Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Mr. Mulliner, Private Detective
by P. G. WODEHOUSE

The Vanishing Lady
by ALEXANDER WOOLLcott

The Boy Cried Murder
by WILLIAM IRISH

A Package for Mr. Big
by FRANK KANE

Dishonor Among Thieves
by EDGAR WALLACE

THE MAN FROM MOSCOW
A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW – THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION
Being happily free from much affectation of modesty, as most regular readers will have discovered by now, I can comfortably say that we have here another good issue.

I firmly predict that you'll find THE BOY CRIED MURDER, by William Irish, one of the most powerful stories you've read in a long time. There's no secret about the problem: Will the kid get anyone to believe him before the killers silence him for keeps? But the suspense should keep the most blasé reader on the hooks used to stretch cloth on a drying frame. (Our dictionary tells us that this is the meaning of "tenterhooks," and don't try to tell us you knew that.)

This, by the way, is the first time the name of William Irish has appeared on our cover. But the same writer has been in our pages more than once before under another name. If you want to try some literary detection, you might try to guess who he is. But don't write in and ask if you hit it. No prize is offered; and we ain't telling.

DISHONOR AMONG THIEVES is another sample of that late great genius, Edgar Wallace. A PACKAGE FOR MR. BIG is another Johnny Liddell story by Frank Kane, for those who like 'em fast and tough. And THE VANISHING LADY is Alexander Woollcott's version of one of the great legendary mysteries.

To borrow the famous plaint of the one and only Durante, "Everybody wants to get into the act!" Nowhere does this seem to be more true than in the writing of detective stories. This magazine has already brought you contributions by some surprising names, and will probably feature many more. This month's intruder, P. G. Wodehouse, is in his own field no less renowned a funny man than The Schnoz; but in MR. MULLINER, PRIVATE DETECTIVE, I find him blithely invading my bailiwick.

Well, about 20 years ago, when Mr. Wodehouse was already at his zenith, and I had just written a few books which not too many people had noticed, I happened to read an interview in which Mr. Wodehouse admitted that I was one of the writers he liked to read. So I wrote and asked him if he would mind if my publishers quoted him in their advertising. He wrote back and said, among other charming things: "I hope you are going to write dozens more Saint stories—they are simply corking." And for years afterwards my publishers used that quote in their sales pitch for me.

So it's good to have you aboard, Mr. Wodehouse, in company with another of those dozens of Saint stories. And I'll go on record that you're simply corking, yourself.
How I foxed the Navy
by Arthur Godfrey

The Navy almost scuttled me. I shudder to think of it. My crazy career could have ended right there.

To be scuttled by the Navy you’ve either got to do something wrong or neglect to do something right. They’ve got you both ways. For my part, I neglected to finish high school.

Ordinarily, a man can get along without a high school diploma. Plenty of men have. But not in the Navy. At least not in the U.S. Navy Material School at Bellevue, D. C., back in 1929. In those days a bluejacket had to have a mind like Einstein’s. And I didn’t.

“Godfrey,” said the lieutenant a few days after I’d checked in, “either you learn mathematics and learn it fast or you go. I’ll give you six weeks.” This, I figured, was it. For a guy who had to take off his shoes to count above ten, it was an impossible assignment.

I was ready to turn in my bell-bottoms. But an ad in a magazine stopped me. Here, it said, is your chance to get special training in almost any subject—mathematics included. I hopped on it. Within a week I was enrolled with the International Correspondence Schools studying algebra, geometry and trig for all I was worth.

Came week-end liberty, I studied. Came a holiday, I studied. Came the end of the sixth weeks, I was top man in the class. Within six weeks I had mastered two years of high school math, thanks to the training I’d gotten.

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Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools, Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada... Special tuition rates to members of the U.S. Armed Forces.
The white crescent of Montego Bay was under their wings, and most of the passengers of the Pan-American clipper who were disembarking at Kingston could be identified by a certain purposeful stirring as they straightened and reassembled themselves and their impedimenta in preparation for the landing a few minutes ahead.

Simon Templar, who saw no reason for not traveling from one vacation spot to another in vacation clothes, was ready for Jamaica without further preparation, wearing nothing more troublesome than sandals, slacks and a sport shirt tastefully decorated with a pattern of rainbow-hued tropical fish circulating through a forest of graceful corals and vivid submarine flora; but he calculated that he had time for one more cigarette before the “no-smoking” sign went on, and lighted it without haste.

The woman who had been sitting next to him, a cold-eyed and stoutly corseted dowager of the type which travel agencies so skillfully keep out of the pictures in their romantically illustrated brochures, had temporarily left

The tropics wear a mask, alluring, rife with intrigue. But under the bright disguise Templar saw the red spiderwebs of Moscow.
her seat, presumably for basic adjustments in the privacy of the ladies room.

Simon thought it was only she returning when he felt someone loom over him and settle in the adjoining chair. He continued to gaze idly at the scenery below, until a voice brought his head around—rather abruptly, because not only had that forbidding female maintained a majestic silence throughout the trip, but the voice was much deeper than hers could plausibly have been. Moreover it addressed him by name.

"Excuse me, Mr. Saint, sah."

Simon looked into a grinning ebony face that was puzzlingly familiar, but which he somehow couldn’t associate at all with the spotless white shirt, port-wine shantung jacket, hand-painted tie, and smartly creased dove-gray trousers which the young negro wore.

"Bet you don’t recognize me, sah."

Simon smiled amiably. "Yes, I know I’ve seen you before. But where?"

"I’m Johnny, sah. I was a sparrin’ partner with Steve Nelson, up in New York, the time you and he had that go with the Masked Angel. Remember now, Mr. Saint?"

"Of course." Now it all came back. "Go easy with that name, Johnny. I’m trying to live a quiet and peaceful life for a while."

"I’m sorry, sah."

"I don’t think anyone else is ... Well, I’ve certainly got an excuse for not recognizing you. I don’t think I ever saw you before with anything but boxing trunks on. What are you doing now, and where are you going?"

"Home, sah."

The Saint raised his eyebrows with pleasant interest. "Home?" he asked. "Where’s that?"

"Jamaica, sah. I was born here." With an odd touch of pride, Johnny added, "I’m a Maroon."

Perhaps hardly one listener in ten thousand would have had any answer but the equivalent of "What?" or "So what?" to such a statement, but Simon Templar was that one. It was one of those coincidences almost commonplace in his life that he not only knew what a Maroon was, but even had some immediate interest in that little-known political survival of the old wild history of the West Indies.

Johnny, however, had already interpreted the Saint’s minuscule stiffening of surprise as a normal reaction of perplexity, and was hastening to explain:

"The original Maroons were slaves who ran away, back at the beginnin’ of the eighteenth century, an’ took to the hills. When there was enough of ’em, they kept fightin’ the British troops who tried to round ’em up, till it was just like a war. They done so well that finally the British Empire had
to give up an’ make a peace treaty with ’em.”

“I’ve heard about them,” said the Saint. “They got their freedom and a piece of the island set aside for them and their descendants forever, sort of like an Indian reservation in the States. Only I was told that they make their own laws and appoint their own rulers. Nobody can interfere with them in any way, just as if they were an independent little country of their own.”

“That’s right,” Johnny said. “And that’s our country, right underneath you now.”

Simon looked down through the window. Below them was a welter of steeply rounded hills, shaped like a mass of old-fashioned beehives jampacked together. Over almost every foot of surface the jungle grew like a coat of curly green wool, above which only the tops of the tallest trees raised little knots like the mounds in a pebbleweave fabric.

Only here and there was the denseness broken by a smoother slope that seemed to be open grass, a tiny brown patch of cultivation, the shiny specks of a banana patch, or the silver thread of a stream exposed on an outcropping of bare boulders; but most of it looked as wild and impenetrable as any terrain that the Saint had ever seen.

“They call it the Cockpit,” Johnny said. “I dunno why, ’cept that it’s sure seen a lot of fightin’.

“Doesn’t look like it’s changed much, though I was only twelve when my dad took me away to the States.”

“What makes you want to go back?” Simon asked.

“Well, sah, he died soon after that, so I didn’t get to go to school much more. I was too busy hustlin’ for a livin’. Bein’ a sparrin’ partner was just another job. I gave that up. I done all kinds of things, from shoeshine boy to cook an’ butler. But by the time I met you, I’d decided I wanted to be something better, an’ I started savin’ my money an’ goin’ to night school.

“Presently, I learned enough an’ saved up enough to pass the entrance exam to Tuskegee an’ afford to go there. Got me a degree a year ago. I know I’ll never talk like a college man, that’s a bad habit I’ve had too long, but I sure learned all I could.”

“You’ve got enough to be proud of,” said the Saint. “But that still doesn’t tell me why you aren’t going on from there to something better in the United States.”

“Well, sah, you know as well as I do how it is up there. There’s a limit to what a colored man can do.” Johnny spoke with devastating candor, without inferiority or rancor. “Some of the fellows at college always think they’re goin’ to change the world. I never felt big enough for that. After I got out an’ tried it, I knew I was always goin’ to have to just be the
best I could among colored people.

“So, I began thinkin’, if that’s how it is, why don’t I go back with my own colored people, the Maroons? Maybe I’m needed more down here, where some negroes go to English universities, but others are more illiterate than even the poorest share-cropper in Mississippi. I dunno . . . I thought maybe I can help more of ’em to be ready when that change in the world comes.”

The sincerity in his brown eyes was so cloudless and complete that Simon found himself hopelessly assaying a medley of assorted answers, afraid to utter any of them spontaneously lest he sound even slightly smug and patronizing.

In that paralysis of fumbling sensitivity, the illuminated sign on the forward bulkhead went on, and the stewardess intoned: “Will you fasten your seat belts, please. And no smoking, please.”

“I better go back to my own seat now. Thank you for listenin’, sah.”

“It was nice seeing you again, Johnny. Maybe I’ll run into you again—in the Cockpit.”

II

David Farnham was at the airport to meet him. A senior officer in the Colonial Secretariat, Farnham presented a sturdy and unmispressably British figure in his open-necked shirt and khaki walk-

ing shorts, pipe in mouth, bright eyes and bald head shining. Under his benevolent aegis, Simon passed through the formalities of immigration and customs as if on a fast-rolling conveyor belt.

“I hope my wire wasn’t too much of a shock to you,” said the Saint, as they circled around the harbor in Dave’s little English car and edged into the crowded clattering streets of the town. “When you talked to me at that cocktail party in Nassau, you probably never thought I’d take you up on your invitation to visit the Maroons.”

“On the contrary, I’m delighted you did.”

“In fact,” said the Saint, lighting a cigarette, “I seem to keep on being reminded of the Maroons, as if Fate was determined to prod me into something. On the plane a colored fellow I’d met years ago in New York told me he was a Maroon.”

“What was his name?”

“Johnny . . . You know, I’m ashamed to say it, but that’s all I know. Just Johnny.”

“It could be his last name,” Farnham said. “One of the leaders of the original Maroons was named Johnny.”

Simon shrugged. “I ran into another bloke from Jamaica, shortly after I met you at that cocktail party in Nassau. Name of Jerry Dugdale.”

“I remember him. He was in the police here.”
"That’s the guy. He also told me about the ancient treaty which gave the Maroons the right to make their own laws and set up their own government. Furthermore, he told me that once he wanted to chat with a couple of natives about a slight case of murder, and got word that they’d taken off for the Maroon country. When he went in to look for them, the Maroon boss man complained to the Governor. And the Governor had Jerry on the carpet and chewed him out for violating their treaty rights and almost making an international incident."

"The Maroons are very touchy about their privileges," Farnham said.

"Right then," said the Saint, "I knew that this was something I had to see. A little independent state left over for a couple of centuries, right inside the island of Jamaica—that’s certainly unique. But from the point of view of your Government, a situation like that could have problems, couldn’t it?"

"It does," Farnham said steadily. "They’re a ready-made audience for the propaganda against us. We had to let India go. We’re losing Africa piece by piece. I’m sure you’ve read about the Mau Mau business. The terrorists may be natives, but you know the encouragement is Russian. And the opportunity here isn’t so different."

"You don’t mean you’re afraid of a kind of Mau Mau outbreak in Jamaica?"

"It’s already started. There have been three brutal, motiveless killings of white people in the last six weeks."

Simon stared, frowning. "But your colored people aren’t naked savages like the Kikuyu. They’re as civilized as Negroes in the United States."

"You’d have said that about Guiana—and it wasn’t so long ago that we had to send a warship there to nip a Communist coup in the bud. No, actually there’s a lot of difference. In some ways, our colored people are a lot better off than in America. There’s no segregation. Some are in business and make a lot of money. Their children go to our best schools, and they can go into any club or restaurant on the island. They not only vote—they hold political power—and they’re very active with it."

"Unfortunately, some of their leaders are pretty radical. And even more unfortunately, there are still an enormous number who are desperately poor, totally illiterate, completely ignorant—and therefore perfect chumps for the Communists to stir up. And that Maroon settlement makes a rather ideal focal point for it. A Communist base in the Caribbean would be rather nasty for all of us."

"Do you know anything about the brains of the act?"
“A little,” Farnham admitted slowly. “One of their own people just arrived from England. His name is Mark Cuffee. He’s a brainy chap who could be quite a problem.”

“A Maroon.” The Saint’s brows drew lower over his quietly intent eyes. “I see. And of course you’re not supposed to touch him. And if he’s an upper-echelon hammer-and-sickle boy ... a black commissar.”

III

Mr. Mark Cuffee’s career, in many respects, could have been cited as a shining example of the achievement possible to the emancipated Negro, and Mr. Cuffee himself had scathing epithets with which to describe those who did not regard it with unqualified admiration.

Soon after Mark was born, his father left the Maroon country to work in a rum distillery. In due course he worked himself up to the rank of foreman. He sent Mark to school in Kingston, where he proved such a brilliant student he won a scholarship to Oxford, at seventeen. There he not only won his degree in Law with honors, but also gave a performance in the title role of an OUDS production of Othello which earned such critical acclaim that he continued it professionally for a six-weeks run in London.

After this brief triumph, Mark Cuffee turned his histrionic talents back to the Bar. He was a clever lawyer and a born virtuoso in court. Since he continued to play cricket for an exclusive amateur club, he possessed a remarkable social entrée in England. He became a Socialist candidate for Parliament in the first post-war election, but was soundly defeated. Soon afterwards he went on a visit to Moscow, where he stayed for a year.

Upon his return he wrote some articles in praise of the Soviet Union, and became a vitriolic public speaker against anything reactionary, bourgeois, capitalist or warmongering. Few of his former legal clients came back to him, but he was regularly retained for the defense of Communist spies and agitators. Several years later, the infinitely elaborate card files in the Kremlin discovered he was ideally suited for propaganda work in Jamaica and now he found himself back in the wild hills of the Maroons, where he had spent his boyhood ...

Mark Cuffee stood near the gate of the village of Accompong, watching the jeep containing Simon Templar and David Farnham bump up the winding rocky road which the Government had built from the nearest market town to the Maroon territory. He had been watching it ever since it came into sight, having been warned of its approach by signals relayed between a chain of sentry outposts.

Drawn up in loose formation
around him were two dozen of his picked senior followers. Most of them were clad in faded rags of incredible age, and all carried machetes, the all-purpose knives of the Jamaican laborer, as long and heavy as a cutlass and just as handy a weapon.

“Dey only two in de car,” said the man nearest to him.

This was one of the few who wore presentable shirts, trousers and shoes. In addition he had on a bandolier and a military-style peaked cap with the insignia of a gold crown fastened above the brim, and instead of a machete, he carried a large cardboard mailing tube like a staff of office.

“You didn’t expect a platoon of soldiers, did you?” Cuffee asked scornfully. “It’ll be a long time before they dare to go that far.”

He himself was dressed in riding breeches and boots, a khaki shirt with brass buttons, a Sam Browne belt and a gold painted sun helmet topped with a red plume. He felt slightly ridiculous in the costume, but it was traditional for the Maroon chieftain to wear some imaginative uniform, and the inspirational effect on at least a majority of his disciples was too valuable to ignore.

The road went only as far as the gate of the settlement. There the jeep stopped. The two men who climbed out did not look very formidable, and Cuffee could feel the rising confidence of his bodyguard as they got a closer look at them. The round-faced one with the pipe, although sturdy, was quite short; and his tall companion in the rainbow-patterned shirt was obviously a tourist. They were certainly unarmed.

“Hullo there,” Farnham called as they approached. “May we come in?”

Cuffee stood with his thumbs hooked in his belt, aware that his ragamuffin élite guard was watching him and that much depended on his first showing.

“You’re Farnham, I believe,” he said.

“That’s right. And I suppose you’re Cuffee.”

“I’m Colonel Cuffee,” was the cold reply.

In commemoration of the warrior prowess of their founding fathers, the Maroon leaders graded themselves by military titles, and their supreme head was now Colonel.

“Are you here on Government business?”

“Just a friendly visit,” Farnham said cheerfully. “Mr. Templar here is my guest on the island, and I thought he ought to have a look at the Cockpit.”

“We don’t want to be gaped at by tourists,” Cuffee said. “For that matter, we don’t want any more uninvited visitors. There have been too many violations of our treaty rights, and now that I’m Colonel I’m putting a stop to it.”

David Farnham sucked his
pipe. "Well, if that’s the way you want it," he said equably, "I’ll have to make it formal."

He took an envelope from his pocket and offered it across the gate. Cuffee almost put out a hand to accept it, but checked himself in time and gave a sign to his chief subordinate. The young man in the peaked cap and bandolier stepped forward and took the envelope.

"Read it aloud, Major" Cuffee said.

The letter said:

Be it known to all men by these Presents:

As Governor of Jamaica, and by virtue of the powers conferred upon me by Her Majesty Elizabeth II, I hereby appoint David Farnham, my personal representative, with full authority to represent me in all matters concerning the Maroons.

Given under the Royal Seal, at Government House.

