.

“Jules—I couldn’t! I could never live here.”

“Nonsense. You’re being stupid again. Now what have I told you, woman? You can overcome fear if you try hard enough.” He patted the top of the concrete balustrade. “Climb up there—you’ll see you’ve nothing to fear.”

She recoiled. “Dear God! No—I couldn’t.”

Scornfully he leapt to the top of the balustrade. “Look—I’ll do it, then—you must.”

She watched him, her mouth sagging open as she crouched against the wall, and then she screamed. Suddenly he’d lost his balance and only his great strong hands were visible, clutching at the edge of the concrete.

Her first instinct was to run for help, and then she hesitated. She was remembering the things he had taught her. “Death at the worst can only be a beautiful adventure”. No, she must not seek to deprive him of that final pleasure, even though his screams were rending the air. How could she deny him a venture into the beautiful unknown?

She went forward and smiled at him encouragingly as he plunged into eternity.

A door opened behind her and the caretaker who’d brought them up
in the lift stumbled toward her. His eyes were glazed, his white face stricken.

"I saw what happened—I was on a balcony further along. I've sent for an ambulance. He must have been crazy to do a trick like that."

Seated in the ambulance that was taking Jules' remains to the morgue, she was composed, relaxed for the first time since she'd married. She remembered the caretaker's words and she wondered why it had never occurred to her before.

Of course she was quite sane. It was Jules who'd been crazy all this time.

One thing troubled her, though—that hole in the garden. She could not leave it as it was. She'd continue where Jules left off. One hour's digging every day.

For thee, O now a silent soul, my brother,
Take at my hands this garland and farewell.
Thin is the leaf, and chill the wintry smell,
And chill the solemn earth, a fatal mother,
With sadder than the Niobean womb
And in the hollow of her breasts a tomb

Swinburne.
THE WHITE CAR

DAVID EAMES

The white car used to pass through our village regularly. Some folks tried to make out it had been coming and going for a long time, but this I rather doubt. It just suddenly seemed to exist, a daily feature of our lives.

It was a beautiful car. I can’t exactly remember the make, but it was one of those older, more solid, altogether more individual cars. The name doesn’t matter, anyway: enough to say that it was a thing of beauty and a joy to behold as it sped sleekly down the long hill, across the wide village square and then out again into open country.

Usually the white car passed through some time in the afternoon, so that in a way we almost knew when to expect it—yet somehow we were never quite prepared. There was something almost ghostly about
the swiftness and comparative silence of its journey: no sooner had it
loomed like some mysterious ship on the horizon than with a sigh and
a whisper it had travelled past in a slithering glisten of white light. . . .
Yes, I must say the effect was rather disturbing, even a little sinister.
Where did it come from? Where was it heading? And why did we
never see it make the return journey?

It was when we combined to share our attempts at identification
that we found the matter even more puzzling. For though there were
plenty of us in the village who had seen the white car it soon emerged
that nobody else had ever shared this experience. The farmer who
lived a mile before the village, for instance—he had never seen the car
go by, never indeed.

But we had, all right, of that there could be no denying. There wasn’t
one of us living in that village who hadn’t some time or another heard
the faint, unmistakable whine of the high powered engine—who hadn’t
leaned out of a window just in time to see the white shape gliding past.
Mr. Curnow, the butcher, had seen it—so had Mr. Hocking, the grocer,
and Mr. Andrewartha, the baker—so had Miss Parsons, the school-
teacher, and Mr. Richards, the postman, and Mrs. Jenkins, at the
sweetshop.

So had I and a dozen others—and so, especially, had young Tilly
Pascoe, the only daughter of the village postmistress. Tilly was rather a
sad case, something of a worry to us all—a young girl with all a young
girl’s yearnings for love and friendship—but doomed to disappointment
by a hare-lip and a face that was somehow almost painfully ugly.
She was only too conscious of her defects and kept very much to her-
self, shut up in her mother’s house. It had always seemed that nothing
would tempt her out of this secretive way of life . . . but in some way,
the white car did. Whenever the sound of its approach was to be heard
there would be a stirring in the house opposite us and I would see that
familiar, ugly face pressed against the windowpane, staring out with
strange eagerness. And somehow, more than once, I was struck by a
fact—that at such moments Tilly looked so excited and intrigued that
she became, well, almost pretty.

The white car . . . its mysterious, shadowy outline seemed gradually
to dominate our thoughts. It wasn’t just the car, of course: it was the
driver, too. Nobody had ever really seen the driver any more clearly
than the car—after all it was always travelling at quite a speed. But
we all had formed our impressions of a dark blob of a human being
crouched low over the wheel in the open cockpit. As bespattered such a vintage model, the driver wore a peaked cap and a scarf around the neck, and what with these and the turned-up neck of a leather jacket it would have been difficult to describe the features, even if there had been time to study them. Sometimes we exchanged opinions between ourselves, but we never seemed to agree. Mrs. Jenkins thought it was a fair young man with a moustache, but Mr. Curnow thought quite differently—it was, he said firmly, a middle-aged man with bushy eyebrows. Mr. Andrewartha, on the other hand, thought it was someone even older, an old white-haired gentleman . . . while Miss Parsons didn’t think it was a man, but a wizened old lady, perhaps a witch.

And Tilly—what did she think? It used to puzzle me, because in some way I felt instinctively that she might have the right answer. Perhaps because of her disfigurement and ensuing life of withdrawal she always gave an impression of being not quite as other people . . . almost of another world altogether. Such a person, I guessed, might well know more about the strange white car than any of us.

Once I even tried to ask the girl, but she shut up like a clam. It was only from her frail, worried mother that I gathered that Tilly was indeed quite fascinated by the white car: looked on it almost worshipfully, yearningly, as one might on a knight of old. She waited for the car, one gathered, with bated breath and beating heart.

And so it went on, becoming an increasingly dominant part of our daily experience: the distant whine of the engine sounding a warning note that would make us pause in whatever we might be doing—then the ghostly gliding apparition—and finally the lonely silence afterwards, in which, disturbed, we would take up our lives again.

At least the rest of us would—of Tilly, I was not so sure. Ever since the white car had first made its appearance Tilly had seemed to be a changing person—indeed, perhaps even a changeling. Living in the house opposite, as I did, I could not help noticing the signs—and especially the way in which the plain, ugly girl would seem for a moment to blossom and bloom at the arrival each day of the mysterious stranger in the white car.

“You’d almost think,” Tilly’s mother confided one day, “my girl do be proper hypnotized by that car.”

And indeed, I began to think, so you might. For there could be no doubt that gradually the fact of the white car passing through our village had become the most important single event in young Tilly’s life.
You might have said that she spent all the first part of the day looking forward eagerly to its appearance—and all the rest of the day bemoaning its disappearance. And along with that, so she waxed and she waned—one moment aglow with secret life, the next glum and despondent, uglier than ever.

And still, day after day, the white car zoomed along, swishing through the air, its big ribbed tyres hissing over the ground, its long graceful form curving across the wide streets. Day after day after day . . . and always, somehow, conveying a curious air of intention, of ultimate purpose.

How would it all end? Somehow there was never any doubt in my mind—nor, I discovered later, among many other villagers—that it would end as abruptly as it began. But I suppose none of us could have been expected to guess just how . . .

It was towards the end of the month, and at the time of the full moon, when we began to notice a strangeness about young Tilly—a kind of uneasy restlessness quite beyond her normal behaviour. Time and again I would look across and see her face pressed against the window pane looking out as if in search of the white car, even when it was not likely to come—still she watched and watched, as if suddenly it had become more important than ever before that she should see it.

And then one day, one extraordinary day, the white car did not appear at its usual time. This was such a strange event that we all of us noticed and commented. Indeed, after a while, we began standing around in small groups, discussing the strange fact. And as time passed, and still there was no white car, we looked at one another uneasily.

Tilly Pascoe, in particular, was very disturbed. I caught glimpses of her in the house opposite, walking up and down and clasping her hands together, as if beset by a turmoil of emotions. Every time there was the sound of a car engine in the distance she would rush to the window and peer out hopefully . . . only for her look of anticipation to fade into disappointment as some ordinary, humdrum vehicle went by.

Four o’clock, five o’clock, six o’clock, seven o’clock . . . I think we had all of us begun to give up thoughts of the white car by then. It was dusk, too, a strange twilight hour when everything acquired an air of mystery and foreboding.

And then, far in the distance, we heard it—the familiar faint whine of the white car, coming down the long hill towards the village. Look-
ing up and out into the duskiness it was just possible to make out the faint white speck, at first tiny on the horizon, then looming larger and larger.

It is difficult now, in the comfort of retrospect, to recapture the heightened atmosphere. Perhaps in some way we were all overwrought, and perhaps this has coloured our memories. But it did seem to me, and to the others, that on this occasion there was an unusually mesmeristic effect about the approach of the white car through the gathering dusk. It was almost as if, more than ever before, it had a deliberate sense of purpose.

And that was the time when, as the white car zoomed down and down, nearer and nearer, the door of the house opposite was flung open and before any of us could make a move to stop her Tilly Pascoe came running out into the road. Perhaps she was caught up in some crazy mood, perhaps she really was hypnotized by the approaching white car—perhaps it was even more strange than that, and she was responding to some deep and primitive call. . . . I don’t know, I really don’t know.

I only know that, all in the confusion of a few moments, the white car loomed larger and larger, until its snarling, zooming presence was there all around us—and at the same time the slip of a girl called Tilly Pascoe ran with arms outstretched as if in greeting—right into the middle of the village square—right into the path of the white car.

It was all over in a matter of seconds . . . yet I still have this curious, vivid recollection of the white car and Tilly seeming not so much to meet, but to merge, almost to become for a moment a single being. . . .

Then the white car had zoomed on, not stopping for a moment, roaring away into the distance . . . and the still form of Tilly Pascoe was left crumpled on the roadway.

She was dead, quite dead, of course. But the strange thing was that on her face was a curious smile, lending her a kind of dignity in death—a smile almost as of recognition. As if—yes, I could not help thinking—as if in some weird way she had at last reached the driver of the white car, had perhaps finally recognized him for who he was . . . the most important person in her life and death.

After that none of us were very much surprised to find that the white car never came again down the hill and through the broad street of our village . . . never from that day to this.
CARTE-BLANCHE FOR MURDER
ERIC LEIGHTON

And so it had continued—one thousand, a second thousand, and then a demand for a third. It was then that he decided to end it.

The tot measure began to gurgle for the third time.

"Steady, Bert, it's a single I want, not a treble."

Albert Weakes, 'Bert' to the regulars at the Little Mayfair, Chelsea, jerked the bottle upright.

"Sorry, sir, I was dreaming."

But in fact Albert had not been dreaming. He'd been staring fascinated at the grey-bearded, loud-voiced man standing among a group of men in the middle of the smoke-laden room. Surely he could not be mistaken—those pale, yellowish-brown eyes, that raucous voice. He'd recognize them anywhere—they were the eyes and the voice of the man he'd murdered twenty-five years ago!

He wrenched his gaze away, took a clean glass from the shelf behind him, poured out a tot and pushed the glass across the counter.

"There you are, sir," he said, with an apologetic smile, "got it right this time, I hope. Thank you, sir."

He tossed the cash into the till and pushed the drawer to.

"Lots of strangers here to-night," he remarked. "That bearded gentleman over there, for instance. Never seen him before."

Bill Sparkes, the rotund, jovial bank manager who lived just round the corner, glanced over his shoulder.

"I know who that is," he said, "it's Trevor Mayne. He's manager of one of those posh night clubs in Piccadilly. 'The Purple Orchid' I think they call it."

At that moment the saloon door swung open and the usual Saturday evening football enthusiasts came crowding in. Albert cursed inwardly. No time now, he thought despondently, to discuss or even think of Trevor Mayne. He'd be kept on the go till long after closing time.

He was right. It was nearly 1 a.m. when, back in his lodgings, he was able to relax and think back on those nightmarish days of 1941. He'd been working for M.I.5. It had been the lunch hour and he'd been sitting on a bench in Hyde Park when a flashily dressed young man
had sat down beside him. Sensing that the newcomer was anxious to open up a conversation he’d carefully buried himself behind his newspaper.

A harsh, raucous voice had said: “Beautiful day. Not often we have it so warm in the spring, is it?”

Reluctantly, he’d lowered the paper. He’d disliked what he’d seen on sight—the shifty, pale, yellowish brown eyes, the smug overbold expression.

“Yes,” he’d said, stiffly, “it is warm,” and had immediately returned to his paper.

At that the stranger had thrown back his head and laughed.

“No use trying that high and mighty stuff on me, Mr. Weakes. I happen to know too much about you.”

Intrigued, he’d lowered the paper.

“What is it you know about me?”

The stranger had smiled, a twisted, secretive smile.

“Interested, eh? I’m not surprised. But first let me introduce myself. Trevor Todd, a photographer by profession. Until a week ago I shared a flat in Bayswater with a Pole, a chap by the name of Petrovski. Like most foreigners he was a bit careless with his papers.” He’d dived into his pocket then.

“Take a look at that, for instance. Keep it, if you like. I’ve another copy. And if you think of stalling until you’ve contacted Petrovski, forget it. He’s vanished and you’ll never find him in time.”

He’d looked down at the document, a photostat copy of one of his own Top Secret reports, and a sickly terror had overtaken him. He’d raised tortured eyes to his tormentor’s face. It had grinned sardonically back at him.

“Pretty serious crime, isn’t it—selling information to an enemy agent?”

“H-how much?” he’d asked, his voice, hoarse, halting.

“A thousand pounds,” had come the ready response. “To-morrow, here, at the same time. In one pound notes and no nonsense.”

And so it had continued—one thousand, a second thousand, and then a demand for a third. It was then that he’d decided there was only one way to end the blackmail—murder.