"It doesn’t mean much," Farnham had confided to the Saint on the way up, "and His Excellency knows it: but it may help a bit."

The Oxford-accented Colonel Cuffee felt reasonably confident that he could make mincemeat of any such credentials in a court of law. But he saw a pretext on which to keep face with his followers and satisfy his curiosity at the same time.

"On that basis, the free and independent Maroons will receive the Ambassador of Her Britannic Majesty—and his friend," he said. "Let them in."

Farnham ambled through the gate as it opened, looking about him with benevolent interest.

"You seem to be quite mobilized," he observed guilelessly. "I hope you aren’t expecting any trouble."

"What makes you think that?" Cuffee demanded.

"I don’t see any women and kids around. And the Maroons aren’t usually armed."

"They’ve always carried machetes, Farnham. You know that perfectly well. It’s just like a stockbroker with his umbrella."

"I was referring," Farnham said, "to your gun."

Cuffee’s right hand touched the holster at his waist, and he laughed. "This? Just part of the costume. A sword would look better, but I couldn’t find a good one on short notice."

They walked some distance up a steep rutted trail, with houses multiplying around them. A few were modest frame cottages with tar-paper roofs, more were unpainted box-like wooden huts and many could only be called tumble-down thatch-topped shacks. From several open doorways, women and children and some men looked out, but none came outside or moved to join the cortège.

Simon could sense the unnatural tension and watchfulness..."
that surrounded them like a gathering storm.

Presently they reached a broad grassy clearing where the habitations were set back to its perimeter, giving it something of the air of a parade ground. There Cuffee raised his hand in an imperious gesture to halt their straggling escort.

"All right, Farnham," Cuffee said bluntly. "What's really on your mind?"

"Well," Farnham replied, "His Excellency, the Governor, thinks he should be officially informed who is the responsible head of the Maroons."

"You know now. I'm the Colonel."

"But quite recently, we hear, they elected another Colonel. What happened to him?"

"He's gone. As soon as the community treasury was turned over to him, he took off and hasn't been seen since."

"Dear me," Farnham said. "And nobody knows where he went?"

Cuffee shrugged. "I don't think anyone cares very much now. The money was only a few pounds, and he's probably spent it by this time. He was obviously unfit for office, and we're well rid of him. There was a new election, and I was elected."

"You must have made an impression very quickly," Farnham remarked. "You haven't been here long, have you?"

"I was born here. And in case you don't recognize my name, I happen to be a direct descendant of one of the first Maroon leaders, Captain Cuffee. His name is on the treaty which still protects us."

"I know. But you're really almost a Londoner."

"It may have taken me a long time to see my duty, Farnham. But I know it now. Whatever talents I have, I inherited from my people. And the education I've gained should be used in their service."

"That's very commendable, of course."

"It's going to make a great difference, I assure you. Your government has had everything its own way too long. I know its policy. Keep what your Empire poet called the 'lesser breeds' in their place. Keep them downtrodden and half-starved so they can be exploited. Keep them ignorant so they can be bamboozled. But you can't get away with it forever. You're going to find that this is one place where, at last, there's a leader who knows all the rules... and all the tricks too. I'm going to see that every right and privilege of the Maroons is respected, in court and out of it."

Farnham nodded, pursing his lips. "Now, about this election," he said imperturbably. "Just how was it conducted?"

"In the normal way."

"A secret ballot? With all Ma-
rooms notified in plenty of time to assemble, and all of them casting their votes?"

Cuffee's face turned ugly and thunderous. "That's an insulting suggestion. And I don't have to answer it, because it isn't any of your business."

"Nevertheless, I have to ask," Farnham persisted quietly. "And I can only place one interpretation on your refusal to answer."

Cuffee's big fist clenched and lifted a little from his side. The Saint balanced himself imperceptibly on the balls of his feet and triggered his muscles for lightning movement, but Farnham stared up at the Colonel unblinkingly. The fist slowly lowered again, but the congestion remained in Cuffee's contorted features.

"You go too far," he said harshly. "This is exactly the kind of meddling I intend to put a stop to. I am obliged to declare you persona non grata. Do you know what that means?"

"In the diplomatic circles, it would mean I was to be kicked out of the country."

"Precisely."

"Do you mean immediately?"

Cuffee hesitated for a second. Then as if a mask slid over his face, the grimace of fury was smoothed out, leaving only a glint of cunning in his eyes.

"No. It's too late for you to be starting back now. Stay the night, if you can find a place to sleep. Let your friend look around and make the most of it. He's the last visitor we shall admit for a long time. And tomorrow I may give you proof that the Maroons are behind me."

He turned on his heel and strode back toward his waiting elite guard, followed closely by his adjutant—leaving the Saint and David Farnham standing alone under the darkening sky.

IV

"Well," Farnham said stoically, "at least I think I know where we can get a bed."

The house that he led them to was one of the better ones as evidenced by the white paint that gleamed through the dusk. Yellow lights glowed behind the windows, but the porch was dark. On it the figure of a black man in dark clothes, standing motionless, was almost invisible until they were within speaking distance.

Farnham said affably: "Good evening, Robertson."

The man said, without moving: "Good evenin', sah."

"Aren't you going to invite us in?"

The man's shoes creaked as he shifted his weight. He said, after a pause: "No, sah. Better you go back dun de hill, sah. I' gettin' late."

"That's all right, we're not going back till tomorrow."

"Better you go tonight, sah. De Colonel don't wan' nobody from outside comin' 'ere."
“Oh, don’t be ridiculous,” Farnham said impatiently. “The Colonel said we could stay tonight. And I want you to meet a friend of mine—Mr. Templar.”

“Yes, sah. How do you do, Mr. Templar, sah. But is bes’ you go dun de hill . . . .”

The door behind him was flung open to frame the shape of another man.

“Did someone say ‘Mr. Templar’? Is that you, sah—the Saint?”

“Yes, Johnny,” Simon said.

The man who stood on the porch was almost bowled over in the rush as Johnny plunged past him, grabbed Simon’s hand, and hustled him and Farnham inside. Robertson followed, quickly shutting the door behind them. The lamplight revealed a very old man feverishly twisting his thin gnarled fingers together.

“I don’ wan’ no trouble here,” mumbled Robertson.

“I don’t want to make any,” said the Saint. “Johnny’s the boxer from New York I was telling you about, Dave.”

“Pleased to meet you, Johnny,” Farnham said, putting out his hand. “I’ve heard nice things about you.”

“Colonel Robertson is a great-uncle of mine,” Johnny explained. He turned to another white-haired old Negro who sat in a rocking chair in the corner. “And this is an older cousin, Commander Reid.”

“I’ve met the Commander,” Farnham said with another cordial handshake.

He sat down at the bare table and tapped the dottle from his burned-out pipe into a saucer which served as ashtray.

“And now, for Heaven’s sake,” he said, “will one of you tell me what’s got into everybody around here?”

“We don’ wan’ no trouble,” Robertson repeated, wringing his hands mechanically.

“Goin’ be lotsa change roun’ here,” said the Commander.

“Things are real bad, Mr. Templar,” Johnny said. “I found that out already. And ever since I found out, I’ve been wondering whether I could find you on the island, or if you’d really come here like you said you might.”

“Dis Missah Templar is a fren’ o’ yours, Johnny?” asked the Commander, rocking busily.

Johnny looked at both the two older negroes. “He’s a wonderful guy. In America, almost everyone knows him. He does things about people like Cuffee. If anyone can help us, he can.”

“I’m just a visitor,” Simon said tactfully. “Mr. Farnham’s the Government man.”

A stout elderly woman came out of the partly screened-off kitchen and began to distribute plates laden with steaming rice and brown stew around the table. Farnham greeted her cordially as Mrs. Robertson. She smiled
politely and went back for more plates, without speaking, for in the councils of the older Maroons a woman's views are not asked for.

"Please, you must both eat with us," Johnny said. "And we'd be honored to have you sleep here."

Robertson shuffled to the table and sat down, looking helpless and lonely, but the Commander pushed back his rocker and stepped across with decisive vigor. "Okay, Johnny," he said heartily. "You fren', and Missah Farnham is my fren'. All o' we is fren'ly here. Dem help us, all okay."

"You're an intelligent young man, Johnny," Farnham said across the table. "What's your version of all this nonsense?"

"It isn't nonsense, Mr. Farnham, sah. This fellow Cuffee's a Communist organizer. I know. I've heard fellows in the States who talked just like him. Being a Maroon himself, he got himself a following pretty quick. It's a pretty hard life up here, just for a man to scratch enough from the ground to feed himself an' his family.

"The people go down to the market an' talk to other people workin' outside, an' the young men go to Kingston an' see how other colored people are livin' so much better, an' they talk to ones who have joined the unions; an' they all come back an' talk."

"The wave of the future," Farnham said heavily. "And they want it all at once."

"Yes, sah. It takes education to be patient, an' patience to get education. An' it takes a lot of both to know why Cuffee's way won't really solve anything."

Cuffee, they learned, had organized the cadre of malcontents with swift efficiency. The disappearance of the most recently installed Colonel had provided such a fortunate vacancy that it was obviously suspect, but Johnny could only quote some of the dark rumors that had been muttered around the village of Accompong. About the handling of the latest election, however, his account was confirmed by Robertson and the Commander.

Cuffee had made an inflammatory speech proposing his own leadership, while his bravos shouted down the arguments of the older conservative group. Two of the most stubborn skeptics had been beaten up. Cuffee's young bullies operated the polls and announced the result.

"But they aren't an army," Farnham said. "At least, not what I saw. Can those two dozen ruffians really terrorize the whole community?"

"Hasn't the same thing happened in bigger countries, but in a not very different proportion?" Simon reminded him.

"Besides," Johnny said, "there's more than what you saw. Cuffee's got them out now, roundin' up
Maroons from all over for a big meeting tomorrow, where he's goin' to tell 'em what the new system's goin' to be."

There was evidently some connection between this and Cuffee's sudden decision to let them stay overnight; and Farnham and the Saint exchanged glances.

"Just what is his platform?" Farnham asked.

"I dunno, sah. But from what I hear, I think it's something about how all the colored people in Jamaica should have the same rights as the Maroons, how we should let all of 'em join us who want to, and enlarge our boundaries till there's room for all of 'em."

"And eventually they end up with the whole island," Farnham said grimly. "Yes, that's clear enough." He looked suddenly very tired. "I'm afraid this turns out to be a bit out of my department. I suppose I'll just have to report it all to the Governor, and let Government decide what to do."

"Government should be able to take care of it," Simon remarked. "A few soldiers, or even policemen —"

"You're forgetting the Treaty."

The Saint had finished his plate. He lighted a cigarette thoughtfully. "Well, where do I stand?" he inquired. "I don't like Cuffee on principle, and I didn't sign any treaty."

He was aware of a transient spark in Robertson's dull eyes, and that for a moment the Commander paused in his energetic chomping, but most of all of the intent eagerness of Johnny.

"No," Farnham said firmly. "You're only a visitor. I know your methods, and they just won't go here. This situation is ticklish enough already. Don't make it any more complicated."

"You're the boss," said the Saint; but he knew that Johnny was still looking at him.

They went to bed not long afterwards.

The Saint awoke to a light touch on his shoulder, instantly, without a movement or even a perceptible change in his breathing. Relaxing one eyelid just enough to give him a minimum slit to peek through, he saw Johnny's face bending over him in the first grayness of dawn, and opened both eyes.

Johnny put a finger to his lips and made a beckoning sign.

The Saint nodded, and slithered over the edge of the bed as silently as the uncooperative springs would let him. The hearty rhythm of Dave Farnham's snoring did not change, and Johnny was already a shadow gliding through the door. A few moments later the Saint, in shirt and trousers and carrying his sandals, joined him outside.

A little way up the path from the house, in shadows made darker by the paling sky, a group
of five men stood waiting. As Johnny and Simon joined them, Simon saw that Robertson and the Commander were two of them. The other three were of similar age. There were no introductions. Johnny seemed to have been appointed spokesman.

"We talked for a long time after you went to bed," he said. "I told them a lot about you. They think you might be able to help us. They want to show you the Peace Cave. That's where the Treaty is supposed to have been signed. I haven't even seen it myself. But they seem to think it's important, I don't know why. Will you go?"

"Of course," said the Saint, with a strange sensation in his spine.

V

The trail turned down around a small valley and twisted past a shoulder of exposed rock and massive boulders. The Commander halted at the rocky point and the rest of the safari gathered around him.

"Now we reach de Peace Cave," said the Commander, and waved his machete. "Open de door!"

The first men to scramble up rolled aside one of the smaller stones disclosing an opening little more than two feet square. Then the man with the lantern lighted it and crawled in on hands and knees. Others followed. The Commander urged Simon upwards.

"Okay, Gaston," said the Saint philosophically.

The tunnel was barely large enough for him to wiggle through on all fours and he was glad to find it only about four yards long. He squirmed out into a low vaulted cave where the lantern revealed the other men perched on the unevenly bouldered floor. The roof was too low for him to stand up straight; and after Johnny and the Commander came in, it was as if the number of people had been calculated by a sardine-packer, for it would have been almost impossible to squeeze one more adult in.

"Dis de Peace Cave," said the Commander, standing in the center with his shoulders seeming to hold up the rock over them. "Here de Maroon dem shoot de soldiers dat come after dem. Look."

He pointed back through the tunnel, and Simon saw the trail that had brought them down into the valley framed like a brilliantly lighted picture at the end of it.

"Now look down here," said the Commander.

He turned the Saint around with strong bony fingers, guiding him between two men who made way and pushing him down into a crevice at the back of the cave. There was just enough room for a man to lie down, and at the end was a natural embrasure that
looked straight up another fifty yards of the trail where it went on to climb the slope behind.

"From dere dem shoot de soldiers dat come dat way," said the Commander. "Bang, bang!"

He made shooting pantomime, holding his machete like an imaginary musket, and roared with laughter.

Simon could see the soldiers in their red coats and bright equipment, probably with flags flying and bugles playing, marching in brave formation down the open path according to the manuals of gentlemanly maneuver of their day, sitting ducks for desperate guerillas. Simon clambered back out of the shallow hole.

"I can see why your people were never beaten," he said to Johnny, who had been down into the hole for a look himself.

The Commander squinted at him with shrewd bright eyes. "You proud to be a Maroon?" he asked Simon.

"I certainly would be. Your fathers won their freedom the hard way."

The Commander pressed him down on to a rock with a hand on his shoulder. "Sit down," he said, and sat beside him. "Where de rum?"

The bottle was produced and opened.

"Hold out yo' hands," said the Commander.

Simon did so awkwardly. The Commander turned them palm upwards and poured rum into the palms.

"Wash yo' face."

The Commander set the example, pouring rum into his own hands and rubbing it over his face, around his neck and up into his hair.

"Very good," said the Commander, beaming. "Nice, cold."

Following suit, the Saint found that it was indeed cooling and refreshing. The bottle passed around the circle for everyone similarly to enjoy. Then the Commander grabbed it and handed it to the Saint.

"Now drink."

"Skoal," said the Saint.

He took a modest sip from the bottle and passed it on. Everyone did the same. The bottle came last to the Commander, who took a Commander’s swallow and firmly corked it again.

"All right," he said. "Out de light."

The cavern was suddenly plunged into blackness.

"Gimme yo' han'," said the Commander.

Simon felt fingers groping down his arm in the inky dark until they closed tightly on his wrist.

The Commander said: "Who got de knife?"

Now at last the Saint understood, and for an instant felt only the reflex drumming of his heart. It was fantastic and unreal, but he was awake and this was happening to him. He wondered fleet-
ingly if it was only a test, a primitive elementary ordeal in darkness and whether perhaps in other days a man who flinched might have found the knife turned summarily into his heart. Intuition held him motionless, his arm relaxed. The Commander’s ghoulish laugh vibrated in the cramped space.

“You have de nerve? You don’ frighten?”

“Go ahead,” said the Saint steadily.

“You all right,” said the Commander, with respect. “Good man.”

There was a tiny flick of pain at the base of the Saint’s little finger, and then his hand was grasped, held as in a firm handshake and his wrist was released.

“Light de lamp,” ordered the Commander.

A match flared and dimmed, and then the brighter flame of the lantern took over. The Commander still held Simon’s hand, and in the renewed light the Saint saw a small trickle of blood run from between their clasped palms and drip down onto the floor of the cave.

Five other entranced black faces leaned forward to observe the same phenomenon, and from four of them came a murmurous exhalation of approval. Johnny said: “Well, for gosh sakes.”

“My blood mix wid yours,” said the Commander gravely. “So A mek you mi brother. Now you is a Maroon too!” Delighted laughter shook him again as he released his grip. “Whe’ de rum?”

He opened the bottle again and poured a few drops on his wound, then on the Saint’s. Then they drank again. Each of the other men solemnly shook the Saint’s bloody hand, and drank from the bottle. After that the bottle was empty.

The Commander pulled out a clean handkerchief and tore it in half. He gave one half to Simon and bound the other half around his own hand.

“All right,” he said. “We go back outside.”

He motioned Simon to go first. The return to sunlight was briefly blinding. While the others were climbing down from the tunnel and replacing the stone across the entrance, Simon wiped his hand and inspected the cut. It was reassuringly small and had already almost stopped bleeding. He fastened the cloth around it again and forgot it.

He looked up and saw the Commander standing before him, with Johnny a little behind.

“Now you is a Maroon, you is mi brother. What you goin’ do ’bout Cuffee?”

“Well,” said the Saint thoughtfully, “first of all, is there any chance of finding the other Colonel? If we produce him, at least Cuffee’s election might be washed out, and we could have another.”
The Commander gazed at him with bright searching eyes, and put an arm around his shoulders.

"Come."

He led the Saint only a little way off the trail, where the fast-growing jungle had already almost obliterated the traces of something heavy being dragged through it. The Saint guessed even then what he was going to see, before the sickly-sweet stench and the buzzing of disturbed flies made it a certainty, before the final pathetic travesty of swollen glistening flesh confirmed it without need of words which were still inevitably spoken.