It had not been difficult. Trevor enjoyed a regular Saturday evening session at the Blue Boar in the Tower Bridge Road. He hadn’t a strong head for liquor and five or six pints were sufficient to send him into an
alcoholic stupor. On that particular Saturday he'd waited outside the saloon bar until Trevor had passed out and, when closing time came and Trevor still lay sprawled across the bench at the far end of the bar, what more natural than to give him a lift to his flat across the river which was on his own way home?

To the cheering of the other customers he'd gathered Trevor in his arms and dumped him into the back of his car. But he hadn't dropped him at his flat. He'd dropped him, in the pitch darkness of the London black-out, over the side of the Tower Bridge.

But scarcely had he heard the faint splash in the darkness below than, too late, he'd become aware of approaching footsteps. The next instant the beam of the beat constable's torch had caught him full in the face.

"Hi! What goes on here?"

He'd been obliged to think quickly.

"Nothing, officer. Just getting rid of a sackful of rubbish. The dustbin wouldn't take it."

"Sorry, sir, but that's not allowed. Dangerous too—might have hit somebody. Your name and address, please, sir."

No use arguing—no use giving a false name and address, for the constable had already taken down the number of the car.

Even now he sweated at the thought of the agony which he'd suffered as the circumstantial evidence of murder had piled up. The identification of Trevor's belongings recovered during the dragging of the river. The Counsel for the Prosecution who'd stressed the childish absurdity of his explanation about a sackful of rubbish which nobody had seen and which he could have left by the dustbin if the dustbin had been full, which, in fact, it wasn't.

The inconsistency, not to say inhumanity, of abandoning a man whom he claimed was a friend in a blacked-out London street, knowing that the man was drunk and incapable. The man from M.I.5 who'd established his frequent contact with Petrovski, and the discovery in Trevor's flat, which Trevor had once shared with Petrovski, of several photostat copies of secret M.I.5 documents. And finally, the bank manager who'd confirmed that the numbers of the fifty brand new one-pound notes, which the police had seized from Trevor's safe, ran in sequence and corresponded to the numbers of those which the bank had included when encashing the prisoner's second cheque for one thousand pounds.

It had not been until the Summing Up that the first glimmer of hope
had come, when the stern, poker-faced Judge had stressed the one missing link in the chain of evidence—the failure to recover Trevor's body, raising a strong element of doubt about his actual death. And finally, the exquisite relief when the jury had brought in a verdict of NOT GUILTY.

It had been in the subsequent trial for espionage that he'd received a seven years' sentence, but exemplary conduct had secured him two years' remission of sentence and, on release, a job as an assistant barman.

And now, at the age of fifty-one, he'd come face to face with Trevor Todd, the man responsible for all his misfortunes. Then a thought came to him. Hadn't he read it in some law book? Seen it repeated in novels? Yes, he could remember distinctly—a man couldn't be prosecuted for the commission of an offence for which he'd already been tried and convicted. And he, Albert Weakes, had been tried for the murder of Trevor Todd and acquitted!

A thrill of anticipation raced through him as he pondered on the possibilities of the situation! He licked his lips. He'd no need to kill silently, secretly. He could have an audience—the bigger the better. He'd make history—headlines in the press, the man who committed murder, with malice aforethought, and yet couldn't be touched by the law! God, what a lark! He laughed, a shrill sound.

But no, he mustn't laugh—at least, not yet. He must think, plan. . . .

Place? That was easy. Trevor's own night club. Time? On a crowded Saturday night. That would create stir enough, wouldn't it? His eyes gleamed.

But there must be no mistakes. He must make quite sure that the man he'd seen in the Little Mayfair was Trevor Todd. The voice, the eyes, the mannerisms were all there, but these weren't enough. He must have proof. He must see the scar which streaked down Todd's left forearm—the scar which he'd noticed as Todd was disporting himself at the open-air swimming bath just outside Harrow, on the day he'd left the second thousand pounds in the cubicle in which Todd had changed.

But how to check on the scar now? He could hardly invite the man for a swim—ask him to bare his arm. . . .

Ask him to bare his arm? Well, no. Perhaps nothing quite so blunt as that. But at least he could challenge him face to face with his real name, hint at the scar, and watch his reactions.

He chose a Saturday evening to make his call at the night club. A
be-medalled, moustachioed commissionaire eyed him suspiciously as he approached.

"Yes, sir," he said, thrusting out his chest in typical ex-sergeant-major fashion, "what can I do for you?"

"I want to see Mr. Mayne if he's in."

"He's in, sir, but very busy. Have you an appointment?"

"No, but I'm an old friend of his and, as I'm here in London for the day only, I thought I'd drop in and see him. I won't keep him more than a minute. The name's Weakes, Albert Weakes."

After a moment's hesitation the old soldier said: "Very well, sir, if you'll wait here, I'll have a word with Mr. Mayne."

His luck held. The commissionaire reappeared smiling.

"This way, sir."

He followed him through a long passage, down some steps and into a dimly-lit room. Dodging waiters who, coatless, their sleeves rolled up, were flinging tablecloths over the bare, wooden-topped tables, they stopped before a door marked 'private'. The commissionaire opened it and ushered him through.

"Mr. Weakes, sir."

Trevor Mayne, tall, spruce, looked up from his desk. There was curiosity but, he noted with disappointment, no spark of recognition in the pale, yellowish-brown eyes as he shook the delicately manicured hand.

"Please take a seat, Mr. Weakes. I'm told I know you. But forgive me, I can't recall ever having seen you before."

Learnt something, haven't you, he reflected, since those early days. Quite the gentleman, in fact. But the harsh voice, the abrupt manner and the short-clipped sentences were the same.

"That's hardly surprising, is it, Trevor, after all these years? Though I must confess you haven't changed much—except for your manner and that beard, of course."

Immediately he sensed a sudden awareness in the other's expression. He waited, deliberately not speaking. He watched with growing satisfaction as the delicate fingers began to fidget with a ruler.

"So I've changed my name, have I? How very interesting. Tell me more."

Albert smiled.

"Yes, Trevor, from Todd to Mayne—sounds more glamorous that way, doesn't it?"
The alarm which he’d hoped for didn’t show on the bearded face. But that, after all, might be bluff, a piece of good acting.

“Todd. Todd? The name means nothing to me.”

“Then,” Albert retorted, staking his all on the final throw, “pull up the sleeve on your left arm and I’ll believe you.”

In that moment he knew he’d won. There was no mistaking it—fear, crude and stark, had stared momentarily from the yellowish-brown eyes. The hand, too, which had strayed involuntarily to his left arm, was trembling violently. There could be no doubt now—the man seated in front of him, who called himself Trevor Mayne, was, in fact, Trevor Todd, the man with the scarred left arm, the blackmailer on whose account he’d narrowly missed the gallows!

He knew now what he’d come to find out. He stood up, hat in hand, and was about to move away when Trevor halted him, his voice urgent.

“One moment, Weakes. Can’t we come to some arrangement before you leave? How much do you want?”

He hesitated. Yes, he’d thought of blackmail. He thought of it again now. Should he demand two thousand pounds, plus? After all, it would only be taking back what he’d already paid out. He was sorely tempted. But what if the police discovered the blackmail in the course of their investigations into Trevor’s death? Although Trevor, the chief witness, would be dead, the Crown might prosecute on their own initiative and once again he’d find himself in jail. Besides, if he put too tight a squeeze on Trevor, the latter might well kill him. No, he couldn’t risk it. Blackmail was too dangerous. He must concentrate on killing Trevor—killing him without risk to himself.

“I’m no blackmailer,” he said, contemptuously, “and I want nothing from you.”

He moved towards the door, but Trevor was there first, standing with his back to it, a wild look in his eyes.

“For God’s sake, listen. Don’t go to the police. I’ll give you anything you ask. . . .”

“Don’t worry, Trevor, if it’s any comfort to you, I’m not going to the police, now or ever. I don’t need to.” He paused, suddenly recollecting that he must have access to the night club. “But, yes, on second thoughts, I will take something from you—a membership card for this club and free drinks whenever I choose to turn up.”

Trevor stared a moment, then, without a word, took a card from one of the drawers in his desk and looked up, pen poised.
“Your full name, please.”
Albert laughed.
“Always the bluffer, weren’t you, Trevor? But I’ll humour you. It’s Albert Geoffrey, and Weakes with an ‘a’.”
“Thanks,” he said as he pocketed the card.

As regards method he’d never been in doubt. In his younger days he’d been a crack shot with the revolver and his eyesight was still good. There was no hurry. He found a stand-in for his job at the pub. He joined a rifle club, applied for an arms’ licence and, after some difficulty, obtained one. He purchased a short-barrelled .38 Webley with a wooden butt. He practised assiduously until he’d acquired all his former accuracy. He then visited ‘The Purple Orchid’ on three consecutive Saturday nights and acquainted himself with the routine. On these occasions he’d frequently seen Trevor peering at him with a cool, calculating look. The look somehow unnerved him—made him feel anxious about his own safety. He was glad, therefore, when the night for action arrived.

He was seated as usual at the table reserved for him. A waiter had brought him a bottle of his favourite champagne and filled his glass. But to-night he left the drink untouched. At midnight came the familiar roll of drums. The lights went out. The spotlight flashed and more than a hundred pairs of eyes focused on Trevor Mayne as he mounted the three steps which led up to the revolving stage. They saw him raise the microphone to his mouth, heard him say: “Ladies and gentlemen, it give me great pleasure to introduce the famous, inimitable . . .”

Came a sharp explosion and every man and woman watched spell-bound as Trevor swayed, toppled forward and fell with a thud, shattering the microphone beneath him.

A stunned silence followed, then panic set in. There was a mad scramble for the exits. Albert alone stood motionless, gun in hand, smiling, straining his eyes in the semi-darkness. Suddenly he glimpsed the shape of a man rushing towards him. But too late. In the same split second a low, vicious tackle hurtled him to the floor. His head struck the side of the stage. His eyes closed. He heard, as from a great distance, the tramping of feet, a woman’s scream. Then he heard and felt nothing.

When he came to, he found himself blinking into a blurred, moon-shaped face. The face withdrew. He heard its owner say: “He’ll be all right now, Inspector. Slightly concussed, that’s all. Nothing serious.”
His vision was clearing now. He recognized the room—it was Trevor’s office. A tall, sombre-looking stranger was seated at the desk. He was saying: “Thanks, doctor, show your card to the constable at the entrance and he’ll let you pass. I’ve got your name and address in case you’re wanted.”

As soon as the door closed, the Inspector strolled over to Albert and laid a hand on his shoulder.

“I’m Inspector Shale of Scotland Yard and I arrest you, Albert Weakes, for the murder of Trevor Mayne alias Trevor Vaughan. I must warn you that anything you say will be taken down and may be used in evidence.”

Despite the excruciating pain which stabbed at his temples Albert felt happy—elated even. He laughed.

“I’m afraid you’re wasting your breath, Inspector. You’ll use nothing in evidence whatever I say. What’s more, you’ve got the alias wrong. It’s Trevor Todd, not Vaughan. I should know, shouldn’t I? You prosecuted me for killing him in 1942. Fortunately the jury had more sense than the police. They acquitted me.”

He paused to allow the full implications of his statement to sink into the Inspector’s brain. But the Inspector obviously wasn’t very bright. No light of understanding appeared in the sad, grey eyes—only a look of puzzlement.

He smiled, a pitying, condescending smile.

“Don’t they teach you law at Hendon?” he sneered. “Don’t you know that a man, once acquitted, cannot be tried again for the same offence?”

The Inspector nodded.

“That’s so,” he agreed. “You, for example, couldn’t be tried again for the murder of Trevor Todd in 1942. But this isn’t 1942—it’s 1967. In any case, what makes you think the name’s Todd?”

Despite himself Albert felt a queasy sensation in the pit of his stomach. What the devil did the Inspector mean? ‘This isn’t 1942—it’s 1967.’ Had the law been changed or what? He began to sweat. His voice rose hysterically.

“The scar, of course. The long crimson streak down his left arm. He wouldn’t show it to me—toofrightened. Didn’t you notice it?”

The Inspector shook his head.

“No. Can’t say I did. Which is not surprising because there isn’t one. Just three tattoo marks—three little cobras with their hoods spread,
their heads reared.”

Albert’s hand strayed to his throat.

“Cobras . . . cobras . . .” he repeated, stupidly.

“Yes, cobras. That’s how we identified the dead man. Trevor Mayne alias Trevor Vaughan. Tattooed in France in 1939 and wanted since 1948 for bank robbery with murder. Confusing, isn’t it? But every man has his double somewhere—or so they say.”

He paused, laid a firm hand on Albert’s shoulder.

“But what’s in a surname, Todd or Vaughan? The charge would have been the same—murder. I arrest you, Albert Weakes, for the murder of Trevor Mayne alias Vaughan, and I must again warn you that anything you say . . .”

But Albert said nothing. He fainted.

O world invisible, we view thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

FRANCIS THOMPSON.

That a lie which is all a lie may be met and fought with outright,
But a lie which is part a truth is a harder matter to fight.

TENNYSON.
Husband and wife approached the white wicket gate and paused to drink in every aspect of the picture book dwelling before them. The flagged path edged with alternating clumps of lavender and Mrs Simkins pinks led to a porch whose shoulders were bowed down under the purple profusion of a Jackmanii clematis.

“This must be it, Ron, the name is on the gate, Tilly’s Cottage. What a gem and how can the owners bear to part with it.”

The cottage walls were colour washed in the pink so common on the Norfolk Suffolk border, the thatched roof sat like an immense straw hat over the leaded light windows peering out beneath it. Two or three elderly apple trees, their branches knotted in arthritic permanence, graced a small lawn. Unpruned rose bushes were a blaze of undisciplined blooms and there was an air of luxuriant blossoming of tree, bush and plant.
“Soon get this little lot under control,” said Ron, a keen gardener, “let’s go in.”