"Das de Colonel," the Commander said.

VI

It was the Commander who had found the body, Simon learned—driven by rebellious unsatisfied curiosity. The other elders represented there had been informed, but had been afraid even to reveal their knowledge outside their own circle. The recent Colonel had been murdered, but they had no evidence to point from his body to the killer. The Commander might just as easily have been accused himself. And if the real killer felt himself in serious jeopardy, anyone who appeared to threaten him might well be found in the same condition as the luckless ex-Colonel.

All this was explained by the men. Simon could probably have deduced as much by himself more quickly, but courtesy obliged him to listen.

"It sounds just like in the States, when the gangsters knock someone off," Johnny said.

Simon nodded. "Only here the gangster is also the Chief of Police and the Mayor too. But he can't be the Judge as well. Or is he? Don't you have any Constitution?"

They looked at him blankly, and he tried again slowly and simply.

"Is he a dictator? Can the Colonel do anything he likes?"

"De Colonel is de head man," Robertson said.

"What does the Treaty say?"

"See de Treaty yah, sah."

The Saint took it and stared at it. It gave him a strange feeling to be holding that much-discussed document at last. It seemed extraordinary, now, that this moment had been so long delayed.

"Well I'm damned," he said: and then another thought rebounded. "Where did you get this copy?"

"De new Major is mi gran'son, sah. Him is a very wil' bwoy. Him keep it fe Cuffee. A tek it las' night while him was sleepin'."

Simon carried it to a convenient rock and sat down. He lighted a cigarette, and then carefully extracted the scroll from the tube and as carefully unrolled it. Johnny had followed him, and was peering over his shoulder.
The parchment was yellowed and stained with age and the antique angular script often hard to decipher. But the following is an exact transcription and if there are any skeptics who still doubt the authenticity of these chronicles, they can see the original in Kingston whenever they care to go there.

At the Camp near Trelawny Town
March 1st 1738
In the name of God Amen
Whereas Captain Cudjoe, Captain Accompong, Captain Johnny, Captain Cuffee, Captain Quaco, and several other negroes their dependants and adherents, have been in a state of war and hostility for several years past against our Sovereign Lord the King and the inhabitants of this Island: and whereas peace and friendship among mankind and the preventing the effusion of blood is agreeable to God consonant to reason and desired by every good man; and whereas his Majesty George the Second, King of Great Britain, France and Ireland and of Jamaica Lord &c. has quires to negotiate and finally conclude a treaty of peace and friendship with the aforesaid Captain Cudjoe, the rest of his captains adherents and his men; they mutually, sincerely and amicably have agreed to the following Articles:

1st. That all hostilities shall cease on both sides for ever.

There followed paragraphs establishing the freedom of the Maroons and the boundaries of their territory, defining the rights of farming, marketing, and hunting, and binding the Maroons to join the Governor in suppressing other rebels or repelling foreign invaders. Then:

8th. That if any white man shall do any manner of injury to Captain Cudjoe his successors, or any of his or their people they shall apply to any commanding officer or Magistrate in the neighbourhood for justice and in case Captain Cudjoe or any of his people shall do any injury to any white person he shall submit himself or deliver up such offenders to justice.

9th. That if any negroes shall hereafter run away from their master or owner and fall into Captain Cudjoe’s hands they shall immediately be sent back to the Chief Magistrate of the next parish where they are taken; and those that bring them are to be satisfied for their trouble as the legislature shall appoint.

10th. That all negroes taken

“King of France too?” said the Saint. “That’s a new one on me.”

has by his letters patent dated February 25th 1738 in the twelfth year of his reign granted full power and authority to John Guthrie and Francis Sadler, Es-
since the raising of this party by Captain Cudjoe’s people shall immediately be returned.

“That seems to settle Cuffee’s idea of taking all the other colored people in Jamaica into the Maroons,” Simon remarked.

“But they aren’t slaves any longer,” Johnny said. “So how could they be returned?”

“It’ll give the lawyers something to haggle with, anyway,” said the Saint. “But Cuffee’s a lawyer himself. I’m looking for some law we can use now.”

11th. That Captain Cudjoe and his successors, shall wait on His Excellency or the commander in chief for the time being shall constantly live and reside with Captain Cudjoe and his successors in order to maintain a friendly correspondence with the inhabitants of this Island.

“That’s an item that somebody seems to have overlooked,” Simon observed. “It might be some help, but it isn’t exactly a lightning solution.”

The excitement with which he started reading was beginning to drag. The lift of a couple of false hopes had only made the subsequent let-downs more discouraging. The treaty, although its simplicity and straightforwardness could have been studied with advantage by the architects of more modern pacts, left vast areas untouched. The only regulation it set up for the internal affairs of the Maroons was that they should not execute each other. How otherwise they should organize their freedom seemed to have been wholly outside the scope of the agenda.

There was only one clause left; and the Saint’s heart sank as the first words foreshadowed its stately irrelevance.

15th. That Captain Cudjoe shall during his life, be Chief Commander in Trelawny Town; after his decease the command to devolve on his brother Captain
Accompong, and in case of his decease to his next brother Captain Johnny; and failing him, Captain Cuffee shall succeed; who is to be succeeded by Captain Quaco—

His eyes widened incredulously over the next three and final lines. He read them again to make sure. His pointing forefinger underlined them slowly, and he looked up to meet the stunned stare of Johnny at his shoulder.

"You see what I see, don't you?" said the Saint.

"Yes, sah. But—"

"Oh no," said the Saint, in a low quavering voice. "Oh, leaping lizards. Oh, holy Moses in the mountains!"

He was rolling the parchment up again with shaking fingers, stuffing it back into the protective tube. He came to his feet with a shout that brought all the others around him.

"O blessed bureaucracy," he yelled. "O divine dust of departmental archives. O rollicking ribbons of red tape!"

They gaped at him as if he had gone out of his mind, which perhaps he temporarily had. The immortal magnificence of that moment was more than flesh and blood could take with equanimity. And it was all crystallized in the last few words of the Maroons' charter, after he had given up all hope—exactly like a charge of cavalry pounding to the rescue of a beleaguered outpost in the last few feet of the corniest horse opera ever filmed.

Simon's ribs ached with laughter. He handed the tube back to the man who had carried it, and clapped Johnny and the Commander ecstatically on the back, each with one hand.

"Let's get back to Accompong," he said. "And somebody better find something we can eat on the way. This is going to be a day to remember, and I don't want to starve to death before I see the end of it."

VII

"I've told you till I'm blue in the face," David Farnham said irritably. "I don't know where Mr. Templar went, or why, or anything about it."

It was late in the afternoon, and he must have repeated the same statement twenty or thirty times during the day. Farnham was considerably perplexed, but not too worried, once the attitudes of Cuffee and his henchmen clearly proved that they were equally baffled by the disappearance. Cuffee scowled. The Major, zealously taking his cue, scowled even more ferociously. Others of the bodyguard dutifully joined in the gloowering.

They were in a house at the edge of the "parade-ground" where Cuffee was living and making his official headquarters. Twenty yards in front of it, men had been working all day to build
a sort of open bandstand about fifteen feet square, with a floor raised two feet above the ground and stout poles at each corner supporting a thatched roof. Now it was completed; and for the past hour the wide clearing had been gradually filling with a motley crowd of men, drifting and conglomerating and separating again uncertainly, with chattering groups of women on the outskirts and small children chasing each other like puppies around its fringes.

Several of Cuffee's elite corps were trying to marshal the mob into a semblance of audience formation facing the newly erected platform. They were now distinguished with broad red arm bands, which seemed to give them the added confidence and bravado of a uniform.

Cuffee looked at his watch. He was restless. Although he knew that schedules meant little to the Maroons, he had set a time for himself. Even more importantly, he sensed that if the suspense of the people waiting to hear him were prolonged beyond a certain point it might have the opposite effect from what he wanted.

With an abrupt decisiveness he stood up, settled his Sam Browne belt, and put on his gilded helmet.

"The meeting will begin," he said, and looked at Farnham. "I think you'll want to listen to this."

"I shall be interested," Farnham said calmly.

Cuffee turned and marched out, followed by his adjutant and the rest of his bodyguard, except for two who remained with Farnham.

Farnham strolled out, relighting his pipe, and the two followed him. Cuffee had not invited him to join him on the rostrum, and Farnham wondered whether he should take the invitation for granted or the lack of it as a diplomatic affront.

His two personal escorts, however, who seemed to have prior instructions, fell in on either side of him and steered him with suggestive pressures round the reviewing stand to an empty wooden crate placed in line with one corner where it was indicated that he should sit.

Thus he found himself nearer the platform than the other spectators, but set aside rather in the center of a special front row. It gave him the uncomfortable feeling of being positioned more like a prisoner on trial, which was not relieved by the way his escorts stationed themselves just behind him.

A dozen of the elite guard had ranged themselves in a double rank from front to rear of the dais, with the Major at the rear of one file. At a word from him, they raised their clenched fists in a ragged salute, and Cuffee strode down the human aisle to the front of the stand, where he raised his fist in salute to the audience.

There was a splatter of ap-
plause, which Farnham observed was led and fomented by a number of red-armleted who still circulated authoritatively through the assembly.

Cuffee lowered his fist, and his guard of honor slouched out of formation and shuffled towards the front of the stage.

"My friends," Cuffee said, "comrades, and brother Maroons. I am your new Colonel. Colonel Cuffee. I've brought you here to tell you what I'm going to do for you and for all our people while I'm your leader."

His oratorical voice was resonant and dynamic, and he handled it with the skill of an actor. But with even greater intellectual skill he chose words of almost puerile simplicity but uttered them with overwhelming earnestness, investing them with vast profundity, never seeming to talk down to his listeners, yet assuring that the most ignorant and unschooled of them could grasp his meaning.

"It is a pity," he said, "that the spirit of our Treaty was soon forgotten by the Government of this island . . . And because some of our fathers were not wide awake, or were deceived by tricks and lies, they let their rights be taken away one by one."

He cited an insidiously increasing variety of encroachments. Their lands had never been properly surveyed, and their boundaries had been involved in a continual series of disputes designed to whittle them away acre by acre. Administration of their own affairs had been spied on and meddled with by a procession of imperialist agents disguised as missionaries or welfare workers. Their territory had been arrogantly invaded by British policemen with instructions to fabricate evidence that the Maroons were bandits or were harboring bandits; their privilege of self-government was nullified by emissaries of the Colonial Secretariat who presumed to force their way in and ask impertinent questions about the conduction of elections and to cast doubt on their validity.

It was during the development of this theme that Cuffee began to turn pointed glances toward David Farnham, the last charge being directed straight at him.

"Nonsense!" Farnham said loudly. But he felt the impact of hostile stares and heard some ugly muttering in the audience.

Also he had a mostly psychic impression of his two special guards stiffening and hefting their machetes when he spoke; for the first time he felt a real qualm of somewhat incredulous apprehension.

Where the devil had the Saint gone? he wondered.

He re-crossed his legs and moved his pipe to the other side of his mouth with a good show of phlegmatic ennui as Cuffee turned away from him again with calcu-
lated contempt to make another smooth shift from second into high
gear.

“But, comrades, we don’t have

to let them do this. Now I shall
tell you what we can do—what
we are going to do.”

The only thing wrong with the
Treaty was that it had not gone
far enough. The Maroons had
won their freedom, but for many
years after that their fellow slaves
had been kept in bondage. Even
though today they could vote,
they could vote only for British
governments. They were still sub-
jects of the same flag that had
flown over the slave ships.

“Now I say that it is time for
us to set another glorious example.
Let us urge our comrades outside
to demand the same rights that
we have. Let us help them to get
their rights. Let us tell any of
them who want to fight for their
rights, that if the British tyrants
want to put them in jail for it,
they can come here, where they’ll
be safe, because the British police
can’t come to our country to
arrest them—”

Farnham could sit still no
longer. He jumped to his feet.
“That’s treason!” he shouted.

“Also,” said another voice, “it’s
against the Treaty.”

The voice turned every eye
before any move could develop
against Farnham. And everyone
saw the Saint, with the little group
of Johnny and the old men behind
him, standing at the other corner
of the rostrum.

The Commander stepped for-
ward and held up the Saint’s hand
with his own, so that their two
bandages were together in plain
sight.

“Dis man is mi brother!” he
roared. “Him is a good Maroon
now, a good man. Listen to him!”

The bloodstains on the cloth
stood out so clearly that the
delicate pink flush of evening
touching the tops of the clouds
looked like a pale reflection from
them. An awed murmur rippled
through the crowd and settled into
a complete hush.

“In our treaty,” said the Saint,
“the Maroons promised to help
stop rebellions, not start them.”

The man who carried the car-
board tube held it up symbolically.

The young Major’s eyes blazed
as he saw it. He leaped down
from the stand, snatched the tube
away, and felled the old man with
a brutal blow. In another second
he measured more than his own
length on the ground, sliding on
his back, as Johnny connected
with a classic straight left to his
chin.

Simon grabbed the tube as it
fell and sprang up on the plat-
form. Johnny was close behind
him; and David Farnham had
started in the same direction be-
fore his guards could recover from
their astonishment and stop him.
Farnham’s move was made with-
out conscious thought, and
although the end could only be disastrous he felt that he should be at the core of it.

The swift succession of surprises, however, seemed to have temporarily robbed everyone else of initiative. Even the red-arm-banded squad on the platform were as nonplussed as their colleagues among the crowd: still too new to their role to have developed the reflexes of trained and organized bullies, they waited uncertainly for orders, and for a moment Cuffee himself hesitated before the fateful possibilities of his decision.

In that breathing spell of confusion, Simon Templar raised and stretched out his arms to the audience, with the tube held aloft in one of them, and said:

"I shall not stop Colonel Cuffee talking for long—although I should only call him Captain Cuffee, because I see in the Treaty that the Maroons who set you free were none of them more than Captains, and I don’t know why anyone today should make himself bigger than those men who signed this Treaty. I have it here, and I have read it. All of you should read it. It has not been read enough.

"For years people have talked about this Treaty, here and in the Government too; but I think very few of them have ever looked at it. If they had, there would not be so many arguments. For instance, about your—our last election, in which Captain Cuffee made himself the chief. You should all know what the Treaty says!"

He thrust the tube into Farnham’s hands, and whispered: "Read ’em the last clause—and try not to look shocked yourself."

Cuffee started to move then, but in the same instant Johnny pinioned his arms from behind. In the next, Simon had whipped the gun out of Cuffee’s holster and leveled it.

"Tell your boys to stand back," he said grimly. "Because if a riot starts now, you’ll be the first casualty."

As Johnny released him and stepped warily away, Cuffee made a perfunctory gesture of compliance. It was almost supererogatory, for sight of the gun had already cooled the ambition of his cohorts.

Farnham held the unrolled parchment, and read with pulpit clarity:

"That Captain Cudjoe shall during his life, be Chief Commander in Trelawny Town; after his decease the command to devolve on his brother Captain Accompong, and in case of his decease to his next brother Captain Johnny; and failing him, Captain Cuffee shall succeed; who is to be succeeded by Captain Quaco; and after all their demises . . ."

His voice faltered as his eyes ran ahead of it, but he braced
himself and finished strongly and firmly: "—and after all their demises the Governor or Commander-in-Chief for the time being shall appoint from time to time, whom he thinks fit for that command."

There was a silence in which the earth itself seemed to stand still, and then it was as if all the people breathed together in a great sigh.

David Farnham let the scroll curl up again. "As the official representative of the Governor, therefore," he said, "I declare that Cuffee is no longer your Colonel."

There was a vague medley of gasps and murmurs in the audience and several sporadic handclaps.

Farnham looked at the Saint. Simon nodded and put a hand on Johnny's shoulder. Farnham turned again to the assembly. "Instead, I shall appoint another man who has been to school and learned a lot of things that will help you, but who’s also a good Maroon, whose ancestor is named in the Treaty even ahead of Cuffee's—Captain Johnny!"

Simon seized Johnny's hand and hoisted it like the mitt of a victorious prizefighter.

The murmurs became more positively approving, the applause louder; and the Commander started a gleeful cheer which was taken up by an increasing number of voices.

Cuffee's face was gray under its dusky pigment. Ignoring the gun that the Saint held, he forced his way again to the front of the platform, his clenched fist raised. "That's what I've been telling you!" he howled. "The Treaty cheated you! You're still slaves—"

Johnny spun him around by the shoulder and flung him into the arms of the nearest of his own men. "Arrest him," he said.

For Johnny it was as if an invisible mantle that had always been waiting for him had fallen on his shoulders. He had at last found his stature. The tone of command came without effort to his voice.

Cuffee's guard glanced nervously about. They must have heard in the rising babble of the crowd beyond a trend that would not lightly change its course again. Already some of their fraternity in the audience were unobtrusively slipping off their red armlets...

They took hold of Cuffee and held him, instinctively obeying the one who seemed to be the stronger leader.

Johnny turned back to the throng that was crowding up to the dais.

"That man lied to you about the Treaty!" he shouted. "Why should we listen to him any more? He lied about the last Colonel, too. Cuffee killed him so that he could make himself Colonel. We found his body near the Peace
Cave. The Commander saw it too, an’ Colonel Robertson, an’ Mr. Templar.”

Of course it was not evidence, but to his hearers it carried conviction. An appalled hush settled on the throng.

“Now you can see what Cuffee’s kind of freedom means.” Johnny’s eyes flashed. “A worse kind of slavery than our fathers fought against—a slavery in which death is the price of disagreeing with those in power.”

Simon, standing behind felt a glow of pride at his protégé’s newfound eloquence.

“Nobody does himself any good by breakin’ the law,” Johnny said with simple dignity. “The Treaty is our law. An’ it’s a good treaty. Whatever the British Government did once, they want to be our friends now. It isn’t anything like Cuffee tried to make out. If you’ll listen, an’ Mr. Farnham will help me, I’ll try to tell you why.”

VIII

Later that evening Farnham said meticulously: “Of course, Johnny, between ourselves, the Governor’ll have to approve my recommendation and confirm your appointment himself. But I don’t think we’ll have any trouble about that. He should be grateful to have such a tidy solution dropped into his lap. . . . As for you, Simon, I think I’d feel better if you went ahead and laughed at me, instead of displaying such hypocritical Christian forbearance.”

“Because you’d never read the Treaty right to the end yourself?” said the Saint. “No, I did most of my laughing this morning, and not principally at you. Hereafter, we’ll keep the joke to ourselves. Besides which, I doubt if anyone else would ever believe it.”

He lighted a cigarette and shook his head in rapture nevertheless.

“But what a fabulous little gem it is,” he said dreamily. “For more than two hundred years the legend of the Maroons had gone on. Away back somewhere, some clerk in some Government department told some new clerk who was too lazy to look for himself his careless version of what the Treaty said. That new clerk repeated it to his successor, who repeated it to the next man. Everyone accepted it and believed it. Each incoming Governor heard about it from his staff, believed it, and perpetuated it.

“It was such general knowledge that nobody ever thought of questioning it, any more than they would have questioned the statement that Jamaica is a British colony. Jerry Dugdale, the policeman, believed it, and so did the Governor who bawled him out. You believed it. A copy of the Treaty was in the files all the time, but who ever looks in files? For maybe two centuries, nobody ever read the Treaty. Except probably Cuffee. But why should
he blow his hand? It took a nosey bustard like me, sitting on a rock out in the wilderness, to read all through the damn thing and explode the lovely myth."

"All right," Farnham said solidly. "There's only one thing that bothers me now. It's about Cuffee. None of us has any reasonable doubt that he murdered the former Colonel—or if he didn't do it himself, he instigated it. But the Treaty doesn't allow you to hang him, Johnny. You have to hand him over to our authorities. And there's no evidence against him that would stand up in a regular court. I'm very much afraid that he'll eventually get off scot-free."

The Saint stood up. "I've been thinking about that myself," he said soberly. "And I have an idea. But if you'll excuse me, I'd rather tell Johnny alone. If you know nothing about it, you can't have anything on your conscience."

Mr. Mark Cuffee had been gradually regaining his confidence as he endlessly paced the confines of the room that had become his cell. The men who guarded him now were half a dozen of the older generation, headed by the Commander, and he knew that it would have been a waste of breath to try to argue or coax them into changing their allegiance. Nor had he been foolish enough to attempt a forcible escape. In spite of their years, they still had the sinews of a lifetime of manual labor, and any two of them would have been an easy match for him.

So instead of attempting the impossible, he had been using his head.

There was no evidence that could possibly convict him in a British court. And with his knowledge and experience as a barrister, he would back himself to make any colonial prosecutor in that little island look like a clown. There were even opportunities for such a grandstand performance that his superiors in the Party, of whom he was much more afraid, might not only forgive his local failure but commend the larger achievement. His defense of himself and his struggle to liberate a downtrodden proletariat from imperialist exploiters would make worldwide headlines. He would—

As the door opened and Johnny and Simon Templar walked in, he swung around as if he himself were the potential prosecutor and they had come to plead for leniency.

"What do you want now?" he challenged truculently. "I demand to be properly arraigned before a Magistrate. Until you're ready to conform with civilized legal procedures, be good enough to leave me alone."

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about," said the Saint quietly.

Johnny made a sign to the guard, and one by one they silently
left the room. As the door closed behind the last of them, Cuffee threw himself into a chair.

"What's the idea?" he inquired sarcastically. "Were you thinking of trying some American third degree on me? It won't get you anywhere, and it'll only make matters worse for you when I get out in court."

"Mr. Cuffee," said the Saint, "you aren't going to any court where you'd probably get acquitted. Johnny has decided that it would be better for him to convict you on a lesser charge, and give you a sentence which he has the right to impose. You remember that the Treaty allows him to inflict any punishment short of death. Therefore his idea is that he should have your hands and feet cut off, your eyes put out, your tongue cut out, castrate you—and let you go."

Cuffee stared at them. "You must be crazy," he sneered. "I shall appeal to the Governor—"

"The sentence is to be carried out tonight."

Cuffee licked his lips. He could not believe his ears, but Johnny's face was expressionless and im placable.

"You're off your head, Johnny," he said in a husky mumble of horror. "England would never let you get away with that, treaty or no treaty. You'd pay for it in the end, you and all the Maroons."

"That's what I tried to tell him," said the Saint. "But he won't listen. His mind's made up. And by the time the British Parliament could do anything about it, it'll be too late to do you any good. The best I've been able to do is persuade him to let you take an easier way out for yourself, if you want to."

He brought one hand from behind his back, and Cuffee saw that there was a coiled length of rope in it. Cuffee gazed at it numbly.

"It's a strong rope," said the Saint, "and so are the beams over your head. You'll be left alone for half an hour before they come for you. I'm sorry, but that's all I could do."

He turned and walked out of the room. Johnny followed him, closing the door after them.

"You know, sah," Johnny said, "I happened to see an old map of Jamaica in Kingston, an' I saw what they used to call this part of the country. You know what it was? The District of Look Behind. I kept rememberin' that when we were at the Peace Cove, thinkin' how they used to ambush the redcoats. Kind of gives you a shudder, doesn't it?"

"My God, what a wonderful name," said the Saint, with the pure delight of a poet. Then his hand lay on Johnny's shoulder, and he said: "But now it's your job to make it the District of Look Ahead."

Then they both looked back at the house, and listened.
The kid was twelve, and his name was Buddy. His real name wasn't that, it was Charlie, but they called him Buddy.

He was small for his age. The world he lived in was small too. Or rather, one of them was. He lived in two worlds at once. One of them was a small, drab, confined world; just two squalid rooms, in the rear of a six-story tenement, 20 Holt Street; stifling in summer, freezing in winter. Just two grownups in it, Mom and Pop. And a handful of other kids like himself, that he knew from school and from playing on the streets.

The other world had no boundaries, no limits. You could do anything in it. You could go anywhere. All you had to do was just sit still and think hard. Make it up as you went along. The world of imagination. He did a lot of that.

But he was learning to keep it to himself. They told him he was getting too big now for that stuff. They swatted him, and called it

Everyone was annoyed by Buddy's daydreaming. But only the killers thought it a crime for such a brave little boy to stay alive!

On the mystery best-seller lists, and the suspense-charged depths of the silver screen the novels and short stories of William Irish parade in chilling sequence like proud peacocks of the night! But for sheer tragic pathos, whiplash characterization, and a pattern of violence terrifyingly new we proudly nominate the magnificent crime novelet presented here.

Copyright, 1947, by William Irish and published as Fire Escape in “Dead Man’s Blues” and used by permission of the publishers, J. B. Lippincott Co.
lies. The last time he’d tried telling them about it, Pop had threatened.

“I’m going to wallop you good next time you make up any more of them fancy lies of yours!” Pop had said.

“It comes from them Sa’day afternoon movies he’s been see- ing,” Mom said. “I told him he can’t go any more.”

And then this night came along.

It felt as if it were made of boiling tar, poured all over you. July was hot everywhere, but on Holt Street it was hell. He kept trying and he kept trying, and it wouldn’t work. The bedding on his cot got all soggy and streaked with damp. Pop wasn’t home; he worked nights.

The two rooms were like the chambers of an oven, with all the gas burners left on full tilt. Buddy took his pillow with him finally and climbed out the window onto the fire-escape landing just outside, and tried it out there. It wasn’t the first time; he’d done it lots before. You couldn’t fall off, the landing was railed around. Well, you could if you were unlucky, but it hadn’t happened yet. He sort of locked his arm through the rail uprights, and that kept him from rolling in his sleep.

It wouldn’t work, it was just as bad out there. It was still like an oven, only now with the burners out maybe. He decided maybe it would be better if he tried it a little higher up. Sometimes there was a faint stirring of breeze skimming along at roof level. It couldn’t bend and get down in here behind the tenements. He picked up the pillow and went up the iron slats one flight, to the sixth-floor landing, and tried it there.

It wasn’t very much better. But it had to do, you couldn’t go up any higher than that. He’d learned by experience you couldn’t sleep on the roof itself, because it was covered with gravel, and that got into you and hurt. And underneath it was tar-surfaced, and in the hot weather that got soft and stuck to you all over.

He wriggled around a little on the hard-bitten iron slats, with empty spaces in-between, that were like sleeping on a grill, and then finally he dozed off. The way you can even on a fire escape, when you’re only twelve.

Morning came awfully fast. It seemed to get light only about a minute later. The shine tickled his eyelids and he opened them. Then he saw that it wasn’t coming down from above, from the sky, the way light should. It was still dark, it was still night up there. It was coming in a thin bar, down low, even with his eyes, running along the bottom of the window he was lying outside of, on a level with the fire-escape landing he was lying on.

If he’d been standing up instead of stretched out flat, it would have been over his feet instead of
across his eyes. It was only about an inch high. A dark shade unrolled nearly to the bottom, but that had slipped back maybe a half turn on its roller, cut the rest of it off. But with his eyes up close against it like they were, it was nearly as good as the whole window being lit up. He could see the whole inside of the room.

There were two people in it, a man and a woman. He would have closed his eyes again and gone right back to sleep—what did he care about watching grown-ups?—except for the funny, sneaky way they were both acting. That made him keep on watching, wondering what they were up to.

The man was asleep on a chair, by a table. He’d been drinking or something. There was a bottle and two glasses on the table in front of him. His head was down on the table, and his hand was in front of his eyes, to protect them from the light.

The woman was moving around on tiptoes, trying not to make any noise. She was carrying the man’s coat in her hands, like she’d just taken it off the back of the chair, where he’d hung it before he fell asleep. She had on a lot of red and white stuff all over her face; but Buddy didn’t think she looked very pretty.

When she got around the other side of the table from him, she stopped, and started to dip her hand in and out of all the pockets of the coat. She kept her back to him while she was doing it. But Buddy could see her good from the side, he was looking right in at her.

That was the first sneaky thing he saw that made him keep on watching them. And the second was, he saw the fingers of the man’s hand, the one that was lying in front of his eyes, split open, and the man stole a look through them at what she was doing.

Then when she turned her head, to make sure he was asleep, he quickly closed his fingers together again, just in time.

She turned her head the other way again and went ahead doing what she was doing.

She came up with a big fat roll of money from the coat all rolled up tight, and she threw the coat aside, and bent her head close, and started to count it over. Her eyes got all bright, and Buddy could see her licking her lips while she was doing it.

All of a sudden Buddy held his breath. The man’s arm was starting to crawl along the top of the table toward her, to reach for her and grab her. It moved very slow and quiet, like a big thick snake inching along after somebody, and she never noticed it. Then when it was out straight and nearly touching her, the man started to come up off his chair after it and crouch over toward her, and she never heard that either. He was smiling, but it wasn’t a very good
kind of a smile—not at all.
Buddy’s heart was pounding.
He thought, “You better look
around, lady, you better look
around!” But she didn’t. She was
too busy counting the money.
All of a sudden the man jumped
and grabbed her. His chair went
over flat, and the table nearly did
too, but it recovered and stayed
up. His big hand, the one that
had been reaching out all along,
cought her around the back of the
neck, and held on tight, and he
started to shake her from head to
foot.
His other hand grabbed the
wrist that was holding the money.
She tried to jam it down the front
of her dress, but she wasn’t quick
enough. He twisted her wrist
slowly around, to make her let
go of it.
She gave a funny little squeak
like a mouse, but not very loud.
At least it didn’t come out the
window very loud, where Buddy
was.
“No you don’t!” Buddy heard
the man growl. “I figured some-
thing like this was coming! You
gotta get up pretty early in the
morning to put anything like that
over on me!”
“Take your hands off me!” she
panted. “Let go of me!”
He started to swing her around
from side to side. “You won’t
ever try anything like this again,
by the time I get through with
you!” Buddy heard the man grunt.
All of a sudden she screamed,
“Joe! Hurry up in here! I can’t
handle him any longer by myself!”
But she didn’t scream it out real
loud, just in a sort of a smothered
way, as if she didn’t want it to
carry too far.
The door flew open, and a
second man showed up. He must
have been standing right outside it
waiting the whole time, to come
in that fast. He ran up behind
the man who was being robbed.
She held on tight and kept him
from turning around to meet him.
The second man waited until
his head was in the right position,
and then he locked both his own
hands together in a double fist,
and smashed them down with all
his might on the back of the other
man’s neck.
The other man dropped to the
floor like a stone and lay there
quiet for a minute.
The woman scrambled down
and started to pick up all the
money that was lying around on
the floor.
“Here!” she said, handing it to
the man.
“Hurry up, let’s get out of
here!” he snarled. “What’d you
have to bungle it up like that for?
Why didn’t you fix his drink
right?”
“I did, but it didn’t work on
him. He musta seen me do it.”
“Come on!” he said, and started
for the door. “When he comes to,
he’ll bring the cops down on us.”
All of a sudden the man lying
on the floor wrapped his arm tight
wrenched it out with a sawing motion from side to side, and swung it again, and buried it again, in a different place this time. The other man wasn’t moving any more, just sort of recoiling with the stab itself.

He wasn’t satisfied even yet. He freed it a third time, with a lot of trouble, and it came up and went back in again. Then they both lay there still, one of them getting his breath, the other not breathing any more.

Finally he rolled the crumpled weight off him, and picked himself up, and felt his jaw. Then they both stood looking down at what lay there, he and the woman. “Is he dead?” Buddy heard her ask in a scared voice.

“Wait a minute, I’ll see.” He got down by him, and put his hand underneath him, where his heart was. Then he pulled it out. Then he pulled the knife out of his back. Then he stood up.

He looked at her and shook his head a little.

“Holy Smoke!” she gasped. “We’ve killed him! Joe what’ll we do?” She didn’t say it very loud, but it was so quiet in the room now, Buddy could hear everything they said just as if he were in there too.

The man grabbed her arm and squeezed it tight. “Take it easy. There’s plenty of people killed, that they never find out who done it. Just don’t lose your head, that’s all. We’ll get by with it.”
He held her until he was sure she was steady, then he let go of her again. He looked all around the room. "Gimme some newspapers. I want to keep this stuff from getting on the floor."

He got down and stuffed them underneath the body on all sides. Then he said, "Case the door, see if there's anyone out there that heard us. Open it slow and careful, now."

She went over to it on tiptoe, and moved it open just on a crack, and looked out with one eye. Then she made it a little wider, and stuck her whole head out, and turned it both ways. Then she pulled it in again, and closed up, and came back to him.

"Not a soul around," she whispered.

"All right. Now case the window. See if it's all right out in the back there. Don't pull up the shade, just take a squint out the side of it."

II

She started to come over to where Buddy's eyes were staring in, and she got bigger and bigger every minute, the closer she got. Her head went way up high out of sight, and her waist blotted out the whole room. He couldn't move, he was like paralyzed. The little gap under the shade must have been awfully skinny for her not to see it, but he knew in another minute she was going to look right out on top of him, from higher up—and see him.

Buddy rolled over flat on his back, it was only a half-roll because he'd been lying on his side until now, and that was about all the moving there was time for him to do. There was an old blanket over the fire-escape rail, hung out to air. He clawed at it and pulled it down on top of him.

He only hoped it covered all of him, but there wasn't time to tuck it around evenly. About all he could do was hunch himself up and make himself as small as possible, and pray none of him stuck out.

A minute later, even with his head covered, he could tell, by a splash of light that fell across the blanket, like a sort of stripe, that she'd tipped the shade back and was staring out the side of it.

"There's something white down here," Buddy heard her say, and he froze all over. He even stopped breathing, for fear his breath would show up against the blanket, make it ripple.

"Oh, I know!" she explained, in relief. "It's that blanket I left out there yesterday. It must have fallen down. Gee, for a minute I thought it was somebody lying there!"

"Don't stand there all night, sir," the man growled.

The stripe of light went out, and Buddy knew she'd let the shade go back in place.

He was still afraid to move for a minute, even after that. Then he
worked his head clear of the blanket, and looked again.

Even the gap was gone now. She must have pulled the shade down even, before she turned away. He couldn’t see them any more, but he could still hear them.

But he didn’t want to. All he wanted to do was get down off there!

He knew, though, that if he could hear them, they could hear him just as easy. He had to do it slow. The fire escape was old and rickety, it might creak. He started to stretch out his legs, backward, toward the ladder steps going down. Then when he had them out straight, he started to palm himself along backward on the flats of his hands, keeping his head and shoulders down. It was a little bit like swimming the breast stroke on dry land. Or rather on iron slats, which was worse still.

But he could still keep on hearing them the whole time he was doing it.

“Here’s his identification papers,” the man said. “Cliff Bristol, Mate on a merchant ship. That’s good. Them guys disappear awfully easy. Not too many questions asked. We want to make sure of getting everything out of his pockets, so they won’t be able to trace who he was.”

The woman said, like she was almost crying, “Oh, what do we care what his name is. We’ve done it, that’s all that matters.

Come on, Joe, for God’s sake let’s get out of here!”

“We don’t have to get out now,” the man said. “Why should we? All we have to do is get him out. Nobody seen him come up here with you. Nobody knows it happened. If we lam out now and leave him here, they’ll be after us in five seconds. If we just stay here like we are, nobody’ll be any the wiser.”

“But how you going to do it, Joe? How you going to get him out?”

“I’ll show you. Bring out them two valises of yours, and empty the stuff out of them.”

Buddy was worming his way down the fire-escape steps backward now, but his face and chin were still balanced above the landing.

“But he won’t go into one of them, a great big guy like him,” the woman protested.

“He will the way I’ll do it,” the man answered. And then he said, “Go in the bathroom and get me my razor.”