Coming from a town Ron and Maple Prescott were so entranced at the prospect of owning such a property they failed to observe how eager were the vendors to lower their price and meet every demand with acquiescence. How enthusiastically they pointed out the ingle-nook fireplace, the massive beams, the genuine Norfolk oven in the kitchen, the oak floors and even the advantage of having a well in the garden for drinking water and not having to rely on the flat liquid fluoride from the mains.

Six weeks later the Prescotts moved in. Ron worked in Ipswich, twenty miles away, and left each morning at eight. Maple worked all day setting the cottage to rights and slept at night as never before. Such industry soon reduced chaos to order and the tempo of her life slowed down to that prevailing in the village. Less tired, she no longer relaxed in dreamless slumber but was awakened one night by the noise of a baby crying. But the early morning sunshine made her think she had imagined it for, after all, the nearest house was a good quarter of a mile away. The next night, though, and the next and the next, she woke to a baby’s cry. Sometimes it was crying lustily and would stop suddenly in the midst of a good yell, sometimes it seemed the feeble cry of a sick infant that would tail off to a whimper. When she mentioned the disturbance to Ron he only laughed.

“Imagination, darling, you’re not used to the quiet of the countryside. Probably a night jar or owls hooting or a fox barking.”

Maple was not convinced by this unconcerned reply and when she went down to the village and asked whose baby or babies she had heard crying, and learned there were none within earshot of the cottage she felt a slight prickling of the scalp. Nor was the look Mrs Churchyard, postmistress-cum-general shopkeeper, gave her reassuring.

“She must have thought I was bonkers, Ron,” she told her husband that evening.

“So you are sweetie. Noises in the head and all that. Forget it.”

How could she forget it when the baby continued to cry and she lay awake hour after hour pondering the cause. One night of brilliant moonlight she got out of bed to see the full glory of the harvest moon hanging on the sky like a golden medal. The silent earth lay gilded beneath it but when she looked down into the flower-filled garden there was someone moving about. Clad in an old-fashioned gown of some
sprigged material, a shawl about her shoulders and wearing a lilac print
sun-bonnet a small bustling figure came from the well towards the cot-
tage. She looked up at Maple, smiled and disappeared. The inclination
to wake Ron was strong but, he would never believe her for the garden
was now still and deserted. In any case he woke full of plans for the
garden and could talk of nothing else.

"Go down to the village, darling, and see if anyone can rustle up a
handyman of some sort."

Maple welcomed the idea hoping that in some friendly villager she
would find one to corroborate her certainty that the cottage was
haunted. Poor Maple, a Londoner by origin, she had much to learn of
the cautious, reticent East Anglians. She met no one who looked as
if they would welcome a confidence or dispense sympathy. She was a
"furriner" and treated as such. Disheartened, Maple returned to the
cottage still bearing her unshared burden and was pleasantly surprised
to find a possible handyman awaiting her.

"Thort yow’d cum arter me or Oi’d a cum afore."

"Who are you?" demanded Maple of the pale, undersized man be-
fore her.

"Name o’ Joe. Worked in this little owd gardin many a time fer them
as ’as ’eard ’em."

"Heard who?"

Joe looked up from under his bushy eyebrows towards the garden,
and continued in his broad Suffolk dialect:

"The little ’uns a-cryin’. Oi niver cum’s fer them as don’t hear ’em.
T’int likely. ’Tis wimmenkind wot ’ears ’em. Fare tear the ’eart out o’
’em. Happen it dew ter yew tew?"

"I don’t know what you are talking about. Who are you and where
do you come from?"

"Hereabouts and me name is Joe same as Oi said. A rare owd muck
this gardin be in. The last lot niver stayed more’n three months. But
then folk niver dew once they’ve heered the childer. Gotter name fer
bein’ haunted."

"Do you think so?"

"Shouldn’t wonder seein’ as ’ow ’twere a baby farm nigh on a hun-
dred year ago. Kep by Martha Fisk but everyone knowed ’er as Ma
Fisk."

"What did she look like this Martha Fisk?"

"Comely, tha’s wot she wor, comely wi’ a pretty face and a cowd
heart. Always wot a sun-bonnet, winter an’ summer, colour of lilac. Reckon she mus’ ave loiked tha’ colour.”

“What was a baby farm?”

“Place where folk ’ud put their babies, them as ’ud cum aw’ard like. The mawthers ’ud bring ’em an’ long as they sent money reg’ler Ma Fisk ’ud look arter ’em well enough. But if the money stopped a-cumin it ’twere down tha’ well or smothered wi’ a piller, she won’t partickler.”

Though cold with horror at the gruesome tale the funny little man was unfolding Maple felt compelled to seek further information.

“What about the law and the police? Surely there was some control over such a place?”

“Wot, them perlice cum twenty mile out from Ipswidge. There’d be noobbut Ma Fisk who knew ’ow many babies she ’ad and she’d not ago tellin’. Chance time some Guardian from the work’us might drop on tev ’er if ’e were passin’ but she knew ’ow ter deal wi’ ’em. A-smilin’ and a curtseyin’ aah she wor artful and wicked with it.”

“What happened to her in the end?”

“She vanished. Jest like one o’ they conjurin’ tricks.”

“You can’t expect me to believe that. I don’t . . .” the rest was drowned by the roar of a squadron of jet aircraft which, trailing plumes of smoke across the sky, zoomed away seawards.

“Really those jets from the U.S. air base get noisier and noisier, they should not be permitted to fly so low.”

The pallid little man affected not to observe the passing aircraft though his eyes slid in the direction of her accusing finger following the jets.

“Oh arn’t a-goooin’ ter work fer them as is disbelievin’ of me. Good day ter yer, Ma’am.”

“No need to take offence like that,” said Maple nervously fearing Ron’s wrath if she allowed anything so rare in 1968 as a handyman to slip through her fingers. She turned back from watching the dissolving smoke lanes only to find Joe had taken himself off.

“There one minute and gone the next,” as she later explained, “and all in a huff.”

“Not to worry, like as not he’ll be back. Probably wanted to be first in with the village bogey woman. You put his back up,” laughed Ron.

“Do you think it really was a baby farm?”

“Could have been. Plenty about in those days. Find out from the
village, or ask the postman. He's old enough, heaven knows, to have been one of them."

The postman, though old, was taciturn. "Afore my time," was his contribution to the enquiry. Nor was the visiting Rector from the larger neighbouring parish more helpful.

"Better not to think of it, Mrs Prescott. Records clearly show there was a baby farm here in the last century and obviously run on very irregular lines but there, it was all a long time ago and is best forgotten."

"But Martha Fisk, what really happened to her?"

"We shall never know, alas, for her sudden disappearance was never explained. Let us hope that somewhere she had Christian burial, and repented of her ways," he added piously.

Maple Prescott wished she had never heard of Tilly's Cottage. Ron, on the other hand, fell more and more in love with the place and, with the blindness of love, was unaware of the nervous strain imposed on his wife.

"Tilly's Cottage don't never hold its owners," she was told down in the village. "You'll not stay long." And when she mentioned Joe they merely shrugged and said. "So 'e's turned up agin has he?" It was all very discouraging. Try as she might to interest herself in a variety of subjects or tire herself out with gardening or housework the babies cried persistently during the night.

Three weeks later Joe turned up again and she welcomed him as someone to talk to. He seemed to have forgotten their last encounter and was disposed to do a little work, in his own time.

"Who was the Tilly this cottage is named after?"

"It were named arter Matilda Twinpenny an' Oi'll telly fer why."

"Tell me then."

"She were the larst person wot saw Ma Fisk alive."

Once again Maple felt a cold prickling sensation, and once again she could not forbear seeking further information from the one person who seemed disposed to give it.

"Tell me about this Matilda."

"She lived hereabouts as a mawther. Strapping wench she wor an' a good looker. Allus good fer a roll in the hay or so 'tis bin said. But she found 'erself in trouble. Lorst 'er job she did up at the 'all."

"Where's that?"

"Gone, 'twere pulled down twenty year agone. She 'ad a baby boy, brought it down 'ere to Ma Fisk and then went orf ter Lunnor. Did
well up there did Tilly and sent money reg’ler fer ’bout four year. Then she went an’ done it again and this toime ’twere a little girl. Down ’ere together they cum and Ma Fisk kep’ the baby along o’ its half brother. Then Tilly fell on hard toimes an’ the money stopped a-cumin. Ma Fisk wer’nt long gettin’ rid o’ the baby but she kep’ the boy cause it was useful. She kep’ the poor little bastard all on a-carryin’ and a-fetchin’, ’ardly give ’im enough ter eat an’ treated ’im shameful. Then one day who should cum down the lane with money in ’er parket and a-wearin’ a new cloak an’ bonnet but Tilly.

‘Oi’ve struck it rich,’ she says, ‘and cum ter take me kids home,’ she calls out cheerful like from the gate.”

“Oh! the poor woman, how dreadful. Whatever happened when she found out?”

“Aah! that’s whativery one ’ud like ter know fer no one niver seen ’em no more.”

“Do you mean to say . . . bother there’s my husband back early. I’ll see you tomorrow Joe and arrange about your wages.”

The morrow, however, found them in London, for Ron had been detailed off to accompany his boss to a convention. Maple found the respite from her baby-haunted nights so blissful that the roar of traffic outside the hotel passed unnoticed. She wished they had never heard of the cottage and dreaded returning to it. In fact she said as much as they were driving back there. Immediately the words were uttered she regretted them remembering how dearly Ron had come to love the place. He made no reply to her remark until they turned into the lane leading to ‘Tilly’s Cottage’ when he said:

“If you would care to live in a nice modern bungalow in a road lined with its identical twin you may get your wish. From here it looks to me as if that is the tail of an aircraft sticking up in the middle of what once was our home.”

He was quite right. A jet had crashed in the garden and sliced right through the cottage which had fallen apart and crumbled like a stale cake. Some American personnel were standing about and the village constable was on guard. He came up to meet the returning owners.

“Afraid this is a rum ’un, Sir. Happened early this marnin’ but the pilot an’ crew baled out safely. The little old cottage is a rare mess but there, like as not you were well insured, and you can depend on the Americans to do the right thing by you. They’ll soon clear away the rubble, then you can build a nice little bungalow and still have a tidy
bit of garden and room for a little garridge, instead of that rickety barn."

Even the sight of all their remaining belongings piled neatly on the lawn and protected by tarpaulins could not dampen the feeling of elation that Maple experienced. There was still the garden for Ron if he wanted it and the constable was correct when he said the Americans would treat them well. Leaving her husband to go over and talk to them she went to survey their remaining bits and pieces. She was just passing the old well when Joe suddenly appeared from the direction of what had once been the kitchen. The sight of his unusual headgear was such a shock she had to sit down suddenly on the well cover.

"Gave you a turn Oi'll warrant seein' me in remains o' owd Martha's sunbonnet. I knowed it 'ud cum ter light someday though the heat did'unt dew it no good."

The little man took it off and surveyed the charred holes and ragged charcoal-smeread edges of faded lilac with approval.

"Nobbut a heap o' owd bones left o' the owd witch though she were plump enough ter 'ave left a bit o' dripping behind her."

"Then you do know what happened to Martha Fisk? Did Tilly kill her?" asked Maple faintly.

"Aaah, she done 'er in an' double cunning' she wore about it tew. A big strong woman wur Tilly an' when she found out about her little 'un and how badly the little boy 'ad bin served, ter say nawthin' o' all the other little innercents she took Ma Fisk an' tied 'er hand and foot to a kitchen chair, gagged 'er and then went out and c'lected a whole heap o' kindling, furze and sechlike an' takin' the little boy ter help 'er. Owd Ma Fisk couldn't move no how but 'er eyes rolled wunnerful.

In mortal terror she wur for she a-knoed what were in Tilly's mind when she saw the faggots packed in the Norfolk overn and set alight. Ter git them ovens real hot take a mite of time, three ter fower hours mebbe. Time Tilly raked out the ashes the bricks wur glowin' red. Then she trussed up Ma Fisk, threw 'er in the oven and shut the door. But first she took the gag off so's she could enjoy 'earin' the owd so-and-so a-screamin' and a-screechin'.

"About fower in the marnin she woke up the little boy an' a-tween 'em they pushed wot were left of the body of Ma Fisk ter the very end wi' a peel, that's wot they allus used fer takin' out the bread and sechlike. Then they bricked up that end an' it still left enough for plenty o' firin' and cookin' should anyone be minded ter use it.
“Then Tilly took the little boy by the hand and though it were still
dark they walked across the fields ter the church. Twere a Sunday
marnin’ an’ she left a note on the church door ter say Ma Fisk ’ad bin
called away sudden an’ left the babies. Then they set out fer Lunnun
an’ no one niver see ’em no more fer no one ain’t niver see ’er cum
seein’ it were wintertime an’ dark by fower in the arternune an’ it were
six o’clock when she’d arrived.”

“How do you know all this if no one else does . . . but, of course, you
were the little boy. Joe, Joe, where are you?”

But there was no sign of Joe and only an old half-burnt lilac sun-
bonnet lay on the grass, and Ron’s voice calling out that a collection
of bones had just been found in the ruins and the constable had gone
to fetch his sergeant.
It all happened so quickly, his uncle called him in that soft tone of voice that made the lad's inside swell with terror.

The house was in a hollow. The road above curved round sharply, like a race track. It was lined with a wooden fence that seemed too flimsy to deflect the snarl of the ever-flowing traffic. Twice in six months cars had crashed into the fence. The last one went right through and down the twelve foot bank, badly injuring the driver. "He won't be the last," prophesied Mr. Gray.

David and his uncle had just finished breakfast. Without looking up Mr. Gray spoke in his very quiet voice.

"I want you to bring the dog and come into the barn when you've finished drinking your coffee."