Buddy’s chin went down flat on the landing for a minute, and he felt like he wanted to throw up. The fire escape creaked a little, but the woman had groaned just then, and that covered it up.

“You don’t have to watch,” the man said. “You go outside the door and wait, if you feel that way about it. Come in again if you hear anyone coming.”

Buddy began to move again,
spilling salt water from his mouth. "Hand me all the rest of the newspapers we got in here, before you go," he heard the man say. "And bring in that blanket you said was outside the window, that'll come in handy too. I'm going to need it for a lining."

Buddy wriggled the rest of the way down, like a snake in reverse. He felt his feet touch bottom of his own landing, outside his own windows, and he was safe! But there was something soft clinging to them. He looked, and it was the blanket. It had gotten tangled around his foot while he was still up above there, and he'd trailed it down with him without noticing in his excitement.

He kicked it clear of himself, but there was no time to do anything else with it. He squirmed across the sill and toppled back into his own flat, and left it lying there. An instant later a shot of light doused the fire escape and he heard the window above go up, as she reached out for it.

Then he heard her whisper in a frightened, bated voice: "It blew down! I see it, there it is down below. It was right out here a minute ago, and now it's down below!"

The man must have told her to go after it and bring it up. The light went out. He must have put the light out in the room, so she'd have a chance to climb down and get it without being seen. Buddy could hear the wooden window frame ease the rest of the way up in the dark, then a stealthy scrape on the iron ladder stairs.

He pressed himself up flat against the wall, under his own sill. He was small enough to fit in there. He saw the white of the blanket flick upward and disappear from sight.

Then he heard her whisper, just as she went in her own window again, "That's funny; and there's not a breath of air stirring either. How did it come to get blown down there?"

Then the window rustled closed and it was over.

Buddy didn't get up and walk to his own bed. He couldn't lift himself that high. He crawled to it on his hands and knees.

He pulled the covers all over him, even past the top of his head, and as hot as the night had seemed only a little while ago, he shook as if it were the middle of December and goose-pimpls came out all over him.

He was still shaking for a long time after. He could hear someone moving around right over him once in a while, even with the covers over his head. And just picturing what was going on up there, that would start him in shaking all over again.

It took a long time. Then everything got quiet. No more creaks on the ceiling, like some body was rocking back and forth sawing away at something. He
was all covered with sweat now, and the sheets were damp.

Then he heard a door open, and someone moved softly down the stairs outside. Past his own door and down to the bottom. Once something scraped a little against the wall, like a valise. He started in shaking again, worse than ever.

He didn’t sleep all the rest of the night. Hours later, after it was already light, he heard someone coming quietly up the stairs. This time nothing scraped against the walls. Then the door closed above, and after that there was no more sound of anything.

Then in a little while his mother got up in the next room and got breakfast started and called in to him.

He got dressed and dragged himself in to her, and when she turned around and saw him she said, “You don’t look well, Buddy. You feel sick?”

He didn’t want to tell her, he wanted to tell his father.

His father came home from work a few minutes after that, and they sat down to the table together like they did every morning, Buddy to his breakfast and his father to his before-bedtime supper.

He waited till his mother was out of the room, then he whispered: “Pop, I want to tell you something.”

“Okay, shoot,” his father grinned.

“Pop, there’s a man and woman livin’ over us.”

“Sure, I know that,” his father said, helping himself to some bacon. “That’s no news to me. I’ve seen them, coming and going. I think the name’s Scanlon or Hanlon, something like that.”

Buddy shifted his chair closer and leaned nearer his father’s ear. “But Pop,” he breathed, “last night they killed a man up there, and they cut up his body into small pieces, and stuck it into two valises.”

His father stopped chewing. Then he put down his knife and fork. Then he turned around slowly in his chair and looked at him hard. For a minute Buddy thought he felt sick and scared about it, like he had himself. But then he saw that he was only sore. Sore at Buddy himself.

“Mary, come in here,” he called out grimly.

Buddy’s mother came to the door and looked in at them. “He’s at it again,” his father said. “I thought I told you not to let him go to any more of them Sat’day movies.”

She gnawed her lip worriedly. “Making things up again?”

“I didn’t make—” Buddy started to protest.

“I wouldn’t even repeat to you the filthy trash he’s just been telling me. It would turn your blood cold.” His father whacked him across the mouth with the back of his hand. “Shut up,” he
said. “If there’s one thing I can’t stand it’s a liar. One of them congenial liars.”

“What’d he say?” his mother asked troubledly.

“It’s not fit for you to hear,” his father said indignantly. But then he went ahead and told her anyway. “He said they done someone in up there, over us, and then chopped him up into small pieces and carried him off in two valises.”

His mother touched her apron to her mouth nauseatedly. “The Kellermans?” she gasped in horrified disbelief. “Oh Buddy, when are you going to stop that? Why, they’re the last people in the world. She seems like a very nice woman. Why she was right down here at the door only the other day, to borrow a cup of sugar from me. She always has a smile and a nice word, whenever you pass her on the stairs. Why, they’re the last ones—!”

“Well, he’ll grow up fine,” his father said darkly. “There’s something wrong with a boy like that. This had to happen to me! I don’t know where he gets it from. I wasn’t that way, in my whole life. My brother Ed, rest his soul, wasn’t that way. You were never that way, nor anyone on your side of the family. But I’m going to take it out of him if it’s the last thing I do.”

He started to roll up his shirt sleeve. He pushed his chair back. “You come in here with me.”

Then at the door he gave him one more chance. “Are you going to say it’s not true?”

“But I saw them. I watched through the window and saw them,” Buddy wailed helplessly.

His father’s jaw set tight. “All right, come in here.” He closed the door after the two of them.

It didn’t hurt very much. Well, it did, but just for a minute; it didn’t last. His father wasn’t a man with a vicious temper. He was just a man with a strong sense of what was right and what was wrong. His father just used half-strength on him; just enough to make him holler out satisfactorily, not enough to really bruise him badly.

Then when he got through, he rolled down his shirt sleeves and said to the sniffing Buddy: “Now are you going to make up any more of them fancy lies of yours?”

There was an out there, and Buddy was smart enough to grab it. “No, sir,” he said submissively. “I’m not going to make up any lies.” And he started for the door.

But his father added quickly too quickly, “Then you’re ready to admit now that wasn’t true, what you told me in there at the table?”

Buddy swallowed hard and stood still, with freedom just within reach. He didn’t answer.

“Answer me,” his father said severely. “Was it or wasn’t it?”

There was a dilemma here, and Buddy couldn’t handle it. He’d
been walloped for telling what they thought was a lie. Now they wanted him to do the very thing they’d punished him for doing in the first place. If he told the truth it would be called a lie, and if he told a lie he’d be repeating what he knew they were walloping him for.

He tried to side-step it by asking a question of his own. “When you—when you see a thing yourself, with your own eyes, is it true then?” he faltered.

“Sure,” his father said impatiently. “You’re old enough to know that! You’re not two years old.”

“Then I saw it, and it has to be true.”

This time his father got real sore. He hauled him back from the door by the scuff of his neck, and for a minute he acted as if he were going to give him another walloping, all over again. But he didn’t.

Instead he took the key out of the door, opened it, and put the key in the front. “You’re going to stay in here until you’re ready to admit that whole thing was a dirty, rotten lie!” he said wrathfully. “You’ll stay in here all day, if you have to! It’s what you deserve, all right.”

He went out, slammed the door after him, and locked Buddy in from the outside. Then he took the key out of the lock, so Buddy’s mother wouldn’t weaken while he was asleep.

III

Buddy went over and slumped down gloomily onto a chair, and hung his head, and tried to puzzle it out. He was being punished for doing the very thing they were trying to lace into him: sticking to the truth.

He heard his father moving around out there getting ready for bed; heard his shoes drop heavily one after the other, then the bed-springs creak. Then after that nothing. He’d sleep all day now, until dark. But maybe his mother would let him out, before she went to work for the day.

He went over to the door and started to jiggle the knob back and forth, to try and attract her attention with as little noise as he could.

“Mom,” he whispered close to the keyhole. “Hey, mom.”

After a while he heard her tip-toe up on the other side.

“Mom, are you there? Let me out.”

“It’s for your own good, Buddy,” she whispered back. “I can’t do it unless you take back that sinful lie you told. He told me not to.” She waited patiently. “Do you take it back, Buddy? Do you?”

“No,” he sighed. He went back to the chair and disheartenedly sat down once more.

What was a fellow to do, when even his own people wouldn’t believe him? Who was he to turn to? You had to tell somebody
about a thing like that. If you didn't, it was just as bad as—just as bad as if you were one of the ones that did it. He wasn't scared any more as he'd been last night, because it was daylight now, but he still felt a little sick at his stomach whenever he thought of it. You had to tell somebody.

Suddenly he turned his head and looked at the window. Why hadn't he thought of that before? Not about getting out through the window; he'd known he could all along, it was latched on the inside. But he hadn't tried to get out that way until now, because he wanted to stay here and get them to believe him here, where he was. As long as they wouldn't believe him here, there was another place where maybe they would believe him.

That's what grownups did the first thing, whenever they were in his predicament. Why shouldn't a kid do it? The police. They were the ones had to be told. They were the ones you were supposed to tell, anyway. Even his father, if he'd only believed him, was supposed to tell them. Well, if his father wouldn't, then he'd tell them himself.

He got up and softshoed over to the window and eased it up. He slung himself over onto the fire escape. It was easy, of course; nothing to it. At his age it was just as easy as going out a door. Then he eased it down again. But not all the way, he left just a little crack open underneath, so he could get his fingers in and get it up again when he came back.

He'd tell the police, and then he'd come back and sneak in again through the window, and be there when his father woke up and unlocked the door. That would get it off his mind; then he wouldn't have to worry any more.

He went down the fire escape, dropped off where the last section of ladder was hoisted clear of the ground, went in through the basement, and came out the front, up the janitor's steps without meeting anybody. He beat it away from in front of the house fast, so he wouldn't be seen by anyone who knew him, any of the neighbors for instance, who might later accidentally tell on him. Then as soon as he was safely around the corner he slowed up and tried to figure out how you went about it.

Telling the police!

It was better to go to a station house, for anything as important as this, instead of just telling a stray neighborhood cop you met on the sidewalk. He was a little bit in awe of station houses, but as long as you hadn't done anything yourself it was probably safe enough to go into one.

He didn't know where one was exactly, but he knew there must be one somewhere close around, there had to be. He saw a storekeeper sweeping the sidewalk, and
he got up his courage and went up to him.

"Where's the station house, mister?" he asked.

"How should I know?" said the man gruffly. "What am I, a telephone book? Look out with your feet, can't you see I'm busy?"

Buddy backed away. That gave him an idea. He turned and went looking for a drugstore, and when he found one, he went in and looked in the telephone books they had in the back, chained to the wall.

He picked the nearest one to where he was, and he headed for it. When he got there, all his instinctive fear of that kind of place, left over from when he was a kid of six or eight and cops were the natural enemies of small boys, came back again for a minute. He hung around outside for a short while, and then finally he saw the station house cat go in, and that gave him courage, and he went in himself.

The man at the desk didn't pay any attention to him for a long time. He was looking over some papers or something. Buddy just stood there and waited, afraid to speak first.

Finally he said, kindly, "What is it, son? Lost your dog or something?"

"No, sir," Buddy said spasmodically. "I—I got something I want to tell someone."

The desk sergeant grinned absentley, continuing to look at what he was looking at. "And what would that be, now?"

Buddy glanced apprehensively behind him, at the street outside, as though fearful of being overheard from there. "Well, it's pretty serious," he gulped. "It's about a man that was killed."

The sergeant gave him his full attention for the first time. "You know something about a man that was killed?"

"Yessir," said Buddy breathlessly. "Last night. And I thought I better tell you." He wondered if that was enough, and he could go now. No, they had to have the name and address; they couldn't just guess.

The sergeant clawed his chin. "You're not trying to be a smart aleck, now, or anything like that?" he asked warningly. One look at Buddy's face, however, seemed to reassure him on that point.

"No sir," Buddy said strenuously.

"Well, I'll tell you. That's not my department, exactly. You see that hall there, over next to the clock? You go down that to the second door you come to. There's a man in there, you tell him about it. Don't go in the first door, now, or he'll have your life; he eats kids your age for breakfast."

Buddy went over to the mouth of the corridor, looked back from there for reassurance.

"Second door," the sergeant reassured him.

He went on. He made a wide
loop around the dread first door, pressing himself flat against the opposite wall to get safely by it. Then he knocked on the one after that, and felt as scared as if it were the principal’s office at school. Even more scared, in fact.

"’M’in,” a voice said.

He couldn’t move for a minute. “Well?” the voice repeated with a touch of annoyance.

To stay out, now, was worse than to go in. Buddy took a deep breath, held it, caving in his middle, and went in. Then he remembered to close the door after him. When you didn’t close the door after you in the principal’s office, you had to go outside and come in all over again.

There was another man, at another desk. His eyes had been fixed in readiness at a point about six feet up the door. When it opened and closed, and they still met nothing, they dropped down to Buddy’s four-foot level.

“What is this?” he growled. “How’d you get in here?” The first part of the question didn’t seem to be addressed to Buddy himself, but to the ceiling light or something like that.

Buddy had to go through the thing a second time, and repetition didn’t make it come any easier than the first.

The man just looked at him. In his imagination, Buddy had pictured a general rising-up and an excited, pell-mell rushing out on the part of everyone in the station house, when he delivered his news; patrol cars wailing into high gear and orders being barked around. That was what always happened in pictures. Everyone always jumped up and rushed out, whenever somebody came in and told them something like this. But now, in real life: the man just looked at him.

He said, “What’s your name, son?” He said, “What’s your address?”

Buddy told him.

He said, “D’y’ever have a nightmare, son? You know, a pretty bad dream that scares the life out of you?”

“Oh, sure,” Buddy said incautiously. “I’ve had ’em, lots of times.”

The man said, into a boxlike thing on his desk, “Ross, come in here.”

Another man came in. He didn’t have on a uniform either; neither of them did. Which made them a little decline in Buddy’s esteem. They conferred in low voices; he couldn’t hear a word they said. He knew it was about himself, though. He could tell by the way they’d look over at him every now and then.

They didn’t look in the right way. They should have looked sort of—well, sort of concerned worried about what he’d told them, or something. Instead, they looked sort of amused; like men
who are trying to keep straight faces.

Then the first one spoke up again. "So you saw them cut him up and—"

This was a distortion, and Buddy scotched it quick. He wasn’t here to make things up, although only a few short weeks ago, he would have grabbed at the chance this gave him, it was a wonderful opening.

"No, sir," he said, "I didn’t see that part of it. I just heard them say they were going to do it. But—"

But then before he could reaffirm that he had seen the man fall and the knife go home three times, as he was about to, the detective cut in with another question, without waiting. So he was left with the appearance of having made a whole retraction, instead of just a partial one.

"Did you tell your parents about this?"

This was a bad one, and nobody knew it better than Buddy. "Yes," he mumbled unwillingly.

"Then why didn’t they come and tell us about it, why’d they send you instead?"

He tried to duck that by not answering.

"Speak up, son."

You had to tell the truth to cops; that was serious, not telling the truth to cops. Even civilian cops, like these.

"They didn’t believe me," he breathed.

"Why didn’t they believe you?"

"They—they think I’m always making up things."

He saw the look they gave one another, and he knew what it meant. He’d already lost the battle. They were already on his father’s side.

"Oh, they do, hunh? Well, do you make up things?"

You had to tell the truth to cops. "I used to. I used to a lot. But not any more. Not this time. This time I’m not making it up."

He saw one of them tap a finger to his forehead, just once. He wasn’t meant to see it, it was done very quickly, but he saw it.

"Well, do you know for sure when you are and when you’re not making things up, son?"

"I do, honest!" he protested. "I know I’m not this time! I know I’m not!"

But it wasn’t a very good answer, he knew that. It was the only one he had, though. They got you in corners where you hardly knew what you were saying any more.

"We’ll send somebody around, son, and check up," the first man reassured him. He turned to the other man.

"Ross, go over there and take a look around. Don’t put your foot down too hard, it’s not official. Sell them a magazine subscription or something. No, an electric razor, that’ll tie in with the story. There’s one in my locker, you can take that with you for a
sample. It's the—" He glanced at Buddy inquiringly.

"The sixth floor, right over us."

"That's all I've got to do," Ross said disgruntledly. But he went out.

"You wait out in the hall, son," the first man said to Buddy. "Sit down on the bench out there."

IV

Buddy went out and sat.

About half an hour went by, not much more. Then he saw Ross come back and go in again. He waited hopefully for the rushing out and shouting of orders to come. Nothing happened. Nobody stirred. All he could hear was Ross swearing and complaining in a low voice, through the frosted glass inset of the door, and the other man laughing, like you do when there's a joke at somebody's expense. Then they sent for him to come in again.

Ross gave Buddy a dirty look. The other man tried to straighten his face. He passed his hand slowly in front of his mouth, and it came out serious at the other side of it.

"Son," he said, "you can hear things quite easily through that ceiling of yours, can't you? The one between you and them. Pretty thin?"

"Y'yes," Buddy faltered, wondering what was coming next.

"Well, what you heard was a program on their radio."

"There wasn't any. They didn't have a radio in the apartment."

Ross gave him quite an unfriendly look. "Yes, they do," he said sourly. "I was just over there, and I saw it myself. You could hear it all the way down the stairs to the third floor, when I came away. I been on the force fourteen years, and this kid's going to tell me what is in a room I case and what isn't!"

"All right, Ross," the other man tried to soothe him.

"But I saw it through the window!" Buddy wailed.

"It could have still been the radio, son," he explained pacifyingly. "Remember, you can't see something that's said, you can only hear it. You could have been looking square at them, and still hearing what the radio was saying."

"What time was it you were out there?" Ross growled at Buddy.

"I don't know. Just—just nighttime. We only got an alarm clock and you can't see it in the dark."

Ross shrugged angrily at the other man, as if to say: See what I mean? "It was the Crime-Smashers Program," he said bitterly. "It's on from eleven to twelve. And last night was Wednesday. Or don't you know that either?" he flared in an aside to Buddy.

"She told me herself it was a particly gruesome one this time. Said her husband wouldn't talk to her for an hour afterward, because he can't stand hearing that kind of
stuff and she dotes on it. She admits she had it on too loud, just
to spite him. Fair enough?"

The other man just looked at Buddy, quizzically. Buddy just
looked at the floor.

Ross finished rubbing it in, with
vengeful relish. "And her hus-
band uses a safety razor. She
brought it out and showed it to
me herself when I tried to peddle
the prop to her. Did you ever try
cutting up anybody with one of
them? And there are two valises
still right there in the room with
them. I saw them when I pre-
tended to fumble my pencil and
stooped down to pick it up from
the floor. With their lids left ajar
and nothing worse in them than a
mess of shirts and women's undies.

"And not brand-new replace-
ments, either; plenty grubby and
battered from years of knocking
around with them. Even papered
all over with faded hotel labels.
I don't think cheapskates like them
would be apt to own four valises,
two apiece. And if they did, I
don't think they'd pack the stuff
in the two best ones and keep the
two worst ones for themselves.
It would most likely be the other
way around.

"And, finally, they've got news-
papers still kicking around from
two weeks back. I spotted the
date-lines on a few of them my-
self. What were they supposed to
have used to clean up the mess,
kleenex?"

And he backed his arm toward

Buddy, as if to let one fly at him
across the ear. The other man,
laughing, had to reach over
quickly and hold him back. "A
little practice work won't hurt
you."

"On level ground maybe; not
up six flights of stairs." Ross
stalked out and gave the door a
cloth behind him.

The other man sent for a cop;
this time one of the kind in un-
iform. For a minute Buddy thought
he was going to be arrested then
and there, and his stomach went
down to about his feet, nearly.

"Where do you live, son? You
better take him back with you,
Lyons."

"Not the front way," Buddy
pleaded, aghast. "I can get in like
I got out."

"Just to make sure you get
safely back, son. You've done
enough damage for one day." And
the man at the desk waved him,
and the whole matter he'd tried to
tell them about, out the door.

He knew better than to fight a
policeman. That was about the
worst thing you could do, fight
back at a policeman. He went
along with him tractably, his head
hanging down in shame.

They went inside and up the
stairs. The Carmody kid on the
second floor peeked out the door
and shrieked to her sister, "Ooh,
they've arrested Buddy!"

"They have not," he denied in-
dignantly. "They're just bringing
me home special!"
They stopped in front of his own door.

"Here, son?"

Buddy quailed. Now he was going to get it!

The policeman tapped, and his mother, not his father opened the door. She must have been late leaving for work today, to still be there. Her face got white for a minute.

The policeman winked at her to reassure her. "Nothing to get frightened about, lady. He just came over and gave us a little story, and we thought we better bring him back here where he belongs."

"Buddy!" she said, horrified. "You went and told them?"

"Does he do it very often?" the policeman asked.

"All the time. All the time. But never anything as bad as this."

"Getting worse, hunh? Well, you ought to talk to the principal of his school, or maybe a doctor."

There was a stealthy creak on the stairs, and the Kellerman woman had paused on her way down, was standing looking at them. Curiously, but with cold composure.

The cop didn't even turn his head. "Well, I gotta be getting back," he said, and touched the visor of his cap to Buddy's mother and left.

Buddy got panicky. "Come in, quick!" he whispered frantically. "Come in quick, before she sees us" And tried to drag his mother in out of the doorway.

She resisted, held him there in full view. "There she is now. You apologize. You say you're sorry, hear me?"

The woman came the rest of the way down. She smiled affably, in neighborly greeting. Buddy's mother smiled in answering affability.

"Nothing wrong, is there?"

"No, nothing wrong," Buddy's mother murmured deprecatingly.

"I thought I saw a policeman at the door here, as I was coming down."

"Buddy did something he shouldn't." Without taking her eyes off the woman, she shook Buddy in an aside. Meantime, pantomimically, "Apologize."

He hung back, tried to efface himself behind her.

"He looks like a good little boy," the woman said patronizingly. "What'd he do?"

"He's not a good boy," Buddy's mother said firmly. "He makes things up. He tells things on people. Horrible things. Things that aren't so. It can cause a lot of trouble, especially when the people are living in the same house with us—" She didn't finish it.

The woman's eyes rested speculatively on Buddy for a long cool moment. Speculation ended and conviction entered them. They never wavered. She might have been thinking of a blanket that suddenly fell down the fire escape
from one floor to the next when there was no wind. She might have been thinking of a razor salesman that asked too many questions.

Something about that look, it went right through you. It crinkled you all up. It was like death itself looking at you. Buddy’d never met a look like that before. It was so still, so deep, so cold, so dangerous.

Then she smiled. The look in her eyes didn’t go out, but her mouth smiled. “Boys will be boys,” she said sweetly. She reached out to try and playfully pull his hair or something like that, but he swerved his head violently aside, with something akin to horror, and she failed to reach him.

She turned away and left them. But she went up, not down. She had been coming from above just now, now she went back that way again. “I’m always forgetting something,” she murmured as if to herself. “That letter I wanted to mail.”

Buddy knew, with an awful certainty. She wanted to tell him. That man. She wanted to tell him right away, without losing a minute.

The politeness forced on her by the spectator at an end, Buddy’s mother resumed her flurried handling of him where she had left off. She wrestled him violently into their flat and closed the door. But he wasn’t aware of anything that she said to him. He could only think of one thing.

“Now you told her!” he sobbed in mortal anguish. “Now they know! Now they know who!”

His mother misunderstood, beautifully and completely. “Oh, now you’re ashamed of yourself, is that it? I should think you would be!” She retrieved the key from his sleeping father’s pillow, unlocked the door, thrust him in, and relocked it. “I was going to let you out, but now you’ll stay in there the rest of the day!”

He didn’t hear her, didn’t know what she was saying at all.

“Now you told her!” he said over and over. “Now they’ll get me for it!”

He heard her leave for work. He was left alone there, in the stifling flat, with just his father’s heavy breathing in the outside room to keep him company.

Fear didn’t come right away. He knew he was safe while his father was out there. They couldn’t get at him. That’s why he didn’t mind being in there, he didn’t even try to get out through the window a second time. He was all right as long as he stayed where he was. It was tonight he was worried about, when his father was away at work and just his mother was asleep in the flat with him.

The long hot day burned itself out. The sun started to go down,
and premonitory fear came with the creeping, deepening blue shadows. He'd never felt this way before. The night was going to be bad, the night was going to be his enemy, and he didn't have anyone he could tell it to, so they'd help him. Not his father, not his mother, not even the police.

And if you didn't have the police on your side, you might as well give up, there was no hope for you. They were on the side of everyone in the whole world, who wasn't a crook or murderer. Everyone.

But not him. He was left out.

His mother came back from work. He heard her start to get supper ready, then call to his father, to wake him. He heard his father moving around getting dressed. Then the key was inserted, the door unlocked. He jumped up from the chair he'd been huddled on. His father motioned him to come out.

"Now you going to behave yourself?" he asked gruffly. "You going to cut that stuff out?"

"Yes sir," Buddy said docilely.

"Yes sir."

"Sit down and have your supper."

They sat down to eat.

His mother didn't mean to give way on him, he could tell that. It came out accidentally, toward the end of the meal. She incautiously said something about her employer having called her down.

"Why?" Buddy's father asked.

"Oh, because I was five to ten minutes late."

"How'd you happen to be late? You seemed to be ready on time."

"I was ready, but by the time I got through talking to that policeman that came to the do—" she stopped short, but the damage was already done.

"What policeman came to the door?"

She didn't want to, but he finally made her tell him. "Buddy sneaked out. One of them brought him back here with him. Now, Charlie, don't, you just finished eating."

Buddy's father hauled him off his chair by the shoulder. "I belted you once today. How many times am I going to have to—"

There was a knock at the door, and that saved Buddy for a minute. His father let go of him, went over and opened it. He stood out there a minute with someone, then he closed it, came back, and said in surprise: "It's a telegram. And for you, Mary."

"Who on earth—?" She tore it open tremulously. Then she gave him a stricken look. "It's from Emma. She must be in some kind of trouble. She says to come out there at once, she needs me. 'Please come without delay as soon as you get this.'"

Emma was Buddy's aunt, his mother's sister. She lived all the way out on Staten Island.

"It must be the children," his
mother said. "They must be both taken sick at once or something."

"Maybe it's her herself," his father said. "That would be even worse."

"If I could only reach her! That's what comes of not having telephones."

She started to get her things together. Buddy pleaded, terrified, "Don't go, Mom! It's a trick. It's from them. They want you out of the way. They want to get me."

"Still at it," his father said, giving him a push. "Get inside there. Go ahead, Mary. You'll be half the night getting there as it is. I'll take care of him. Gimme a hammer and a couple of long nails," he added grimly. "He'll stay put, I'll see to that."

He drove them through the two sash joints of the window in there, riveting it inextricably closed. "That oughta keep you. Now you can tell your stories to the four walls, to your heart's content!"

His mother patted his head tearfully, "Please be a good boy, listen to your father," and was gone.

He only had one protector left now. And a protector who had turned against him. He tried to reason with him, win him over.

"Pop, don't leave me here alone. They're going to come down and get me. Pop, take me with you to the plant. I won't get in your way. Honest, I won't."

His father eyed him balefully. "Keep it up. Just keep it up. You're going to a doctor tomorrow. I'm going to take you to one myself and find out what's the matter with you."

"Pop, don't lock the door. Don't. Don't. At least give me a chance so I can get out." He tried to hang on to the knob with both hands, but his father's greater strength dragged it slowly around in a closing arc.

"So you can run around to the police again and disgrace us? Well, if you're so afraid of them, whoever they are, then you ought to be glad I'm locking the door, that'll keep you safe from them. You confounded little liar!"

"Cluck! went the key in the lock."

He pressed his face close to the door seam and pleaded agonizedly. "Pop, don't leave the key in. If you gotta lock me up, at least take the key with you."

"The key stays in. I ain't taking a chance on dropping it somewhere and losing it."

He began to pound with his fists, frantic now and beyond all control. "Pop, come back! Take me with you! Don't leave me here alone! Pop, I take it back. It wasn't so."

His father was thoroughly exasperated by now, nothing could have made him relent. "I'll see you when I come back from work, young fellow!" he rasped. "You've got something coming to you!"

The outer door slammed, and
he was gone away beyond recall. He was alone now. Alone with crafty enemies, alone with imminent death.

He stopped his outcries at once. Now they were risky. Now they could no longer help him, now they might even bring on the danger all the quicker.

He put out the light. It made it more scary without it, but he knew it was safer to be in the dark than in the light. Maybe he could fool them into thinking nobody was there, if he stayed in the dark like this. Maybe, but he didn’t have much hope. They must have watched down the stairs, seen his father go alone.

Silence, then. Not a sound. Not a sound of menace, at least; from overhead, or from the outside room. Plenty of sounds outside in the back; the blurred harmless sounds of a summer night. Radios, and dishes being washed, and a baby crying somewhere, then going off to sleep.

Too early yet, he had a little time yet. That almost made it worse, to have to sit and wait for it to come.

A church bell began to toll. St. Agnes’, the little neighborhood church a couple of blocks over. You could always hear it from here. He counted the strokes. Nine. No, there was another one. Ten already. Gee, time had gone fast. In the dark you couldn’t keep track of it very easy.

It would take Mom a full hour and a half to get over to Aunt Emma’s even if she made good connections. She’d have to cross over to lower Manhattan first, and then go by ferry down the bay, and then take the bus out to where the place was. And another hour and a half to get back, even if she left right away.

But she wouldn’t leave right away. She’d stay on there for a while, even after she found out the message was a fake. She wouldn’t think there was any danger, she trusted everyone so. She always saw the good in everyone. She’d think it was just a harmless joke.

He’d be alone here until at least one, and maybe even after. They knew that. That’s why they were taking their time. That’s why they were waiting. They wanted things to quiet down, they wanted other people to be asleep.

He got up every once in a while and went over to the door and listened. Nothing. The ticking of the clock in the other room was all he could hear.

Maybe if he could push the key out, and it fell close to the door, he could pull it through to his side underneath the door. It was an old, warped door, and the crack seemed pretty wide along the floor.

It was easy to push it out. He did that with a pencil stub he had in his pocket. He heard it fall. Then he got a rusty old wire coat hanger that was in the room, and
pushed that through the crack on its flat side and started to fish round with it, hoping the flat hook at the top of it would snag the key and scoop it through to him.

He could hear himself hitting it, but each time he’d ease the hanger through, the hook would come back empty. Finally he couldn’t hit it any more at all, and he knew what had happened. He’d pushed it farther away, it was out of reach now entirely. He’d lost it.

The church bell sounded again. Again he counted. Eleven. Had a whole hour passed, just doing that?

Most of the lights in the back windows were out now. The last radio had stopped.

If he could last through the next hour, maybe he’d be all right. From twelve on time would be working in his favor. Mom would be on her way back, and—

He stiffened. There was a single creak, from directly overhead. From them. The first sound they’d made. Trying not to be heard. You could tell the person was going on tiptoe by the slow way it sounded. Cree-ak. It took about a whole half-minute to finish itself.

Then nothing more for a long time. He was afraid to move, he was afraid to breathe. Then another kind of a sound, from a different place. Not wood, but shaky iron. Not overhead, but outside. Not a creak, but a kind of a soft clank.

His eyes flew to the window.

The shade. He should have thought about that sooner. But if there was no light on, nobody could see into the room anyway, even with it up.

He could see out a little. Not much, but just a sort of sooty dark gray color, a little bit lighter than the room itself, that was all. And now this was getting darker, right while he watched it. It was sort of blotting out, as if something was coming down from above, out there in front of the window.

He crouched back against the wall, hunched his head low between his shoulders, like a turtle trying to draw its head into its shell.

The looming shape was up close now, it covered the whole pane, like a black feather bolster. He could see something pale in the middle of it, though, like a face.

Suddenly the middle of it lit up bright silver, in a disk about the size of an egg, and a long spoke of light shot through the glass and into the room.

It started to swing around slowly, following the walls from one side all the way around to the other. It traced a white paper hoop as it went. Maybe if he got down low he could duck under it, it would miss him. He bunched himself up into a ball, head below knees now.
It arrived right over him, on the wall, and there was nothing he could push in front of him, nothing he could get behind. Suddenly it dropped. It flashed square into his squinting face, blinding him.

Then it went out, as suddenly as it had gone on. It wasn’t needed any more. It had told them what they wanted to know. They knew he was in there now. They knew he was alone in there.

He could hear fingers fumbling about the woodwork, trying the window. It wouldn’t move, the nails held it tight.

The looming black blur slowly rose upward, out of sight. The fire escape cleared. There was another creak overhead, on the ceiling. Not so slow or stealthy any more; the need for concealment was past now.

What would they do next? Would they try to get in the other way, down the front stairs? Would they give up? He knew they wouldn’t. They’d gone to too much trouble, sending that phony telegram. It was now or never, they’d never have such an opportunity again.

St. Agnes’ chimed the half-hour. His heart was going so fast, it was just as though he’d run a mile race top speed.

VI

Silence for minutes. Like before thunder, like before something happens. Silence for the last time. Buddy was breathing with his mouth open, that was the only way he could get enough air in. Even that way he couldn’t, he felt as if he were going to choke.

Then a lock jigged a little. Out there, in the room past this. You could hardly hear it, but it gave off little soft turning sounds. The outside door started to open gradually. He could hear one of the hinges whine a little as it turned. Then it closed again.

A skeleton key. They’d used a skeleton key.

The floor softly complained, here, there, the next place, coming straight over toward the door he was behind, the final door. Somebody was in there. Maybe just one. Maybe the both of them together.

They didn’t put on the lights. They were afraid, maybe they’d be seen from outside. They were up to it now, the door to where he was. He almost thought he could hear their breathing, but he wasn’t sure; his own made enough noise for two.

The knob started to turn. Then it went back again to where it had been. They were trying the door. If only they didn’t see the key lying there—but then he realized they didn’t need that one anyway. The same skeleton key that had opened the outside door would work on this.

Maybe he could jam the lock; the pencil stub that he’d used the first time, to force the original key
out. He dredged it up from his pocket. Too fast, too flurriedly. He dropped it, and he had to go feeling all over the floor for it, with slapping hands.

He found it again, floundered toward the door. The door seam had gleamed a little, for a moment, as if a light were licking along it, to place the keyhole. Just as he got there, the keyhole sounded off, the key rammed into it.

Too late; the key was in, he was gone.

He looked around for something to shove up against the door, to buy a minute more. Nothing heavy enough. Only that chair he’d been sitting on, and that was no good.

The key was squirming around, catching onto the lock.

He hoisted the chair and he swung it. But the other way, away from the door. He swatted the window pane with all his might. It went out with a torrential crash just as the door broke away from its frame and bucked inward.

He got out through the jagged opening; so fast that his very speed was a factor in saving him. He felt his clothing catch in a couple of places, but the glass didn’t touch his skin.

Heavy running steps hammered across the wooden floor in there behind him. An arm reached through and just missed him. The splintered glass kept the man back, he was too big to chance it as Buddy had.

Buddy scuttled down the fire escape for all his life. And around the turn, and down, and around another turn, and down, like a corkscrew. Then he jumped down to the ground, and ran into the basement.

It was plenty dark down there, and he knew every inch of it by heart from being in there a lot at other times. But he was afraid if he stayed in there they’d come right down after him and trap him, cut off his escape. Then eventually ferret him out, and do it down there instead, in the dark. He wanted the open, he wanted the safety of the streets, where they wouldn’t dare try anything. Where there would be people around who could interfere, come to his rescue.