He got up from the table and went outside. The boy knew something was wrong because his uncle usually called the dog by his name, Jock, a brown-and-white collie, a present to the boy from his mother. His uncle always seemed to resent this. He only called him dog when something was wrong, which, of late, was most of the time.

It all happened so quickly, his uncle called him in that soft tone of voice that made the lad's inside swell with horror. It was Saturday morning, the sun was shining and it didn't seem right to the boy that things should go wrong on a nice sunny Saturday morning.

David got up from the table, took a well-worn leather lead from a hook behind the door and with trembling fingers clipped it on the dog's collar. He took a deep breath and went out into the sunlight. The yard was long hard dirt, where chickens grovelled. At the far end were tumbled down out-buildings.

From the time his mother and father were killed in a car crash twelve months before, his life went by in frightened disbelief, and ever since he went to live with his uncle, that part of his life which should have been immersed in the wonderment of growing up, was now, to him, a sickening mixture of pain and bewilderment.

A big brown hand gripping a dead chicken, which was covered with
blood and dirty feathers was thrust under his nose. He felt ill as his uncle spoke, still in the soft voice as he almost lisped the accusation.

"The dog killed the chicken. I told you what would happen if the dog did anything like this, well he has now, so the dog must die."

"No, it's not true. I'm sure he can't have killed the chicken." But even as he pleaded he knew he would get nowhere, he knew that his uncle had made up his mind to kill the dog and nothing he said or did would make any difference.

His uncle held up his hand to stop further protest.

"The dog must die."

"What are you going to do with him?"

"I'm going to hang him."

"Hang him," the boy echoed the words in frantic disbelief.

"Yes, he will be hung later this afternoon. Hanged for the murderer he is." He reached out and took the lead from the boy's trembling grasp, and almost ceremoniously marched the dog in the barn where he tied him to a rusty hook in the corner.

"You are not to go near the animal, or touch or talk to him, nor untie him," his voice seemed to go higher. "He will hang at four o'clock this afternoon," he announced, as he turned from the barn and walked towards the house.

For the boy the rest of the day went by in an agony of despair. Futile questions tore and cut their way through him, why did his uncle hate him, his own father's brother, why was he so cruel, why did all the people in the village say it was good of him to give the boy a home after the death of his parents? Why, he pondered yet again, was there an uncle but no aunt? He searched his mind in submissive despair as he felt that there was no central part of his life around which others gathered or grew. He was indeed on the edge of a flat world waiting to fall off.

It was almost four o'clock when David's uncle called him into the barn. He had a long rope with him and he motioned the boy to sit in the corner.

"You will witness the execution. It is required." David cried and begged his uncle to let the dog go, he told him time and again that he hadn't killed the chicken, he even went so far as to say that he had killed it himself. His uncle took no notice, but looked curiously at him and told him to sit still and say nothing.

The man seemed to be prolonging things by walking slowly up and
down, talking first to the dog, then to the boy, then to himself, in a low monotonous voice. He slung the rope over the beam and made a loop in the end of it. The boy’s legs weakened, and he felt sick. His uncle untied the lead from the hook. The dog strained towards David but the man held fast and half dragged the wretched animal to the dangling loop.

Suddenly David covered his eyes with his hands and began to pray, silently and intensely. In his innocent, childlike torment he called for his mother and father and some kind of miracle to save him and the dog.

The dog yelped and David uncovered his eyes, then almost without thinking he rushed towards the dog and tried desperately to get the noose from its neck; the man was taken back for a moment, but he picked up the boy and hurled him in the corner. He got up again almost at once and flung himself at the feet of his uncle trying to shield the dog with his body, the man snarled and flung him away again.

“I can see you will have to be tied up,” he pushed the boy into the corner and grabbed a piece of cord, he was about to tie the boy up when there was a terrific crash and a tearing of wood and metal, followed by shouts. The man dropped everything and ran out into the bright sunshine.

The boy saw from the door that a car had once again crashed through the fence, it looked bad this time. The car had already caught fire. David watched transfixed as his uncle raced towards the now blazing car; as he reached it there was a blinding flash and a terrific roar as the car blew up. He saw his uncle almost melt in the fire and smoke.

As David clutched the dog, the events that followed seemed to bypass his mind like the half-reality of a dream.

He remembered voices saying the same old things, about how good his uncle was, and how bravely he died, and how everything would be all right, and that he would be taken care of. He was pleased that everyone was so kind to him, and he was going to be all right, and he was to be allowed to keep the dog, though why there should be any doubt about that he couldn’t imagine. The thing that puzzled him most was that everyone should be so surprised and mystified about the fact that no sign of a driver or occupant of the crashed car could be found.
It was the sale of the Andros collection—the biggest collection in the world. But they did not yet know of my own collection.

Few people can have been more surprised than I was when Peter Andrews left me his entire fortune. I had known him for many years certainly, but there was no tie of relationship or anything deeper than a lasting friendship.

He had come round to dinner sometimes at my small suburban house, and I had quite often gone down to his enormous country estate with my wife and children. We had rarely been to the large, gaunt house he kept in Mayfair; this was usually for the grander occasions necessary to a successful man.

For he was successful, as the whole world knows. Few people have been more so. At school we first met, and at school people outside his home first saw the signs of his brilliance. He was matchless—physically and mentally—and succeeded at everything without exception. But he caused no jealousy; he was so far beyond the rest of us that that was impossible.

No one was surprised when he won a brilliant scholarship to Oxford, but everyone was surprised when he announced that he had decided not to go there. He had been spending more and more time in the laboratories and during his last couple of terms hardly anyone had seen him during his free time.

I was perhaps his best friend, although he was so self-sufficient that this did not count for a great deal, and one day just before he left he told me that he had made an invention that would completely revolutionize the electronics industry. A prophetic glint gleamed in his eyes as he told me that he knew he would be rich and successful, controlling thousands of people and millions of pounds. What he wanted me to know was that, however unapproachable he might appear, I should always be sure of a welcome and his friendship.

I suppose that even then he had realized what isolation occurs at the top. No one needs to be told now how successful his invention was,
nor how rapidly Andrews Electronics became the largest business organization in the world.

Despite Peter's words, once he had reached the goal he had set for himself I never did dare to contact him and I was therefore all the more surprised to receive a telephone call from him one day some ten years after we had left school.

I had not been successful. I had gone into accountancy and I had hardly passed my finals when Peter was a world famous and respected figure. I was obviously flattered by his contacting me and by his telling me that it had taken his secretary three weeks to track me down. He really had wanted to renew contact.

I told him that I was married and that Susan was expecting our second child, so she was unable to come when he asked us round to dinner at his town house. I went, however, and was surprised to see that no one else had been invited.

At first I thought that he had not invited anyone else because he would have been ashamed of me in front of cabinet ministers, company presidents and the rest of his friends, but I soon realized that, on the contrary, he wished to be alone with me and talk about intimate, personal matters.

Naturally we started talking about people we had been together with at school; Peter had lost contact with them all, and inquired with an insatiable interest after those that I knew. He was not inquiring in order to compare his own success with theirs—his ascendancy was too great for that—but out of genuine interest, and I had my first glimpse of his loneliness. His interest in my house and family was boundless. He asked me what I was earning with the ease that can only occur when two people's incomes are poles apart. I told him and he said he would give me a job at triple the salary. I refused and he looked surprised but he did not ask why or press the point.

Eventually we got onto our stamp collections. We had, remarkably, started collecting on the same day—I forget whether it was my idea or his, probably his.

I had collected haphazardly for the colours and attractive pictures one could find, and for the names of exotic and romantic countries far away. Peter had collected sets and countries methodically, and even by the time we left school he had had a huge collection, perfectly set out on page after page.

We had both continued collecting since then, I did so partly for my
own pleasure, and partly for my little boy who would, I hoped, one day take over the collection. Peter now only supervised his collection and had two permanent advisers working on it. It had become a very valuable investment.

We talked long into the night. He was a fascinating companion and I lost all sense of time. Despite running his business empire he had found time to read widely, to take an interest in painting (his galleries were reputed to house the finest private collection in the world) and music (he told me he had thought of buying Glyndebourne), architecture and history. I was amazed at his learning and culture. I had never seemed to have had enough time to acquire the knowledge of even one subject; let alone the many he had studied.

He came down to have dinner with us shortly after the christening of our second child. He brought a picture with him as a christening present. It had a curious beauty about it but it was by an unknown artist. If nothing else was proof of Peter’s taste and delicacy, this was. We were not embarrassed because the painting would have cost only a few pounds—an enormous gift would only have made us all uneasy—but twenty-five years later, another Joumelle was sold for £205,000.

I think he enjoyed coming down to spend the evening with us—a simple, quiet, rather too suburban, family evening. I did not see him again for about a year but I knew from the papers that he had been abroad much of the time. When he returned it was with a wife.

We were invited to spend a weekend with them at Peter’s country house. Susan was in a state of near hysteria about what to wear, what we should take, what we should say and do.

The weekend was not a success. Peter had meant to keep it free, but had “unavoidably” had to ask some business people along. Susan and I felt ill at ease with all these people who probably earned more money in a week than I did in a couple of years. And Peter’s wife did not make us more comfortable. She was stunningly beautiful, but cold and haughty; she was, it soon became obvious, startlingly intelligent, and was able to converse as an equal on any topic that came up for discussion. I discovered later that her father’s oilfields in America covered an area slightly larger than Wales.

It seemed to be a brilliant marriage, but it hardly lasted a year. Peter told me later that their temperaments had been “mutually abrasive”, and they had separated. They never divorced and a year later, the world had been shocked to hear of her suicide. No one seemed to know
the cause and Peter would never speak of it.

After this, he and I used to see each other quite regularly—or as regularly as his other commitments would allow—about once every three months. I think he enjoyed in my family the domestic peace and content he lacked in his own.

For the last ten years of his life hardly anyone saw him at all. I was no exception and only saw him once. He seemed to isolate himself in his great house and retire from the rest of the world. No one knew why and few—certainly not I—dared to invade his privacy. I sometimes wondered if he did not feel alone. His businesses flourished under the men he had groomed to succeed him, and even they did not seem to communicate with him. Then he died.

After his will had been read, I suddenly found myself to be one of the richest men in the world. Susan and I spent a lot of time looking at the things that had unexpectedly become ours.

One morning I discovered a diary. Susan and I had been going through the house in Mayfair.

"Look, darling," I said, "I've found Peter's diary. Had we better destroy it, or do you think we can read it?"

She looked at it and opened the cover. A piece of stiff paper fluttered to the floor. I picked it up and read my own name! It said, "Richard Carstairs. I shall be dead when you read this. You may decide what to do with it. Yours ever, Peter."

The conventional "ever" stirred me strangely. In the eyes of the world Peter Andrews was one of its most successful inhabitants; in my own mind I knew that there had been something gnawing at his heart throughout his life and I was sure that he had never been absolutely happy.

The diary was a large, fat book with a crimson leather cover. The pages were not printed and he had written in no dates: merely "Mon" or "Tues" at the top of a page. It was obvious from the writing and the content that he had filled in his entries haphazardly over a long period of time.

The first entry was written some time after his separation from his wife. I realized that it had been written one evening after he had come round to have dinner with Susan and me.

"How lucky they are! I don't think they realize how much. They probably envy me. Me! Just because I've got enough money to make a rajah green with envy. But here I am, surrounded with wealth and
servants, and not a soul to care twopence what I do. Would anyone shed a tear if I died tomorrow?

"I am now completely alone. I am not made for marriage. Of that I am sure. And yet I have this dread—this dread of being spiritually alone for the rest of my life. I shall have to look after my health, my brain."

This was the first entry, and it was the first hint of his fear for his sanity. He became increasingly obsessed by the dread of going mad, until there was hardly a thought expressed that did not concern the subject. I began to realize why he had been isolated for the last ten years of his life.

It seemed incredible to me that a man of his brilliance, culture and understanding should have had this obsession, but it became increasingly obvious with every entry. Slowly I began to understand that his obsession was justified, and in his diary it became clear that he, too, realized that the cord had snapped.

After Susan and I had read the diary, we decided to destroy it. We did not want the world to know of the void at the heart and the head of one of its most brilliant beings.

But I kept the last entry, and I stuck it into a stamp book I had had at school, when Peter and I were collecting together. You shall see why.

* * *  

Tues.

I was away! I had escaped! In a moment I had driven through the gates of my park into freedom. My park! My prison!

Oh yes. They had penetrated my guilty secret. They knew I was mad. But they had not bargained for my cunning and my lucid moments. I knew I had to escape today—I could not remember why. Sometimes my brain gets muddled—and I did escape. I outwitted them all.

It was planned with genius. The genius that had made me the richest man in England when I was only thirty. The gates were open for one second and I flashed through.

I half saw the chauffeur run to his lodge. He would tell Hislop the butler. My butler! My keeper! How I hated him. I should like to tear him limb from limb!

He would be behind me soon. Driving my specially built Lamborghini. Who was it who described it as the fastest car in England? The fool. He did not know about my own car, built secretly at my Preston
works. It was faster than the wind!

I slowed down. I would make a fool of Hislop. In a few seconds I saw his hated face in the Lamborghini. Even he did not know about my own car. I saw a sinister look on his face and I knew which room he would put me in that night if he caught me.

If he caught me! Just as he was beginning to think the chase was over, I put my foot on the accelerator. Down, down to the floor boards. I shot away. He could never catch me! I laughed with triumph. I shouted and screamed at the top of my voice. No one could hear me now. They would come in with their ferocious faces and the jacket. How I hated the jacket!

And the last time when Hislop had thrust his leering face into mine and said, "You'll be much more comfortable now, sir." I could have killed him. If I had caught his nose between my teeth—Aagh!

He couldn't catch me now. No one knew where I was going. They could search for me all over England and never find me. Or I could show my face in any big hotel in London. They would do everything I said—they knew my face, but not my secret.