So he plunged straight through without stopping, and up the janitor’s steps at the front to sidewalk level. Just as he gained the street, panting, the oncoming rush of his pursuer sounded warningly from the cavernous building entrance alongside him, and a moment later the man came careening out after him. He’d come down the front stairs in an attempt to try to cut him off.

Buddy turned and sped away toward the corner, racing as only the very small and the very light in weight can race. But the man had longer legs and greater wind-power, and it was only a matter of
minutes before the unequal pursuit would end.

Buddy made the corner and scuffed around it on the sides of his shoes. No one in sight, no one around that offered any chance of protection. The man was closing in on him remorselessly now, every long step swallowing three of Buddy's. Buddy would have had to be running three times as fast even to break even with him, and he wasn't even matching his speed. The woman had joined in the chase too, but she was far behind, unimportant to the immediate crisis.

He spotted a row of ashcans just ahead, lined up along the curb. All filled and set out waiting to be emptied. About six, making a bulwark of them about ten yards or so in length. He knew he couldn't get past them, the man was within about two outstretched arm's length of him now, and already had one arm out to bridge half the span.

So he ran to the end of them, caught the rim of the last one to swing himself around on—its fill held it down fast—and suddenly doubled back along the other side of them. A feat the man couldn't hope to match as quickly, as deftly, because of his greater bulk. He went flying out too far on a wasteful ellipse, had to come in again from out there.

Buddy was able to keep their strung-out length between the two of them from now on. The man couldn't reach across them the short way, all he had to do was swerve back a little out of his reach. The man couldn't overthrow them either, they were too hefty with coke and ash.

But Buddy knew he couldn't stay there long, the woman was coming up rapidly and they'd sew him up between the two of them. He stopped short and crouched warily over one of the bins. He gouged both hands into the powdery gritty ash, left them that way for an instant, buried up to the wrists. The man dove for him.

Buddy's hands shot up. A landmine of the stuff exploded full into the man's face. He got more of it that way than by throwing it. The whole top layer erupted.

Buddy shot diagonally into the open for the other side, left the readymade barricade behind. The man couldn't follow him for a minute, he was too busy staggering coughing, pawing, trying to get his eyesight back.

Buddy made the most of it. He gained another corner, tore down a new street. But it was just a postponement, not a clear getaway. The man came pounding into sight again behind him after a brief time-lag, murderous now with added intensity. Again those longer legs, the deeper chest, started to get in their work.

Buddy saw a moving figure ahead, the first person he'd seen on the streets since the chase had begun. He raced up abreast of
him, started to tug at his arm, too breathless to be able to do anything but pant for a minute. Pant, and point behind him, and keep jerking at his arm.

“Geddada here,” the man said thickly, half-alarmed himself by the frenzied incoherent symptoms. “Warrya doing?”

“Mister, that man’s trying to get me! Mister, don’t let him!”

The man swayed unpredictably to one of Buddy’s tugs, and the two of them nearly went down together in a heap.

A look of idiotic fatuousness overspread his face. “Warrsh matter kid? Somebody trying to getcha?”

A drunk. No good to him. Hardly able to understand what he was saying to him at all.

Buddy suddenly pushed him in the path of the oncoming nemesis. He went down, and the other one sprawled over his legs. Another minute or two gained.

At the upper end of the street Buddy turned off again, into an avenue. This one had tracks, and a lighted trolley was bearing down on him just as he came around the corner. That miracle after dark, a trolley just when it was needed. Its half-hourly passing just coinciding with his arrival at the corner.

He was an old hand at cadging free rides on the backs of them; that was the way he did all his traveling back and forth. He knew just where to put his feet, he knew just where to take hold with his hands.

He turned to face the direction it was going, let it rumble by full length, took a short spurt after it, jumped, and latched on.

The man came around into view too late, saw him being borne triumphantly away. The distance began to widen, slowly but surely; legs couldn’t keep up with a motor, windpower with electricity. But he wouldn’t give up, he kept on running just the same, shrinking in stature now each time Buddy looked back.

“Stop that car!” he shouted faintly from the rear.

The conductor must have thought he merely wanted to board it himself as a fare. Buddy, peering over the rim of the rear window, saw him fling a derisive arm out in answer.

Suddenly the car started to slacken, taper off for an approaching stop. There was a huddle of figures ahead at trackside, waiting to board it. Buddy agonizedly tried to gauge the distance between pursuer, trolley, and intended passengers.

The man was still about twice as far away from it, in the one direction, as they were in the other. If they’d get on quick, if he started right off again, Buddy could still make it, he’d still get away from him, even if only by the skin of his teeth.

The car ground to a stop. A friendly green light was shining
offside, at the crossing. The figures, there were three, went into a hubbub. Two helped the third aboard. Then they handed several baskets and parcels after her. Then she leaned down from the top of the step and kissed them severally.

"Goodbye. Get home all right, Aunt Tilly."

"Thank you for a lovely time."

"Give my love to Sam."

"Wait a minute! Aunt Tilly! Your umbrella! Here's your umbrella!"

The motorman went ding! impatiently, with his foot.

The green light was gone now. There was nothing there in its place, just an eclipse, blackness.

The car gave a nervous little start, about to go forward.

Suddenly red flowered balefully up there. Like blood, like fiery death. The death of a little boy.

The car fell obediently motionless again, static. In the silence you could hear wap-whup, wap-whup, wap-whup, coming up fast from behind.

Buddy dropped down to the ground, too late. The man's forked hand caught him at the back of the neck like a vise, pinned him flat and squirming against the rear end of the car.

The chase was over. The prey was caught.

"Now I've got you," his captor hissed grimly in his ear.

The treacherous trolley, now that it had undone him, withdrew, taking the shine of its lights with it, leaving the two of them alone in the middle of the darkened trackway.

Buddy was too exhausted to struggle much, the man was too winded to do much more than just hold him fast. That was all he needed to do. They stood there together, strangely passive, almost limp, for a few moments. As if taking time out, waiting for a signal to begin their struggle anew.

VII

The woman came up presently. There was a cold business-like quality to her undertone worse than any imprecations could have been. She spoke as though she were referring to a basket of produce.

"All right, get him out of the middle of the street, Joe. Don't leave him out here."

Buddy went into a flurry of useless struggling, like a snagged pinwheel, that ended almost as soon as it began. The man twisted his arm around behind his back and held it that way, using it as a lever to force submission. The pain was too excruciating to disobey.

They remounted the sidewalk and walked along with him between them. Sandwiched between them, very close between them, so that from the front you couldn't tell he was being strongarmed. The pressure of their two bodies forced him along as well as the compulsion of his disjointed arm.
Wouldn’t they meet anybody, anybody at all? Was the whole town off the streets, just tonight? Suddenly they did.

There were two men this time. Not swaying, walking straight and steady, cold sober. Men you could reason with. They’d help him, they’d have to. They were coming toward him and his captors. Otherwise the latter would have tried to avoid them. They couldn’t; the men had turned the corner just before them too abruptly, catching them in full view.

A retreat would have aroused suspicion.

The man Joe took a merciless extra half-turn in his already fiery arm just as a precaution. “One word out of you,” he gritted, “and I’ll yank it off by the roots!”

Buddy waited until the two parties were abreast of one another, mustering up strength against the pain; both present pain and the pain to come.

Then he sideswept one foot, bit its heel savagely into his captor’s unprotected shin bone. The man heaved from the pavement, released Buddy’s arm by reflex.

Buddy flung himself almost in a football tackle against the nearest of the two passers-by, wrapped both arms about his leg, and held on like a barnacle.

“Mister, help me! Mister, don’t let ’em!”

The man, hobbled, was unable to move another step. His companion halted likewise. “What the—!”

“Y’gotta listen! Y’gotta believe—!” Buddy sputtered, to get his lick in first. “They killed a man last night. Now they’re gonna do the same thing to me!”

Joe didn’t do what he’d expected. He didn’t grab for him, he didn’t show violence, even anger. There was a sudden change of attitude that threw Buddy off key, put him at a disadvantage. The thing had become psychological instead of physical. And he wasn’t so good psychologically.

The line-up had turned into one of age groups before he knew how it had happened; a kid against four grownups. Grownups that gave each other the benefit of the doubt sooner than they would give it to a kid.

“His own mother and father,” Joe murmured with mournful resignation. The woman turned her back and her shoulders shook.

“He doesn’t mean to lie,” Joe said with parental indulgence. “He makes these things up, and he believes it himself. His imagination is over-active.”

“They’re not my parents, they’re not!” Buddy groaned abysmally.

“Well, tell them where you live, then,” Joe said suavely.

“Yeah, kid, give us your address,” one of the two strangers put in.

“Twenty Holt Street!” Buddy rushed in incautiously.
Joe had suddenly whipped out a billfold, held it open for the men to see some sort of corroboratory identification. “For once he admits he lives with us,” he said ruefully. “Usually—”

“He stole five dollars out of my pocketbook,” the woman chimed in tearfully. “My gas bill money for this month. Then he went to the movies. He’s been gone since three this afternoon, we only found him just now. This has been going on all the way home.”

“They killed a man,” Buddy screeched. “They cut him up with a razor.”

“That was in the picture he just saw,” Joe said with a disheartened shake of his head.

The woman was crouched supplicatingly before Buddy now, dabbing her handkerchief at his face in maternal solicitude, trying to clean it. “Won’t you behave now? Won’t you come home like a good boy?”

The two strangers had turned definitely against him. The woman’s tears, the man’s sorrowful forbearance, were having an effect. One man looked at the other. “Gee, I’m sure glad I never married, Mike, if this is what you get.”

The other one bent over and detached Buddy none too gently. “C’mon, leggo of me,” he said gruffly. “Listen to your parents, do like they tell you.”

He dusted off his trouser leg where Buddy had manhandled it, in eloquent indication of having nothing more to do with the matter. They went on about their business, down the street.

The tableau remained unaltered behind them for as long as they were still within call. The woman crouched before Buddy, but her unseen hand had a vicious death grip on the front of his shirt.

Joe was bending over him from behind, as if gently reasoning with him. But he had his arm out of kilter again, holding it coiled up behind his back like a mainspring.

“You—little devil!” he exhaled through tightly clenched teeth.

“Get him in a taxi, Joe. We can’t keep parading him on the open street like this.”

They said something between them that he didn’t quite catch. “—that boarded-up place. Kids play around there a lot.” Then they both nodded in malignant understanding.

A cold ripple went up his back. He didn’t know what they meant, but it was something bad. They even had to whisper it to each other, it was so bad. That boarded-up place. A place for dark, secret deeds that would never come to light again; not for years, anyway.

A cab glided up at the man’s up-chopping arm, and they went into character again. “It’s the last time I ever take you out with me!” the woman scolded, with one eye
late, tried to find his mouth and clamp itself tight over it. He swerved his head, sank his teeth into her fingers. She recoiled with a stifled exclamation, whipped her hand away.

Buddy tore loose with the loudest scream he could summon; it almost pulled the lining of his throat inside out. "Mr. Officer! Mr. Pleeceman! Help me, will ya? Help me!"

The policeman turned on his course, came toward them slowly. A kid’s cry for help, that wasn’t the same as a grownup’s cry for help, that wasn’t as immediate, as crucial.

He looked in the cab window at the three of them. He even rested his forearm negligently along the rim as he did so. He wasn’t on the alert; it couldn’t be anything much, a kid squawking in a taxicab.

"What’s up?" he said friendlily. "What’s the hollering for?"

"He knows what he’s going to get when we get home with him, that’s what’s up!" the woman said primly. "And you can holler at all the policemen you want to, young man, that won’t save you!"

"Fraid of a licking, hunh?" the cop grinned understandingly. "A good licking never hurt any kid. My old man useta gimme enough of ’em when I was—" He chuckled appreciatively. "But that’s a new one, calling the cops on your old man and lady to keep from getting a licking! I tell you,
these kids nowadays are bad—"

"He turned in a false alarm one
time," the "father" complained
virtuously, "to try to keep me
from shellacking him!"

The cop whistled.

The cab driver turned his head
and butt in, unasked. "I got two
of my own, home. And if they
gave me half as much trouble as
this young pup's been giving these
folks here since they first hailed
me, I'd knock their blocks off, I'm
telling you."

"They m-m-murdered a man
last night, with a knife, and then
they cut him up in pieces and—"
Buddy sobbed incoherently.

"What a dirty mind he's got," the
cop commented disapprovingly. He took a closer look at
Buddy's contorted face. "Wait a
minute, don't I know you, kid?"

There was a breathless silence.
Buddy's heart soared like a bal-
loon. At last, at last—

"Sure, I remember you now.
You come over with that same
story and made a lot of trouble
for us at the station house this
morning. Wasting everybody's
time. Brundage even sent some-
body over to investigate, like a
fool. And was his face red after-
wards! A lot of hot air. You're
the very one. I seen you there
myself. Then one of the guys had
to take you home afterwards to
get rid of you. Are you the
parents?"

"Do you think we'd be going
through this if we weren't?" Joe
demanded bitterly.

"Well, you've sure got my sym-
pathy." He waved them on dis-
gustedly. "Take him away. You
can have him!"

The cab glided into lethal
motion again. Buddy's heart went
over supinely, in ultimate despair.
Wasn't there anyone in the whole
grownup world believed you? Did
you have to be a grownup yourself
before anyone would believe you,
stop you from being murdered?

He didn't try to holler out the
window any more at the occas-
ional chance passers-by he
glimpsed flitting by. What was
the use? They wouldn't help him.
He was licked. Salty water
coursed from his eyes, but he
didn't make a sound.

"Any p'tickler number?" the
driver asked.

"The corner'll do," Joe said
plausibly. "We live just a couple
doors up the street." He paid off
before they got out, in order to
have both hands free for Buddy
once they alighted.

The cab slowed, and they
emerged with him, started walking
hurriedly away. Buddy's feet
slithered along the ground more
than they actually lifted them-
selves. The cab wheeled and went
back the way it had come.

"Think he'll remember our
faces later?" the woman breathed
worriedly.

"It's not our faces that count,
it's the kid's face," Joe answered
her. "And nobody'll ever see that again."

As soon as the cab was safely gone, they reversed directions and went up another street entirely.

"There it is, over there," Joe said guardedly.

VIII

It was a derelict tenement, boarded up, condemned, but not demolished. It cast a pall of shadow, so that even while they were still outside in front of it, they could scarcely be seen. It sent forth an odor of decay. It was, Buddy knew, the place where death was.

They stopped short. "Anyone around?" Joe said watchfully.

Then suddenly he embraced the boy; a grim sort of embrace if there ever was one, without love in it. He wrapped his arms around his head and clutched him to him tight, so that his hand sealed Buddy's mouth. Buddy had no chance to bite him as he had the woman. The pressure against his jaws was too great, he couldn't even open them.

He carried him that way, riding on his own hip so to speak, over to the seemingly secure boarded-up doorway. He spaded his free hand under this, tilted it out, wormed his way through, and whisked Buddy after him. The woman followed and replaced it. A pall of complete darkness descended on the three of them. The stench was terrific in here. It wasn't just the death of a building; it was—some other kind of death as well. Death in two suitcases, perhaps.

"How'd you know that was open?" the woman whispered in surprise.

"How do you suppose?" he answered with grisly meaning.

"This where?" was all she said.

The man had taken his torch out. It snapped whitely at a skeleton stair, went right out again; instantaneously as the lens of a camera.

"Wait here where you are; don't smoke," he warned her. "I'm going up aways."

Buddy could guess that he didn't knock him completely out because that would have made him too heavy to handle. He wanted him to get up there on his own two feet, if possible. They started to climb, draggingly. The soundtrack went: crunch, crunch, skfff. That was Buddy's feet trailing passively over the lips of the steps.

He was too numbed with terror now to struggle much any more. It was no use anyway. No one anywhere around outside to hear him through the thick mouldering walls. If they hadn't helped him outside on the street, they were never going to help him in here.

Joe used his torch sparingly, only a wink at a time. Only when one flight had ended and they were beginning another. He wasn't taking any chances using
it too freely. It was like a white Morse Code on black paper. Dot, dot, dot. Spelling out one word: death.

They halted at last. They must have reached the top now. There was a busted skylight somewhere just over them. It was just as black as ever, but a couple of low-wattage stars could be made out.

Joe pressed Buddy back flat against the wall, held him that way with one hand at his throat. Then he clipped his light on, left it that way this time. He wanted to see what he was doing. He set it down on the floor, left it that way, alight, trained on Buddy.

Then his other hand closed in to finish the job.

A minute, maybe a minute and a half, would be all he needed. Life goes out awfully quick; even manually, which is one of the slowest ways.

"Say goodbye, kid," he murmured ironically.

You fight when you die, because—that's what everything alive does, that's what being alive is.

Buddy couldn't fight off the man's arms. But his legs were free. The man had left them free, so he could die standing up. Buddy knew a man's stomach is soft, the softest part of him. He couldn't kick it free-swinging, because the man was in too close. He kicked upward with his knee, rammed it home. He could feel it pillow itself into something rubbery. A flame of hot body breath was expelled against him, like those pressure things you dry yourself with.

The death collar opened and the man's hand went to his middle. Buddy knew that one such punch wasn't enough. This was death and you gave no quarter. The man had given him the space he needed. He shot his whole foot out this time, sole flat. There was almost a sucking noise, as if it had gone into a waterlogged sponge.

The man went all the way back. He must have trodden on the cylindrical light. It spun crazily around. Off Buddy, onto the man for an instant. Then off the man, onto somewhere else. You couldn't follow it with your eyes, it jittered too quick.

There was a splintering of wood. There was a strange sagging feeling, that made everything shake. Then a roaring sound, like a lot of heavy stuff going down a chute. The light flashed across the space once, and showed nothing: no Joe, no rail, no anything.

Then it pitched down into nothingness itself.

There was a curious sort of playback, that came seconds late, from somewhere far below. Like an echo, only it wasn't. Of something heavy and firm, something with bones in it, bones and a skull, smacking like a gunshot report. A
woman’s voice screamed “Joe!” hollowly.