I flung my head back and howled with delight! Laugh! Howl! Scream! I must do it now. When I got to London I would have to control myself. I must not let out my secret. They had kept it well. Be fair. They hadn't told anyone and no one knew. Not even Richard, my closest friend. My only friend! With his simple wife and quiet home. How he must have envied my millions! And how he sympathized when I told him my wife had left me. She had seen. No, she hadn't. I wasn't ... then. Or was I? She had caused my madness. Had she? I can't remember. It's getting muddled. I can't think.

There was a chicken in the road. I pressed the accelerator. What sport if I should kill it! If only it was Hislop! How I should like to kill him. But he was strong. He was even stronger than I at my wildest. They had selected him for that reason. I would give a million pounds to kill him. One million! Ten million! More! What do I want with money? My fortune could buy an Empire!

I entered London. And then I remembered. I knew I would. I am not as mad as they think me. I have my lucid moments. Then all my genius floods back. Or I am sane and have mad moments. Which? I do not know. But does it matter? I can outwit them all. No one has the brains to match me.

I parked near the auction rooms. It was the sale of the collection
Andros. Yes, that was it! The Andros collection. The biggest stamp collection in the world. But they did not know about my own collection. That was in the Mayfair house. Only my advisers and I knew how big it was. Even I did not know its current value! I knew every stamp I had bought, but I had given them carte-blanche. Yes, and they had made me sign a paper recently. What was it? I can’t remember. It was something.

I would buy some stamps. Big ones. Valuable ones. I would add them to the collection. I would show the advisers. They would see them grow in value. I would make fools of them. My judgement was always right. Everything I touched doubled in value. What gulls they were! And how I loved to nod at their recommendations, and then say—No. I’ll do this. And be right! Every time. Their brains could never match mine.

I went in. They all recognized me. I looked at no one and walked straight ahead with my head erect. Oh, how they all grovelled! If they only knew they were bowing and nodding to a madman! To a lunatic!

I almost hugged myself with delight. I could feel the madness bubbling about inside me, but I controlled myself. I wanted to shout and howl. To scream to the moon. But I didn’t.

No one could have walked more sedately forward than I. They all fawned before me. Everyone wanted to show everyone else how well they knew me. How many would kiss my shoes if I told them to!

I saw Richard there. My friend. I did not dare go to speak to him, because I knew that if I did something would suddenly give way and my secret would be out. I looked past him impassively. He did not know that he was the only person I liked—the only person I feared would make me give myself away.

The auction was just starting. I had timed it perfectly. Oh, the cunning of it all!

They treated me with the deference that is my due. And the auction began. A few items were sold—of no real value. I had had some like that myself. I looked on superciliously as if it were all beneath me. I knew that a word from me would close the bidding on any item. No one could compete with my millions. And no one would dare to antagonize me. How puny they all were! With a blow of my arm I could have laid any of them out. And with a word to a banker I could have bought any of them up. Any of them? All of them!

The stamps were sold. Sometimes one by one. Sometimes in sets.
There was nothing new. Nothing I hadn’t got. Even though I hardly ever looked at the collection, I knew exactly what I owned. It was this that had given me my success. My brain. My memory. A madman’s memory! There was nothing I could not remember. No one had ever checked anything I had said—they always knew I was right. How else did I build up my Empire?

I looked around and sneered. What fools they all were! How I’d like to... No. No. I suddenly felt it bubbling up inside me again. I must control myself. I must control myself.

I closed my eyes and clenched all my muscles. Yes, I could do it. No one would know my secret. How I would like to howl! But I must wait. I would wait till the night, and then I would shout and scream until everywhere resounded with my cries.

For a second I thought I saw Hislop! How could he have found me here? I looked again but there was nothing. I was frightened. Was it he? Of course not! I lost my fear and concentrated on the auction.

There was a murmur all round. It was the climax of the day. I looked at the catalogue. It was a crimson stamp from Lithnuria. The subtle shading attracted every eye, and its well-known shape caught everyone’s attention.

I was amazed! I thought that I had the only specimen in the world. I was quite lucid for an appreciable moment. I thought carefully. Yes, I knew I had the only specimen in the world.

I could not be wrong. It must be a forgery. I nearly shouted out immediately, but I controlled myself. I could feel the rage rising within me. I would willingly have stepped up and hit the auctioneer on the head with a sledgehammer. I would buy it and expose them all.

I must be cool. I must be cool. I controlled myself with a mighty effort. I know the veins must have been standing out on my forehead as they do when I am angry. The first bid was made. Another. And another.

The bids were enormous. They astonished even me. Dealers must be bidding for the richest men in the world. Even so, I silently laughed. Who could compete with me?

I decided to bid myself. I bid. The auctioneer seemed not to notice me. There was another bid. I bid again, loudly. Everyone looked around—they were startled. And so they might be! If I bid, everyone else might as well stop trying. The auctioneer looked frightened; he did not know what to do.
At that second a voice hissed sharply in my ear, "Silence!" And added, "Please, sir."

My hot blood turned cold in a second. I knew that voice anywhere. I had seen Hislop! He was here. I did not need to turn. I knew he would be there with his hand in his pocket — on the chloroform pad. Once before in public he had used it and taken me away, saying that I had fainted. Fainted! Me! I could have smashed any two of their heads together like nuts in a cracker.

I would not be put off. Not even he could stop me bidding. I bid again.

There was perfect silence. Everyone looked bewildered. The head of the auction house spoke from one end of the room. "I'm afraid you can't do that, Mr. Andrews."

The bidding continued — ignoring my bid! Mine! My bid! I was furious! I could feel the wildness battling with everything else. In a second I would not be able to contain myself.

I shouted out another bid. It was almost a scream and tripped the preceding bid! Only I could make a bid like that!

And then . . . and then . . . It's going. I can't remember. What happened? What happened? I . . . I . . .

* * *

Peter's diary ended there.

As he had said, I had been at the auction. I had not then discovered the secret of his seclusion from the world. Hislop had chloroformed him immediately and with perfect execution.

"I'm afraid Mr. Andrews has fainted, gentlemen," Hislop had said in his impassive manner. He had then lifted him up like a baby and gently carried him out of the room in his arms. Peter was never seen in public again, and three months later his death was announced.

That evening I had told Susan about Peter's strange behaviour at the auction and neither of us had been able to offer an explanation. It had never occurred to us that he thought it was the auction of someone else's stamps.
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, dear murderer, happy birthday to you. I’ve been humming it all day. It’s my anniversary. Five years since I did in Claude ("Lucky") Anderson, and thereby earned anonymous fame for the Perfect Murder—I always think of it in capital letters. Never once in these five years has the finger of suspicion—let alone the long arm of the law—been anywhere in my direction. Stupid police or dumb detectives? Not on your life—just pure genius on my part. My gimmick was that my victim was totally unknown to me, and there was no motive. Q.E.D. if you know how!

The Perfect Murder had, for ages, been a challenge to me. By the time I was 35, it was obvious that I was going to stay small, bald, skinny, ugly, single, insignificant and unsuccessful. So I knew that in...
order to prove myself to myself, I’d have to do something pretty unusual. I mean I’m not the type who can get lost in Walter Mitty dreams like Danny Kaye. I just drifted into thinking about the Perfect Murder. Not obsessively so, but just gently. As when old Prentis would call me ‘the great lover’ in front of Jill and Joy. I could have killed him (to coin a phrase), but how obvious can you get? You can just imagine the cross-examination.

“Did the deceased tease you about your lack of success with the ladies?”
“Yes.”
“Did it anger you?”
“Yes.”
“Did you resolve to get your revenge?”
No reply.
“I’m sure m’lord and this court would like to hear your answer.”
“Yes.”

This sort of thing wasn’t for me. Old Prentis would die soon anyway. A gluttonous appetite and monumental thirst would see to that. Cholesterol and lack of exercise would do it more effectively than I could, and anyway, he was unworthy of my talents.

On the other hand, I could always have fixed Jill or Joy—or both—but sex murders are so common, so lacking in taste. And, of course, the motive was there in big Neon lights. They were for ever taunting and provoking me, and if they could bend low over my desk so that I could see what was in their bras, they did. No, even though they deserved a gory end, I was not prepared to commit an unsubtle murder. After all, I was playing for high stakes, such as complete immunity from suspicion and “hell hath no fury like a runty little specimen scorned” as the poet didn’t say.

My great advantage was that time was no object. I had no deadline to keep, and I never mean to make these puns, they are just by-products of my unusual brain. But I was always scheming, always gently preparing. I mean, for example, the gloves. You all know the business about fingerprints. I knew that even if I bought a pair of cheap cotton gloves at Petticoat Lane on a busy Sunday morning, as sure as fate some wideawake barrow-boy (and just show me one who isn’t) would remember me, and the Perfect Murder would become the Perfect Flop.

I just bided my time, believing that all things come to those who wait, and then I was presented with an opportunity which can only
come into the ideal class. I went to see the doctor to ask him if he could
do something about my adolescent acne, which had long overstayed
its time, when he was called out of the surgery. On his table was a big
box like a box of face tissues, and in it layers of those thin plastic
gloves, each wrapped in paper. You know the sort of gloves they wear
once and then hurl away. I nipped my handkerchief from my pocket. Helped
myself to a couple, folded the paper coverings carefully, and put them
in my inside pocket. I was gazing raptly at the eye chart ‘H-T-A-R-P’
when the doctor returned. I knew step number one, gloves, was then
safely sewn up, as no overworked National Health quack would have
time to count how many gloves he had in the box on any given day.

The question of victim was of no great importance, except that it
had to be someone I didn’t know. That wasn’t difficult, as I only knew
the clots at the office, and Ma and Pa Clarke where I had digs. No
relations, praise be. I’m a bit anti-social. Meaning that I don’t hang
around pubs calling everyone ‘mate’ and staring at the super-structure
of the barmaids. I am entirely self-sufficient, but I hate jolly holidays
and Christmases. All that goodwill embarrasses me to death.

So the choice of victim presented no problems. I developed the habit
of sizing up the situation. Obviously, bullets and poisons were out—
too crude. I reckon the odds were less than evens of getting away with
them. I toyed with the idea of strangulation because one has to be
something of a craftsman with this method, and, despite looking so
frail, I’ve got exceptional strength in my fingers.

At one time I was crazy to become a concert pianist and used to
spend hours and hours tossing off a concerto or two on the edge of my
dressing-table. For years it was my only hobby. I even went in for
those finger-strengthening springs that you keep in your pocket. I figured
that if I won the pools, the first thing I’d do with Mr. Littlewood’s
lolly would be to get some piano lessons. I never did win, but at least
my fingers were always good and strong. No one knew that I was
Tarzan in disguise, because I’m not the sort to squeeze the daylights
out of a hand when I shake it. In fact, I’m not a keen starter on hand-
shaking anyway. My strong fingers were my own business. So stran-
gulation it just had to be, and strangulation it was.

The only complication—if you can call it that—was that my Perfect
Murder had to take place in the winter because of the gloves. Those
plastic ones that I got from the doctor (surprising what you can get for
free on the National Health Service!) would look pretty stupid on their
own, so I would have to wear them under my leather gloves. I suppose, at a pinch, I could have done the job in ordinary gloves, but there was just the chance that a thread of the fur-lining might come adrift on my victim’s neck or that I might leave my fingerprints on the buttons of the gloves, or something trivial enough like that to get me caught. The margin for error must be nil plus nil. Anyway, I didn’t mind waiting until winter: it gave me a chance to wander into various buildings to see what was what. Actually, I was careful not to look as if I were wandering—mustn’t loiter with intent. I looked as if I had a purpose which, indeed, I had, and if anyone looked at me more than once, I confounded their suspicions by asking that time-honoured question, “Where’s the Gents, mate?”

Eventually it was the thick crêpe soles of the shoes that decided me. Those would not make a sound while he thrashed around. One January evening I was walking down some stairs in a block of offices in Cannon Street, when these shoes passed me—going the same way. My reactions were sharp from all the months of preparation. A quick look round showed me that there was no one in sight. So I slipped off my top gloves, caught up with him, and believe me, the rest was dead easy (those puns!).

I’m no sadist so I won’t regale you with the details. I just left him there where he was, went back down the stairs, not meeting anyone which was what I allowed for. People don’t walk these days. Not even down one flight of stairs. Then I came to the dingy foyer, and in it were about half a dozen people, all minding their own business in typical British fashion (this I allowed for too). I caught an 11 bus home. Then I struck the one minor snag of the entire operation. I planned to put the gloves down the ‘john’. I threw one in and had the devil’s own job getting rid of it. I had to flush the thing four times before it disappeared.

So I disposed of the other one in a manner more in keeping with the general brilliance of the whole affair. I was going to make myself a cottage pie with what was left of Sunday’s beef. I got the mincer out, set it on ‘very fine’ and put the meat with an onion and the remaining glove into the machine. Made no difference to the pie—in fact, I thought at the time that it was tastier than usual.

The papers were full of the murder as you can imagine. The ones that cater for the bowler-hatted brigade gave it front-page coverage but with dignified headlines, and the ‘Daily Chronicle’ had a banner
saying: ‘MOTIVELESS MURDER—THE WORK OF A HOMO. MANIAC? . . . Heartbroken Mum says “Lucky” had no enemies—everyone loved him. The police said they were putting every available man on the job, but that as there was a chronic shortage of personnel in the force, this was not as many as they would have liked. They also hinted that they were in touch with the Soho-underworld. A fat lot of good that would have done them, as I hadn’t been to Soho since those lovely girls were put off the streets.

So time went by, and the whole business was pushed on to the back pages, and then it gradually faded from public sight. No one came near me, and as I wasn’t expecting them to, there was no need to look guilty, and as I hadn’t known ‘Lucky’, I certainly didn’t feel it. After a year or so, the little episode was hardly ever mentioned again until a few months ago when I read an article called ‘The Unclosed Files of Scotland Yard’, and was quite proud to find my murder was mentioned immediately after ‘Jack the Ripper’.

Messy murders loaded with motives seem pointless to me. But to do the job properly gave me the same sort of satisfaction that Leonardo da Vinci must have got when he painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, or that Tchaikovsky got from composing the Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor, which, incidentally, was one of my favourites in the old days of my dressing-table playing. Just as well I got some satisfaction from my masterpiece, as I got none at work. I slaved all the hours there were at dreadfully dull figures, and in the last five years they have given me one rise of seven and six a week, and you’d have thought they had presented me with the flipping Crown jewels when they did.

Old Prentis died (natural causes—overeating as I predicted), and Jill and Joy left to become Air Hostesses with the mostest. Then Sandra and Marlene came in their places, and I did so hope that for once it would be all friendly-like. Nothing funny or anything like that, just friendly. Unfortunately, at the time, my acne had taken a turn for the worse, and when they heard that my name was Richard, they nick-named me ‘Spotted Dick’.

Instead of old Prentis, we now have a loud-mouthed oaf, who can think no further than his next pint. He is called Hogg, and when I’m in a bitchy mood, I feel like telling him he is well named. He bullies me without ceasing—without let or hindrance as the saying goes. He’s still at it, five days a week, 50 weeks a year. He makes my life one long
hideous nightmare. So much so that I am seriously thinking of murdering him, but again the motive is loud and clear, and anyway, why should I demean myself?

Last Tuesday, he came in, and in front of Sandra and Marlene, he picked me out and swore at me beyond belief. “Can’t you do a bloody thing properly?” he asked. “Yes,” I replied, “a Perfect Murder.” But, naturally, he took no notice and swept out. Sandra giggled and said, “Hi there, killer!” Ever since then she and Marlene have kept on asking me things like “Done any more Perfect Murders lately?” and “Is that blood on your sausage roll?” That was quite funny really as I had a big dollop of tomato sauce on it, and it certainly did look like blood. I mean, no one can accuse me of not being able to enjoy a laugh. It’s just that people very seldom joke with me.

Now I have decided once and for all to go to the police and confess. It’s not that I’m guilt-ridden or filled with remorse, but conditions at the office are impossible. A life sentence would be a pleasure in comparison. At least it’ll prove to Hogg and the girls that I’m unique and a perfectionist to boot. I can just hear them bragging away about knowing me. I hope I’m not going to have any trouble with the police. Convincing them I mean. It’ll be nice to go to gaol and to be acclaimed by people who can understand and appreciate my achievement. And anyway, even if I get life, it doesn’t necessarily mean I’ll have to serve the whole sentence. I’ll just have to plot my getaway, which after a murder will be child’s play. Then I’ll be able to claim the Perfect Escape as well.

I mean if George Blake could pull it off, why can’t I? What’s he got that I haven’t, except chums in high places. This escape lark only needs planning, patience and my kind of superior intellect. I’m absolutely convinced that when the time comes, it’ll present no problems, thanks to my talent for detail, etc. It’ll be no more than I deserve to land the Perfect Double of Murder and Escape . . . not bad for a growing lad.

I’m off to the Police Station now . . . see me in the headlines.
"Old Judge Blenkinsop is an irascible old cove" said the lawyer "he can’t stand a tearful woman in the witness box . . . so don’t distress yourself too much . . . ."

Lacey did not worry too much during the first few months of his fifteen-year sentence. True, the Special Branch men were something of a nuisance. They were perfectly aware that he could give them half a dozen names which would crack open the Russian Spy network in Western Europe, and in the early days they questioned him with monotonous regularity. Eventually they wearied of his bland lack of co-operation, and after six months they barely troubled him at all.

Lacey waited. The shadowy men outside could hardly afford to take chances. He knew too much; they would have to get him out. They had the power and the resources to do it—and the experience, for they had done it before. But at the end of a year Lacey was still waiting, and his patience became tinged with anger. He had kept faith with them through his silence, and it was beginning to look as though his faith had been misplaced.

He had been in prison for exactly a year and a day when Alicia came to visit him. He was more than a little surprised. Alicia was his secret—a secret from friend and enemy alike. They had enjoyed a kind of infrequent union, but a close and intense one; she had known all about his curious profession, his hopes and ambitions. Now that she had come out into the open his secret was in danger, and Alicia herself might well be vulnerable.

He met her in a dingy, high walled room, a small bare table between them. A prison officer stood at the door and looked beyond them with indifferent eyes. Lacey noted that she was wearing dark glasses, and that she had dyed her hair. He reached across the table and touched her hand.

"I’m glad you came. Yet I wish you hadn’t."

"I had no choice. I expected to see you long before this. It seems that your friends have deserted you."

Lacey glanced at the prison officer. If he had heard, he gave no sign.
"There is still time." He changed the subject abruptly. "But tell me how things are with you. Tell me what you have been doing."

They talked, and their conversation was stilted and desultory. The atmosphere of the drab room was unbearably artificial. Lacey was almost glad when it was over.

When Alicia rose to go she leaned across the table. Her lips touched his cheek, and in the same instant she slipped a tiny, tight folded piece of paper into his hand. It was beautifully, casually done.

His heart was thumping in his throat as they took him back to his cell. He knew what it was; when eventually they left him alone he unfolded the flimsy paper with unsteady fingers. And he was right, of course. The blueprint for his escape. His friends had failed him, and Alicia had taken matters into her own hands.

Seventy-two hours later Lacey climbed over the east wall of the prison into the mist-blurred November night. The plan had been absurdly simple. A bribed guard, doors which were suddenly unlocked and corridors unaccountably deserted. A rope ladder over the wall and a car waiting in a narrow, empty street.

Alicia was at the wheel. She gave him a single glance, started the engine and moved the car quickly away. For a long time Lacey crouched in the passenger seat with every muscle tensed. His nerves crawled, waiting for the scream of a police siren or the blinding lights of a road barrier. Alicia pushed the car northward, driving fast and with relentless concentration.

Gradually, Lacey relaxed. He fumbled in the glove compartment, found cigarettes and lighted one gratefully.

"We've done it," he said softly. "We've done it, Alicia."

He sensed her smile in the darkness. "Of course. Did you ever think we could fail?"

"I hardly dared hope we could succeed. Yet it all seemed so easy. And when I think that they never made the attempt...." He drew hard on his cigarette and brooded in the darkness.

Alicia's flat was large and tastefully furnished. Lacey's eyes wandered the room, tasting the luxury of it. He walked over to the tiny bar and poured himself a drink. He winced as the unfamiliar spirit tortured his throat.

"I had forgotten," he said, "what it was like to be alive."

He watched her as she removed her coat, followed her as she went into the routine of patting cushions and prodding the room into life.
“And I had forgotten,” he went on, “how it was with a woman, and particularly how it was with you.”

She took away his glass and stroked his cheek with the tips of her fingers. “I will help you to remember,” she said softly.

Sometime later she regarded him with speculative eyes. “There is something about a man,” she said, “when he has been locked away for a year.”

He laughed. “It was almost worth it.”

“But you can’t live on love, my darling. You must be starving. What can I get you to eat?”

“I’m not hungry,” he said dreamily. “All I want is another large drink, and then a hot bath and a soft, soft bed.

He leaned back in an easy chair and nursed his newly filled glass. Alicia curled herself up at his feet.

“In a few days,” he said, “we shall go away. Right away. To South America, perhaps. But first, I have a little business to conduct.”

She looked up at him. “Business?”

“You are forgetting my friends, Alicia. My friends, who left me to rot in prison. It is going to cost them money. A great deal of money.”

“You think they will pay?”

He took a slow, appreciative drink. “Of course they will pay. I am the man who knows names. Important names. And remember, life can be expensive in South America.”

“But suppose they refuse—what will you do?”

“They owe me something for my silence. And for deserting me. If they refuse to pay, I shall simply give the names to British Intelligence.”

He rubbed his forehead absently. “I’m afraid the night is catching up with me. I feel just a bit light headed.”

She stood up and looked down at him. “You’re tired, Lacey. Finish your drink, and let me tuck you into that soft, soft bed.”

He tilted the glass obediently. Then he set it down, and gripped the arms of the chair as the room slid into a curious rocking motion. Alicia’s face was rotating with an insane velocity; he closed his eyes, and when he opened them again the world had almost returned into focus.

His voice sounded blurred and strangely distant. “The drink,” he said. “You put something into the drink.”

She was smiling. “Names, darling. You knew so many names. But
you didn’t know them all—you didn’t know mine, for instance."

His mind trembled on the edge of darkness, and he cursed with a deep and terrible intensity. Yet he knew that the intensity was inside himself, and that the words were silent on his moving lips. Then as from a great distance he heard a door violently opened, and the room was suddenly full of quickly moving men.

He felt himself lifted. Strong hands supported his armpits; his feet moved rebelliously across the carpeted floor. Afterwards, he had a vague recollection of being forced to drink something intolerably bitter, and of the cold porcelain of a lavatory basin beneath his hands. Then his stomach heaved and he remembered nothing for a long time.

When he opened his eyes he was lying on Alicia’s bed. Two men were watching him—one of them a stranger, a tall man with a grey, thin face. The other Lacey recognized instantly. He was an Intelligence Agent who had questioned him frequently during his first few months in prison.

Lacey looked up at him. His voice was surprised, almost hurt. “She poisoned me. She tried to kill me.”

“I’m afraid she did. You know too much, Lacey. They wanted you out of the way.”

Lacey’s mouth twisted. Tears of self-pity welled up into his eyes. “After all I did for them. I could have made it easier on myself. I could have given you the names.”

“Sure you could. And you can. You can give them to me now.”

Lacey started to talk. The names came out effortlessly, like bubbles from a clay pipe. He was still repeating them when they led him out to the long black car which sat waiting in the street.

Back in the flat, the man with the thin, grey face renewed Alicia’s drink. He gave it to her sympathetically.

“It’s finished, Alicia. You can forget all about it—we have all the information we need.”

Her eyes were very dark and sad. “You know, I rather liked him. I suppose it had to be this way?”

“I’m afraid so. He wouldn’t talk, and his friends had already made two determined efforts to get him out. We had to have the names before they succeeded.”

She smiled wryly into her glass. “Poor Lacey. Fourteen long years to brood on the fact that his woman betrayed him. And he doesn’t even know how...”

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GRAVE ERROR
OLIVER TAYLOR

Now she bored him almost into a stupor, but divorce was out of the question for he was a barrister who spoke of the sanctity of marriage.

Roger stirred irritably in his chair. Why must Cynthia keep talking. "Roger, are you listening?" He nodded. "Did you hear what I said?" "Every word."

It was a lie. Of late, he had found Cynthia, and not least her loquacity, almost unbearable. He attempted to escape behind a book—preferably a detective story. But she resented his absorption. She went prattling on, in that monotonous, rather plaintive voice of hers. And she bored him almost into a stupor, with gossip or with what seemed to be word for word accounts of what her friends Susan or Val or Jane had said to her over a long, long coffee in the morning. Or an endless cup of tea in the afternoon.

Each time she behaved like this she fed his urge to murder her. And her rather lined face and thickening arms and legs served to strengthen his determination every time he looked at her.

"Divorce." The word startled him into sudden attention to what Cynthia was saying. "It's absolutely essential."

Something near to panic seized him. "Did you say divorce?" he asked, his voice hoarse with tension.

"I did, Roger."

His book, Clive Borden's 'Grave Error', slipped from his grasp to the floor. "B—but why?" he demanded.

"You know perfectly well why." Cynthia gestured scornfully. "I've told you often enough. The marriage is dead. There's nothing in it—nothing except resentment. Love—even affection—died years ago."

"But divorce!" He was horrified. He would be a laughing-stock to his friends. Worse, he would be an object of derision to his professional associates. He was known as the barrister who spoke of the sanctity of marriage; who claimed that divorce was only for the illiterate and immature, those who lacked the good sense and insight to make the finest human relationship a success. And, altogether damning, he was chairman of the Marriage Guidance Council.
He jerked to his feet. "There can be no divorce." He was almost shouting.

"I knew you would say that." Cynthia was exasperatingly cool and determined. "But that is what there is going to be."

"Good God! That it should come to this—after all these years!"

He marched up and down, unable to contain his agitation. "I shan't permit it," he warned.

"You can't prevent it," was the calm reply.

"I must think, I must think."

"You can think all you like, but it will make no difference."

"Oh!" He was standing over her, fighting down the desire to strike her. Not daring to trust himself in her presence, he turned suddenly and stamped off upstairs.

In the bedroom, he decided that only one course remained open to him. Cynthia must die. Atropine, the means by which he meant to accomplish her death, was stored in an aspirin bottle under some shirts in the back of his dresser drawer. It was safely concealed in the hollowed-out pages of a novel. Cynthia lacked the enterprise to read anything except news headlines and society columns.

He opened the drawer, took out the book and extracted the bottle. He must, he told himself, remember to dispose of the book as soon as Cynthia had taken the poison. The police were not likely to make a search, but he knew the wisdom of making doubly sure in a matter of such a serious nature.

The bottle tucked away in the inside pocket of his jacket, he went downstairs. Cynthia was still sitting in her chair, but now with her head resting against the upholstery, her eyes closed. The argument, it seemed, had provoked a headache. Cynthia was always complaining of headaches. Well, the few drops distilled from the deadly nightshade she was soon to drink would cure that.

It would cure many other things as well. His sense of dependence on her, chiefly. It was her money which had made it possible for him to establish his own practice as a lawyer. And he would be spared making those hypocritical shows of interest and attention she sometimes wrung from him. Best of all, perhaps, he would be rid of her—of her dullness and ordinariness and stupidity. She was bovine. Yes, blast it, that was what she was. Altogether too much like a cow.

"So divorce it is?" he said.

She opened her eyes. "Beyond all doubt," she affirmed.
“Oh well!” He shrugged, suggesting resignation. “A sherry before
dinner?”

“I’d rather have a whisky.”

Damn! Anger exploded in Roger. Sherry disguised the taste of atro-
pine much better than whisky.

“Are you sure you won’t have a sherry?”

“I’ve just said I prefer a whisky.”

“All right.” Annoyance echoed in his tone. But it was anxiety which
was uppermost in his heart. Supposing she detected the atropine as she
drank the whisky? Well, what if she did? She would not know what it
was, and a couple of drops were all that were needed to prove quickly
fatal.

At the bar, his back to her, he poured two whiskies and added the
atropine to her glass. Smiling woodenly, he handed her the whisky.
When she did not begin to drink at once, he found his palm suddenly
moist.

When she finally raised her glass to her lips, he found himself swal-
lowing involuntarily, unconsciously willing the poison to pass her
throat. Then he took a gulp from his own glass.

Had she drunk enough? Could a couple of sips contain enough from
the deadly nightshade to cause her death?

“Drink up,” he urged. “We’ll have another.”

“Not for me, thanks.” Nevertheless, she drank again from her glass,
this time half emptying it.

He was feeling weak with relief—now sure that his purpose had
been achieved—when thunder erupted seemingly right over the house.
The building shook; glassware at the bar chattered. Roger was rigid,
and Cynthia was crouched in her chair in alarm.

“Only a storm,” he said, needlessly.

He went to the window and looked out at the cold autumn rain. He
had no wish to look at his wife. The poison would already be doing its
fatal work. Impelled by curiosity, he turned from the window and
walked stiffly to the fireplace. Some three yards from her, he turned to
scrutinize her face. Her glass was almost empty and she was staring
into the residue of her whisky. She seemed perfectly normal.

Lightning again filled the room, and rain, carried by a high wind,
smote the windows gustily. He still could detect no sign of change in
her. The suspense was making his heart race. He could feel pulses
beating all over his body. He had to talk to her. Perhaps when she
responded he would have evidence that the atropine was doing its work.
"This divorce," he said. "I think it's quite unnecessary."
She looked up at him. Perhaps there was a dullness—the first shadows
do death—gathering in the depths of her eyes. "Do you?" she said.
"Well, I don't."
"It's never too late to make a fresh start." How often had he said
that to couples who had visited the Marriage Guidance Council for help!
"It is in this case." There was something so inexorable in her tone
and manner that he knew her mind was quite made up. Yet he had to
go on talking. He feared the silence that might fall between them at
this moment.
"Cynthia," he said, "there's no reason to go through with this
divorce."
"You're wrong. There's no other course—absolutely no other
course."
The shadows were deepening in the eyes now. Could he detect a faint
bleaching of the colour of her face?
"I'm sure there is," he insisted.
"Then you had better tell Valerie."
"Valerie?"
"And Harry, too, I suppose."
"B-b-but why?" A chill of misgiving was taking icy possession of
his stomach.
"You don't need to ask that surely."
"Y-y-you mean it's—it's their divorce?"
"Of course."
"N-not—not. . . ." For the first time in his life he felt as if he was
about to faint.
"That's what I've been talking about all evening," Cynthia said.
"I've been telling you that Valerie and Harry had decided they must
arrange a divorce. I asked if you had heard me. You said you had. But
I should have known. As usual, you weren't listening."
He felt as if he were shrinking. There was a sudden heat, like a fever,
in his face. His heart was tumbling in its beating. He was taking in air
in brief snatches.
"Roger, you look sick. Is anything wrong?"
He raised his head slowly. "No . . . no. . . . Nothing that can be
helped now."
He turned away from his wife, and started towards his own chair. Suddenly he stopped, swung round and lunged forward. His desperately swinging arm knocked the glass from Cynthia’s hand, sending it with splintering impact into the hearth.

She recoiled. Understanding, a look of pure horror flooded her face. Then, with the suddenness of a marionette upheld by a cord that had been instantly slackened, her head fell forward. She crumpled and slumped from her chair.

“Cyn——”

For a long time his appalled eyes gazed at the dead body. Mouth dry, senses numb, he went to the telephone and dialled.

“Get me the police, please,” he said.

As he rose, his gaze was arrested by the book on the floor. Mechanically he bent to pick it up. He paused, his gaze riveted on the title. “GRAVE ERROR”, he read. When the police arrived it was to find him laughing hysterically and weeping at the same time.
GIVE HIM THE GUN

JEFFRY SCOTT

He was a patriot, and he wanted to clean up the island, tear down the present government, and start all over again. "You can't run a revolution without arms" he warned me.

Remember, not so many years ago, the spate of "Teenage" films? I Was A Teenage Werewolf . . . I Was A Teenage Brain-surgeon. After a while, it got to be a bad joke.

But I don't laugh. To me, it's the sickest joke of all. Because, for six hectic, evil months, they could have written a movie about me.

Title: I Was A Teenage Gun-runner.

It started when ExImCo in London took me on their survey department. That's not the real name of the firm, by the way. But take my word, they're one of the biggest outfits of their kind in the world, dabbling in everything from oil to civil engineering. They'll build you a supermarket—or a city. Move a highway—or a mountain.

Getting my foot in their door, at nineteen, was a big deal for Tomkins, the boy from the back streets, and a not-so-hot grammar school.

"Keep your nose clean, by applying it firmly to the grindstone, and you'll go far, Tomkins," they told me. Only a little more politely than that. The firm is run by Americans, and they like young executives whose sole aim in life is to get ahead.

After three months, I was sent out to the Caribbean section, as a sort of jumped-up fourth-in-command on an airstrip project.

The work was hard, but I thrived on it. Soon I was flying across to South America, trouble-shooting on a couple of other contracts.

The Caribbean island where we were building the airport was hot, none too clean, and utterly depressing. The magic vanished after exactly forty-eight hours on the site. I settled down to a life of making decisions . . . and quite a lot of money.

Then I met Christine. At least, she picked me up, but I wasn't to know it, then.

She talked and looked and acted like a convent school girl. Her softly-waved fair hair smelt of flowers. She seemed disturbed, even ashamed, of a generous body which screamed out that she was a woman, while
she tried to behave like an innocent girl.

Christine was a bit of a mystery—no parents in evidence, and no apparent reason to be on the island. She murmured something about gathering notes for a film company. I was too stunned by her to go in for cross-examinations.

She asked me to show her the island. The first time we kissed she kept her lips pressed together, and blushed as she met my eyes.

A fortnight later, she let me come into her bedroom at the hotel. We kissed, and it wasn’t at all like the first time. “Put the light out, Tommy.” Her whisper sounded frightened. I was shocked yet delighted by her fervour, once the friendly darkness covered us.

Naturally, my work slipped. But the ExImCo crew on the island were an easy-going lot. They slapped my back, gave a lot of ribald advice, and whistled mockingly every time Christine drove up in an old hire car to collect me.

I tried to dodge the South American flights, but my boss wasn’t having any. “You can live without your popsy for a couple of days a week, Tommo,” he leered.

One night, Christine introduced me to a friend of her family, Garcia. He was a tall fellow, a caricature of every Spaniard you’ve seen in a swashbuckling film: flashing eyes, sideboards, deep tan, moustache.

“Nice to meet you, young man,” he purred. His grip numbed my fingers. “You’re being kind to Christine, I trust?” There was nothing but admiration in his voice. I warmed to him.

It became a ritual—drinks with Garcia in the hotel bar, before I went up to Christine’s room. Gradually, his obsession emerged.

He was a patriot, and he wanted to clean up the island, tear down the present government, and start all over again.

When I was ripe for the approach, he gave me one more drink than usual. “I need help. You can’t run a revolution without arms. This infernal government checks all sea and airline entries. But you could get through.”

It was easy to catch his meaning. Working for ExImCo, out there, was like having a diplomatic passport. They were doing a lot for the local economy, providing work for hundreds and giving the tourist industry a shot in the arm.

All the customs men knew me, by sight, and far from searching my briefcase and overnight bag, merely swapped dirty jokes and gossip with the young English engineer.
“I’m no use to you,” I argued. “The most I could smuggle through would be a couple of guns at a time—pistols, at that, not even rifles.”

Garcia spread his hands and grinned around a long black cheroot. “A pair of Colt .45s is a lot better than a stone, or a club.” His face clouded. “But I couldn’t pay you anything.”

That clinched it. He had made just the right remark to light my muddled idealism. “I’m on,” I told him.

All that happened was that I left my briefcase, unlocked, in the hotel where I stayed overnight on the South American trips. On the first occasion, I checked the cargo: two battered ex-G.I. Colts, fully loaded.

After the first few trips, I didn’t even sweat when going through the island’s customs. The briefcase would be left in Christine’s room. She’d hand it to me, empty, when I left in the early hours, the following morning.

I sweated, all right, just after leaving customs on the last trip. Something warned me that I was in trouble. Maybe it was a scared, knowing look from the island customs official, who waved me through without the usual jokes. A guilty man gets as sensitive as a microphone.

Instead of going straight out to the waiting ExImCo jeep, I turned sharp left in the shabby, temporary airport building, and dashed into the toilets. Feverishly, I opened the case and tucked one of the usual .45 automatics behind the cistern.

Steps pounded outside. There was no time to ditch the other gun. I ran out—straight into the arms of two solid, polite, middle-aged American government agents.

They led me away to a private office in the airport. One agent took the remaining .45, and removed the magazine. Thumbing a cartridge out, he pulled at the bullet. To my surprise, it left the cartridge case without resistance.

He tipped the case, and a little stream of what looked like salt ran into his palm. Damping the tip of his finger, he tested the pile, and spat into a wastebasket.

“Heroin,” he said flatly. “You’ve been smuggling dope for your friend Garcia, son.”

There came a knock at the door. Island policemen pushed Christine into the room. She wouldn’t look at me.

The American agent dusted his hands and swung towards her. Suddenly, he grabbed her skirt and whipped it up to her waist. I shouted and aimed a punch at him.
His partner caught me in a hammerlock. Sickly, I stared at Christine's thigh. It was pocked with red injection marks, so closely packed that it looked like a section of pigskin.

"She's hooked," said the other American, grimly. "Proud of yourself, son?" Christine swore at him, at me, at the world—words I'd never heard before from a girl, and seldom ever from men.

Now I knew why she wanted the light out. She'd trapped me, but I felt only pity for her, mingled with disgust. And hatred for Garcia.

Finally, the agents explained the plot to me. I was just a messenger boy, getting the filth from South America to the island. From there, it went to Miami, spreading out to poison and degrade the wretched prisoners, the desperate human animals such as Christine.

They believed that I'd been duped. I served a short term in a nightmare prison on the island. My career was wrecked, and I was branded as a drug smuggler for the rest of my life.

I wasn't concerned by that. The American agent's voice played over and over in my brain, like a cracked record. "Hey, that's real cute. Garcia had them put a live round in the breech of this gun. That way, anybody squeezing the trigger would fire a shot . . . and probably not find the dummy cartridges."

By the time I left gaol, the new airport was in use. But the old building lingered on, locked up and deserted.

I broke in, after dark. The .45 was still behind the cistern, cloudy with rust but well oiled inside. Ready to go.

The U.S. agents didn't know where to find Garcia—he'd skipped just before my arrest—but I did..

Christine had a bad habit, you see. She talked in her sleep. Several times she had mumbled into the pillow: "Garcia—Green Parrot Motel, Shorside Drive, Miami."

I'd dismissed it, then, as rambling nonsense. But a phone call to Miami told me that there was a Green Parrot Motel on Shorside Drive. United States immigration authorities don't welcome convicted crooks, but there are ways to get in. I waited outside the Green Parrot for nearly a week before Garcia showed up.

I let him enter his cabin and switch on the light. Then I made him take a good look at my face.

"A present from Christine," I snarled, and shot him right between the eyes.

He never should have given me a gun, in the first place.
To Kindell's heightened imagination the solitary light above the two men seemed baleful. Yet they played on unaware. His gaze flickered over the dull, colourless walls of the condemned cell, and he shuddered.

One of the card players catching the look in his eyes, grinned.

"Don't take it so hard," he chaffed. "It'll be over in a few hours," and he returned to his game.

Kindell shivered at the callousness and feverishly lit a cigarette. His hands trembled and to hide his fear he picked up a book. But it was a murder story and guiltily he dropped it.

He sat back on the bed and watched the two men play. It was all right for them. They were older and more able to hide their feelings. But he had to suffer. And all because of a petty quarrel. Of a sudden hasty word and an angry blow.

The remembrance of the Judge's words made him feel sick.

He felt again the tense atmosphere of the court. The quick intake of anguished breath as the black cap was donned and the fateful words spoken.

"Hanged by the neck...."

He jumped to his feet. He'd appeal to the governor for clemency. He'd—but what was the use? Who would listen to him? He sank down on the bed again.

He was weary of the slow waiting. The passing of numbered days until one could cry aloud at the unbearable agony of it. Until the last long evening that would fade into a final, irrevocable dawn.

And yet life went on around him. People laughed and sang and the sun shone. And now only a few short hours intervened.

McMath, the senior prison officer, looked over at him, his face also showing signs of strain. Yet this was not the first condemned cell in which he had passed a night with a condemned man.

"Come and have a game of cards," McMath said. "It'll make you feel better." Then he glanced sharply at his partner who had laughed aloud mirthlessly.
Reluctantly Kindell obeyed, yet oddly enough he did feel better as soon as he started to play. They were right; it took his mind off things. He was so engrossed in the game that he was annoyed when it was interrupted by the appearance of the prison chaplain.

He listened dumbly to the conciliatory murmur of the words of prayer. The chaplain looked tired and there was suffering in his eyes. Kindell realized, with something of a shock, that the chaplain and the others were genuinely distressed at this lawful taking of life.

Now came the longest walk of his life. An eternity of living in a few short paces.

The faces of all around were grey. And the prison, that should have been awakening to the dawn, was strangely still.

They moved down a stone-flagged corridor past a white-faced prison officer who mutely unlocked a door to let them pass.

Kindell's fear now was that his legs might give way. That he would at the last moment ignominiously lose his nerve. He swayed a little and saw the governor throw him a swift, searching glance. He straightened and breathed deeply. It wouldn't do to give way now.

They filed into the execution chamber and there before them was the dread instrument of death. Quick, efficient, deadly. It seemed like something out of a dream.

Everything seemed now to move quickly, as the executioner, with the swiftness born of custom and mercy, made his final preparations.

Kindell looked round the circle of expectant faces and wondered at the agony portrayed there. He could feel the sweat start out on his brow. Then the noose was lowered.

With a sudden sense of terrifying suffocation consciousness left him.

It seemed that he walked down a long, dark corridor, towards a dimly glowing light from which a voice boomed. A voice which seemed strangely familiar.

The light loomed nearer until its intensity burned into his eyes and he found himself staring up at a huge bowl enclosing a light on a ceiling.

A group of extraordinarily tall people were staring down at him.

"I thought he didn't look too well," one of them said, inappropriately, and Kindell recognized the voice of the governor.

"I think you had better have the rest of the day off," he continued, not unkindly. Then, with a grave smile, "And you needn't be ashamed because you fainted. You're not the first prison officer who has blacked out at an execution."
CRIME CLUB

The choicest in crime for Christmas

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THE MAN WHOSE DREAMS CAME TRUE 21s
“Lie Down, I Want to Talk to You”, by William McGivern (Collins, 21s.).

Pleasantly light-hearted and a nice mixture of crime, love and psychiatry are the ingredients for Mr. McGivern’s new crime novel.

Otis Pemberton, a practising psychiatrist, awakes to find his studio couch occupied not by a patient but by a naked girl on whose wrist he finds his fiancée’s gold and diamond bracelet...

Not perhaps the correct situation for a practising psychiatrist but certainly one that has to be more than explained in medical terms.

The book frolics on with a gang of bank robbers needing help—psychological help, to change their tendency to get captured after successful robberies. That Otis gets involved in every way imaginable is, of course, the real fun of the book.

“Murder With Minarets”, by Charles Forsyte (Cassell, 16s.).

Murder concerning British Embassy staff could have happened in any country. In a way it is a pity that this is written around Ankara as there are far more exciting places in Turkey that lend themselves to an aura of mystery and intrigue. With the diplomatic background it had to be the capital—so alas, it lacks the colourful atmosphere that one expects and finds in this part of the Middle East.

Quite a complicated plot keeps one guessing; characters are nearly all British and part of a small social circle, so the plot had to be quite ingenious to have a murderer in their midst. Entertaining.
"Sundry Fell Designs", by Osmington Mills (Geoffrey Bles, 21s.). This is Miss Mills’ thirteenth thriller and it shows her astringent writing very clearly. Also her extraordinary penchant for most peculiar names for her characters.

Turnpenny Roundabout is the first name to raise our eyebrows, but quite soon he becomes “poet protesters”. Then we have a “budgerigar-director”, an “enemy scientist” and a Chief Inspector Shonni Hughes.

A mother and daughter plan to spend their holiday in a Dormobile at Tarn Top in the Lake District. All is not however the peace and health they plan. For on the top of Tarn Top is a not very clearly described “Government Project” for defence with the scientists connected thereto living in a farm.

To Tarn Top in protest come Peace Movementers and set up their own camp.

Miss Mills is, however, out to write a thriller—not a Peace Protest and so drops an unpleasantly smelly and deliberately decayed corpse into the bushes. And whodunit?

“Cool Day for Killing”, by William Haggard (Cassell, 21s.).

The introduction of this splendid and dignified thriller by master-writer William Haggard, put us exactly into the right mood . . . “His Highness was waiting to die and he wasn’t too much afraid of death . . . He rose at the evening call to prayer, but halted at a tiny noise. Two men were in his veranda now—Chinese as he’d expected. He nodded to them politely and they shot him down in silence.”

So ends Sir Montagu Raden, ruler of Her Majesty’s protectorate of Shah baddin. But it was not the end of the line—for in England was Oliver Kendry his bastard yet admired son and his daughter Sheila. Sir Montagu knew his Chinese and knew his Malays—somehow these two descendants must return after his death and bring peace to this beloved country.

Charles Russell—Head of the Security Executive, plays a leading role of course in this fine story and the danger, courage and sheer humanity of this plot make it quite unforgettable.

“Fire Opal”, by Peter Monnow (Herbert Jenkins, 21s.).

Richard Thayne, a close student of James Bond and the men from U.N.C.L.E., gets himself assigned to a cloak and dagger job in the subtropical regions of Natal.

Peter Monnow, the author, cleverly uses the colourful mountainous country of Chaka and Dinizulu with much of their folk lore to good purpose.

“Fire Opal” is a story of excitement and suspense, dealing with a Communist activated and inspired infiltration of Zululand. The ending is somewhat contrived; aren’t they all? And some of the getting-out-of-tight-corners won’t stand investigation, but for all that it is a good story and one day it should make a spectacular and exciting film.
“The Great Defenders”, by Judge Gerald Sparrow (John Long, 27s. 6d.).

What kind of man is it that makes a great defender? asks Judge Gerald Sparrow in this new book of his.

Courage, compassion, presence, eloquence and legal know-how (in this order, suggests the author), these are the requirements of the great defender.

Among those reviewed in this book are Marshall Hall, Norman Birkett, Thomas Erskine and Clarence Darrow.

To add to the interest however, Judge Sparrow also includes some unusual and intriguing defenders from the Far East and shows us justice at work in strange settings.

“The Kessler Legacy”, by Richard Martin Stern (Cassell, 25s.).

Twenty-seven years ago a great literary man of Germany dies—and little note is made of it inside that country. But then Heinrich Kessler was no lover of Nazism.

Set in the Austrian Tyrol our story develops through the investigations of a young tutor of Germanic Literature at Harvard who has himself written a book “The Courage of Heinrich Kessler”.

From the first page of the Kessler Legacy we are carried deeper and deeper into an intriguing story of cover-up and uncover of the life and death of one brave man who set himself against a wicked regime. And in his own way achieved success a long time afterwards.

Sundry Fell Designs
OSMINGTON MILLS

‘Former CND marcher rather swift to heave a demonstrative brick. Body in shallow grave with head brick-bashed. And Liz—still young—a veteran protester. Mingle, and the result is rather more than murder.’

EVENING NEWS ‘Clever and amusing’—SUN 21s

The Loch
JANET CAIRD

A mysterious and eerie story set in the Highlands. ‘She is a frisson expert—just a few words and you feel a pleasant shiver run down your back . . . absolutely riveting’—

GLASGOW EVENING TIMES
‘A rip-roaring mystery’—HIGHLAND NEWS 21s

BLES

All prices are net
"FORCE 10 FROM NAVARONE", by Alistair MacLean (Collins, 25s.).

Complete with fascinating map, this new thriller from the hand of a true master, will most certainly break into the best-seller class.

Produced at a moment when our eyes are looking keenly at middle Europe the story is set around the blowing of a dam in the Neretva River in southern Yugoslavia and the holding of German troops preparing for a presumed Allied attack.

The heroes of the novel are those of the Guns of Navarone—plus the aid of a blind Yugoslav folk-singer and his sister. The plot must not be divulged but it is a first rate and enthralling one.

"OUT OF SEASON", by Michael Kenyon (Collins, 18s.).

Otto Haller, young ex-Bundeswehr officer, returns to Jersey as a tourist on a wild and windy day to make some personal investigations of his own. Investigations about his father who had served on the island.

Someone, however, does not welcome Otto and hostile and bizarre actions suggest that he should return to Germany.

But Otto remains and plods on to the heart of the matter in this to most of us summery holiday island. The setting and time is now out of season with the wind "howling like a dog", rain pounding down as in a monsoon and desolate beaches.
Quick writing, a racy style and some very strange and frightening facts make this new novel by the author of The Whole Hog and May you die in Ireland a very exciting crime club novel.

"Death takes a Wife", by Anthony Gilbert (Hamish Hamilton, 25s.).

Throughout the story doubts persist of Paul French's innocence—though he was acquitted—of the murder of his first wife, Blanche. Helen, her nurse, is also involved and though both she and Paul separate and leave the district and eventually marry, they are persistently reminded of this shadow of the past.

The death of another woman, in mysterious circumstances, raises the ugly question again. It is ultimately solved by the great legal champion—Arthur Crook.

A well constructed story set against a very ordinary English background.

"Cruel as a Cat", by Michael Malliday (Hodder & Stoughton 18s.).

A young man on the run, wanted for suspected murder, unwittingly falls into the hands of a young married woman and, rather too late, discovers her schizophrenic tendencies. His fate would have been sealed had she not provoked disapproval of her landlady—an elderly, respected spinster who starts asking questions.

A real "psycho" story—cleverly put together.

The Evergreen Death
James Fraser

Under this pseudonym a very well-known and successful author writes of an "exciting murder hunt in a placid village." Evening News
"Vivid inventive writing and a new detective, young Inspector Aveyard, of whom we must certainly hear some more." Birmingham E. Mail 21s.

A Fever in the Blood
John Davies

Why the inexplicable alienation of David West’s wife? "In his struggle to escape his predicament an innocent man is murdered and horrors mount." Evening News
"Intriguing psychological thriller." Eastern Daily News 21s.

The Chameleon File
Leigh James

Set in Cuba, this is an action-packed tale of a dupe spy entangled in the web of the CIA. "Moves at a fast pace." Bristol Evening News 21s.

Fire Opal
Peter Monnow

"An interesting and original story set against a background of the South African political scene. Mr. Monnow's style is crisp, and his story unfolds with continuous excitement." South Wales Echo 21s.

Murder Most Fair
Janet Gregory Vermandel

HERBERT JENKINS
“Our proxy in the seats of power”—*The Times*

**WILLIAM HAGGARD**

**A COOL DAY FOR KILLING**

Charles Russell, Head of the Security Executive, moves into the murkier undercurrents of diplomacy when the office of a certain High Commissioner in London becomes the centre of a plot to take over a country under British protection. 21/-

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JONATHAN ROSS 16/-

**Murder with Minarets**  
CHARLES FORSYTE 16/-

**None of Us Cared for Kate**  
JOHN HAYTHORNE 18/-

“The Carnaby and the Assassins”, by Peter N. Walker (*Robert Hale*, 16s.).

The dead body of a policeman is found by a shepherd on a lonely part of the moors. Commander Pigeon of the Yard’s Commando Squad sends Carnaby along to give the C.I.D. a hand on the case. Complicated searches and another murder lead to political motives covered by an innocent looking local façade set up by a retired doctor.

This is the third Carnaby story. If you read the others and liked them, then this is a “must”. If not, it is quite a good one to start on, for those who like the traditional “strong stuff” detective fiction.

“Farewell My Lovely”, by Raymond Chandler (*Hamish Hamilton*, 25s.).

Another winner for Philip Marlowe fans. An outsize thug starts looking for the girl who was part of his life before he went “inside”. Private-eye Marlowe just happens to be around when the shooting starts.

Cops ask questions—they’re sure he is involved; and in an effort to allay suspicions he gets involved.

But it is not a straightforward matter of picking up a crazy gunman on the loose. The trail leads to a thoroughly sinister consultant, a phoney nursing home and a ship anchored offshore—all part of a highly organised big time crime set-up in Los Angeles.

The inimitable Marlowe gets there
in the end and makes his peace with the police. He has to, of course, to rise again in the next Chandler episode of this rugged character's crime-busting life. Let us hope it will not be too long in coming.

"Scipio", by Tudor Gates (Muller, 21s.).

Although English by birth and in background, the author has assimilated both facts and feeling of the contagious crime disease which has been spread throughout the world by the Mafia—the organization with its insidious roots in Sicily; so much so that he is convincing in his writing on its crimes.

Perhaps his varied career has helped him to understand all sorts and conditions of people; among other things he has been a Folies Bergère stagehand, Old Vic electrician, librarian, actor, teacher, tank-driver, newspaper editor and parliamentary candidate. He has written many TV plays but perhaps is best known for his recent "Vendetta" series that introduced Danny Scipio. This has had the popularity which it deserves and any "Vendetta" fans will appreciate this story—"Scipio".

It concerns the capi—the untouchable Mafia chiefs who operate their filthy trade behind respectable, safe and legitimate business organizations. A capi monarch dies in his native Sicily and his successor has to be elected. Trails lead to south-east England, where another faceless member of the hierarchy is operating.
as a respectable British businessman.

The climax is a near thing for Scipio, but he has to survive so that Tudor Gates can tell us more. Most of us see the tough, positive, slightly Nordic looking Sicilian, Danny Scipio—the ex-mafioso—in the image of actor Stelio Candelli, whose portrayal is really convincing. We tend to forget, however, that behind his miraculous survival in each TV film, lies the grizzly truth—this diseased “octopus” known *inter alia* as the Mafia or Cosa Nostra has, in fact, stretched its sinister tentacles as far as our shores. “Scipio” is a reminder.

“*Dark Ways to Death*”, by Peter Saxon (*Howard Baker*, 21s.).

An organization to combat evil wherever it is found is named “The Guardians” and throughout the tightly packed 175 pages of “Dark Ways to Death” we have evil of the Black Mass and of psychosomatic form laid on with a very lurid brush.

I am not sure that the coarse light relief of the “aristocratic” set does not very largely detract from the horrors described. Though the final salvage of Bubastis the cat is moving—I still think that humour should have been omitted from the book and the horror and satanism given to us straight.

After all there actually is Black Mass and there are horrible cults being practised in many great cities of the world in 1968—and precious little light relief or humour about it.
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