Then a lot of loose planks went clat-clat, clat, clattity, bang! The woman’s voice just groaned after that, didn’t scream any more. Then the groans stopped too. A lot of plaster dust came up and tickled Buddy’s nose and smarted his eyes.

It was very still, and he was alone in the dark. Something told him not to move. He just stood there, pressed himself flat and stood there. Something kept telling him not to move, not to move a finger. He didn’t know what it was, maybe the way his hair stood up on the back of his neck. As if his hair could see in the dark better than he could, knew something that he didn’t.

It didn’t last long. There were suddenly a lot of voices down there, as if people had come running in from the street. And lights winking around. Then a stronger one than the rest, a sort of thick searchlight beam, shot all the way up, and jockeyed around, and finally found him.

The whole stair structure was gone. A single plank, or maybe two, had held fast against the wall, and he was standing on them. Like on a shelf. A shelf that ended at his toes. Five floors up.

A voice came up to him through a megaphone, trying to be very calm, very friendly; shak-

ing a little around the edges, though.

“Close your eyes, kid. We’ll get you down. Just don’t look, keep your eyes closed. Think hard of something else. Do you know your multiplication tables?”

Buddy nodded cautiously, afraid to move his head too much.

“Start saying them. Two times two, two times three. Keep your eyes closed. You’re in school and the teacher’s right in front of you. But don’t change your position.”

He was in Six-A, didn’t they know that? You got multiplication in the first grade. But he did it anyway. He finished the two, he finished the threes. He stopped.

“Mister,” he called down in a thin but clear voice. “How much longer do I have to hold out? I’m getting pins and needles in my legs, and I’m stuck at four times twenty-three.”

“Do you want it fast and just a little risky, kid, or do you want it slow and safe?”

“Fast and a little risky,” he answered. “I’m getting kind of dizzy.”

“All right, son,” the voice boomed back. “We’ve got a net spread out down here. We can’t show it to you, you’ll have to trust our word for it.”

“There may be loose planks sticking out on the way down,” another voice objected, in an undertone that somehow reached him.
“It’ll take hours the other way, and he’s been through enough already.” The voice directed itself upward to him again. “Keep your arms close to your sides, keep your feet close together, open your eyes, and when I count three, jump.

—three!”

He was never going to get there. Then he did, and he bounced, and it was over, he was safe.

He cried for a minute or two, and he didn’t know why himself; it must have been left over from before, when Joe was trying to kill him. Then he got over it.

He hoped they hadn’t seen him. “I wasn’t crying,” he said. “All that stuff got in my eyes, and stung them.”

“Same here,” Detective Ross, his one-time enemy, said gravely. And the funny part of it was, his eyes were kind of shiny too.

Joe was lying there dead, his head sticking out between two planks. They’d carried the woman out on a stretcher.

Somebody came up and joined them with a sick look on his face. “We’ve pulled two valises out from under what’s left of those stairs back there.”

“Better not look in them just yet,” Ross warned.

“I already did,” he gulped, and he bolted out into the street, holding his hand clapped to his mouth.

They rode Buddy back in state, in a departmental car. In the middle of all of them, like a—like a mascot.

“Gee, thanks for saving me,” he said gratefully.

“We didn’t save you, son. You saved yourself. We’re a great bunch. We were just a couple minutes too late. We would have caught them, all right, but we wouldn’t have saved you.”

“How’d you know where to come, though?”

“Picking up the trail was easy, once we got started. A cop back there remembered you, a cab driver showed where he let you out. It was just that we started so late.”

“But what made you believe it now all of a sudden, when you wouldn’t believe it this morning?”

“A couple little things came up,” Ross said. “Little, but they counted. The Kellerman woman mentioned the exact program you were supposed to have overheard last night, by name. It sounded better that way, more plausible. It’s the exact time, the exact type: it fitted in too good to waste. But by doing that she saved your life tonight. Because I happened to tune in myself tonight. Not out of suspicion, just for my own entertainment. If it was that good, I wanted to hear it myself.

“And it was that good, and even better. It’s a serial, it’s continued every night. Only at the end, the announcer apologized to the listeners for not being on the air at all last night. Tuesday’s
election, and the program gave up its time to one of the candidates. And what you'd said you heard was sure no campaign speech!

"That was one thing. Then I went straight over to their flat. Pretty late, and almost as bad as never. They must have already been on the way with you. Everything in order, just like I'd seen it the first time. Only, a towel fell down from in back of the bathroom door, as I brushed past. And under it, where nobody could be blamed for overlooking it, not even the two of them themselves, there was a well-worn razor strop. The kind you use for an open blade, never a safety. With a fleck of fairly fresh soap still on it. Just a couple of things like that, they came awfully late, but that counted!

"Come on, Buddy, here's your home. I'll go with you."

It was already getting light out, and when they knocked, Buddy said in a scared whisper, "Gee, now I'm going to get it for sure! I been out the whole night long!"

"Detectives have to be sometimes, didn't you know that?" And Ross took his own badge off and pinned it on him.

The door opened, and his father was standing there. Without a word, he swung his arm back.

Ross reached up and held it where it was.

"Now, now, just be careful who you raise the back of your hand to around here. It's a serious matter to swat a member of the Detective Bureau, you know. Even if he happens to be an auxiliary, junior grade."

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When Simon Templar roams the West Indies he's at his reckless, ebullient best, for there is something about a Caribbean island that fires the imagination, and challenges the daring of a lovable rogue like the Saint. And when that daring springs to life amidst the throbbing of Voodoo drums in the magical island of Haiti—made famous by William Seabrook, and a host of other writers brilliantly spearheaded by Charteris himself—you'll know why The Questing Tycoon in the very next Saint has made us so enthusiastic about the reading pleasure excitement in this brand new Charteris saga.
Johnny Liddell turned off Park Avenue and headed east along Fifty-sixth Street. A fog, reminiscent of the clouds of smoke at the bar he had just left, had come up from nowhere. Passersby were ghoulish shapes behind an opaque curtain, street lights a yellow blur in its swirling depths.

His apartment was in a converted old brownstone house in the middle of the block. As he reached the steps leading to the vestibule, a girl materialized from the gloom, caught him by the sleeve.

“'I thought you'd never get here, Johnny Liddell.'”

He had an evanescent glimpse of a small pert face, ash blonde hair and wide blue eyes. She kept looking over her shoulder as though she feared and dreaded the shadowy fingers of the fog.

“If I'd known you were here, I'd have run all the way home,” he grinned. “Trouble is, the finance company re-possessed my crystal ball.”


"You shoot first!" Johnny urged.

So the dark-eyed girl reached for Liddell's gun—and Al Zito's crime empire crashed down in red ruin!

Frank Kane's unusual stories dovetail suspense with a shuddery parade of utterly compelling facts. You never quite realize how powerful they are until the climax thunders in your brain like the crashing of a big .45! We know you'll like the newest in the private eye saga of Johnny Liddell.
I didn’t know where else to go.”
He could see her face more sharply in the vestibule glow, and the stark terror in her eyes alarmed him. He gripped her by the elbow, tried to propel her up the stairs. “Come on up and tell me about it.”

The girl shook her arm free. “I can’t. I’ve got to get back.” She pushed a square package into his hand. “Just keep this for me. It’s very important. They’d kill me to get their hands on it!”

Liddell turned the package over in his hand, slipped it into his jacket pocket. “If you’re really in trouble, let me come with you and—”

The girl shook her head. “They mustn’t know I’ve seen you. That would only make it worse.” She caught him by the sleeve again. “All I want you to do is protect that package until tomorrow night.”

“What then?”
“I’ll have the rest of what I need. I’ll call you then, and tell you where to meet me.” Suddenly, she stiffened, her eyes searching the shadows at his back. “I think they’re coming, Johnny,” she whispered in a frightened voice, “remember what I said. Please, Johnny!” Then, before Liddell could stop her, she glided away into the fog. He made a half-hearted attempt to follow.

“Wait a minute. I want to talk to you,” he called after her. The only answer was the tapping of her heels as she ran down the street.

Liddell pulled the package from his pocket, examined it curiously. It measured about four inches wide by nine long, and was about a quarter of an inch thick. He weighed it in the palm of his hand, and decided it contained sheets of paper folded in half. He returned the package to his pocket, turned to start up the steps.

He stiffened as he felt the snout of a gun jabbed into his back.

“Don’t go away, Chum,” a heavy voice muttered into his ear. “You got something that belongs to me.”

“That’s a matter of opinion. Your opinion.”

The muzzle of the gun bored deeper into Liddell’s back. “Maybe. But I’ve got what it takes to back up my opinion. Where is it?”

Liddell shrugged. “I haven’t the faintest idea what the hell you’re talking about.” He started to turn, but decided against it at the muttered warning from behind. “What’s it look like?”

“Let’s get back behind these steps, and I’ll tell you all about it.”

Liddell permitted himself to be guided to what had once been the entrance to the basement apartment under the steps. Now it was used for the storage of trash cans. As soon as they had melted into the deeper shadows, Liddell
gambled on a desperate move. His hand streaked for his left lapel.

The tips of his fingers just brushed the butt of the .45 in his shoulder holster when the man in back of him swung. The first blow knocked Liddell to his knees. The second flattened him against the pavement.

It seemed hours before consciousness again came knocking at his skull. From a knock it developed into a tumultuous pounding that increased in volume until it threatened to deafen him. Liddell opened his eyes, groaned hollowly, and tried to rectify his mistake by closing his eyes again. But the pinwheeling display of multi-colored lights refused to go away.

After a moment, he was able to open his eyes, was able to keep them from rolling back into his head. He even managed to sit up. Pulling off the dented fedora that had saved him from even more serious injury, he gingerly explored the tender area in the back of his ear with the tips of his fingers. There was a lump, but there was no sign of broken skin.

Laboriously he pulled himself to his feet, steadying himself against the wall until his head stopped spinning. Automatically, he felt for his gun, was mildly surprised to find it still in its holster. Then, remembering, he felt for the package the girl had given him for safe keeping.

It was gone from his pocket. Liddell swore fervently under his breath, dug out a packet of matches, searched the areaway in the forlorn hope that it might have fallen out of his pocket. There was no package.

He was about to blow out the match when he noticed half a dozen half-smoked cigarettes scattered around on the stone floor. The match burned down, burned his finger. He shook it out with a muttered curse, lit another.

The cigarettes bore a faint red stain on their ends. Apparently the girl had stood here waiting for him to return, or hiding from the men following her. Liddell bent over, picked up an empty match packet. The cover was imprinted with an advertisement for a roadhouse called the Dude Ranch on Route 22 outside of Armonk.

He consulted his watch, found it to be a few minutes short of 9:30. He estimated that it would take him less than half an hour to drive to the Dude Ranch.

He shook out the match, climbed the stairs, headed for a cold drink and a hot shower.

II

The Dude Ranch was a sprawling white frame building set off the road roughly two miles north of Armonk. Johnny Liddell turned his convertible over to the doorman, a big six footer in a maroon uniform. The doorman
motioned with his hands and an attendant stepped from the gloom, climbed into the car, swung it expertly away from the entrance in the direction of the parking lot beyond.

The reception hall was filled with small groups of chattering patrons dressed formally. Overhead a pall of smoke stirred restlessly in the breeze from the opened door. At the far end of the hall a staircase led to an upper floor while off to the left one of the original parlors had been converted into a lounge. A bar that ran the full length of the lounge looked inviting, seemed as good a place as any to start, so Liddell wandered in, found elbow room, leaned against the bar.

The white-jacketed barman came over, flashed a smile from a pair of thin lips that were having trouble restraining an oversized denture. His hair was parted in the middle and brushed down and back. His eyes were watery, red-rimmed. “What’ll it be tonight?”


The barman nodded, reached back to the back bar, snagged a bottle of Masson DeLuxe. He produced a glass from under the bar, filled it to within a hair’s breadth of the top.

Liddell turned his back to the bar, looked around. The operators of the Dude Ranch had retained as much of the flavor of the original parlor as had seemed feasible.

At the far end of the room an archway had been broken through the wall into what was obviously a supper room beyond. A broad-shouldered man in a tuxedo presided over a velvet rope that was stretched across the doorway.

Liddell swung back to face the bartender, who stood polishing glasses, studying him. “How are chances of getting inside?”

The man behind the bar shrugged. “I wouldn’t know, mister.” He looked down at the folded bill that had materialized in Liddell’s hand, scratched his chin. “That for me?”

“It could be,” Liddell nodded. “I just made myself a bet you wouldn’t know who could pass me by that guy with the rope.”

The bartender reached over, snagged the bill. “You lose. The guy to see is Angelo.” He looked up and down the bar, dropped his voice. “They like to keep the inside room just for the dressed up stiff. You tell Angelo you’re in from out of town and the boys told you to drop by and look the place over. That’ll do it.”

“What boys?”

The bartender grinned. “The boys. He’ll know.” He flat-footed it down the bar, pushed a button on the back bar. After a moment, a tuxedoed man went up to the bartender, conferred with him. The bartender nodded in Liddell’s direction, then seemed to lose interest. The man in the tuxedo walked down to where he stood.
“Good evening, sir,” his voice had the faintest trace of an accent. His eyes hop-scotched over Liddell’s informal attire disapprovingly. “You wished to see somebody?”

Liddell nodded. “Angelo.”

“Mr. Angelo?” The tuxedoed man’s eyebrows arched. “Is it something personal?” He tapped his teeth indecisively.

“Why don’t you let him decide that. Just tell him one of the boys from out of town is passing through. Just thought I’d give the place a quick buzz.”

The man in the tuxedo hesitated, then walked over to a phone set in the wall on the far end of the bar. He pressed one of the buttons on its base, held it to his ear. He replaced the instrument after a moment, walked back to where Liddell stood.

“Mr. Angelo will be out in a moment, sir.”

Liddell nodded, swung back to the bar, signalled for a refill. The bartender picked up two bills from the bar, rang up the drinks, slid some silver back. He looked past Liddell’s shoulder. “Here comes Angelo now.”

Liddell turned to face a two hundred pound fashion plate in a midnight blue tuxedo, a red carnation in his button hole, a lazy smile pasted on his thick red lips. His eyes were round, flat, lustreless discs set behind two puffy discolored mounds of flesh.

“You wanted to see me?” The lazy smile did not reach the cold eyes as the newcomer looked Liddell over slowly, carefully.

“Yeah. If you’re Angelo.”

The big man bobbed his head. “What can I do for you?”

Liddell indicated the doorway with a toss of his head. “Haven’t you got a back table in there where a peasant from the sticks can have a look around. The boys didn’t tell me you were so particular.”

The smile on the thick lips seemed more relaxed. Angelo dried-washed his hands, nodded. “Of course.” He adjusted his cuffs, snapped over his shoulder. “What tables are available in the main dining room?”

The man in the tuxedo consulted a seating chart. “Nineteen and twenty-eight.”

Angelo snapped his fingers, waited until the man in the tuxedo had passed him a menu, stepped aside, motioned Liddell to precede him. “I’m sure you’ll be satisfied with the table we have for you.”

At the entrance to the dining room, Angelo stepped ahead, led the way down three crimson carpeted steps, along the tables that skirted the dance floor. He stopped at one facing the bandstand, pulled back the chair. “Will this be satisfactory?”

Liddell nodded. “Fine.”

Angelo nodded, opened the menu for him, waved down a waiter. “If there is anything else,
don’t hesitate to call.” He bowed slightly, glided off. On the way to the door, he stopped to smile at a customer here, wave to a customer there or to bend over a table to talk to a favored one.

The waiter took Liddell’s order for a sandwich and a drink, disappeared. Johnny leaned back, sighed, realized that he had come to the Dude Ranch with very slim hopes of seeing the girl. His eyes jumped from table to table in the crowded room, saw no familiar faces. He dug into his pocket, found he was down to his last cigarette. He hung it from the corner of his mouth, touched a match to it.

The waiter deposited his drink and sandwich on the table.

“Can you get me a pack of cigarettes?” Liddell asked.

The waiter shook his head. “I’ll send the cigarette girl over.” He looked up, scowled at the activity on the bandstand, shook his head. “It’ll have to wait until the floor show’s over. No serving during the numbers.”

Liddell nodded. “Whenever she can.”

The band broke into an introductory chord, the house lights went down. A long yellow spot stabbed through the dimness of the room to outline the figure of the girl emcee. She undulated onto the stage, made a production of waiting for the overhead mike to be lowered to within range, broke out into a brassy song of welcome. Her voice was heavy, roughened by whisky and overuse.

After her song, a line of girls scampered onto the floor in spangled brassieres and satin tights. They went through a tortured routine with approximate precision, twisted and squirmed under the colored spot, their bare legs flashing, their bare stomachs undulating. They ran off the stage to a smattering of applause, gave way to a piano single that played and sang a series of double entendre songs in a manner that left only one interpretation.

The line of girls was back with different costumes but the same steps, the same bare midriffs and insufficient brassieres. This time they made way for the brassy voiced emcee. She leaned against the piano, threw her head back and gave herself over to a wail of unrequited love.

Liddell was debating the advisability of calling it quits when he saw a blonde with a cigarette tray suspended around her neck picking her way through the tables in his direction. She was loosely put together in a way that flowed tantalizingly when she walked. Her legs were unencumbered by a pair of breathtakingly brief shorts. Above, she filled a white silk peasant blouse to a point that endangered its seams.

There was no mistaking the corn-colored hair, the pert face. It was the girl who had given him the package.
She didn't recognize him until she stopped at his table. Her eyes widened, she sucked her breath noisily through her teeth. "You wanted some cigarettes, sir?" she asked in a loud voice. As she lowered her head her voice dropped. "What are you doing here? How did you find me?"

Liddell took a pack of cigarettes, dropped a bill on the tray. "I've got to talk to you."

"I can't. They may be watching me."

"You've got to. Something's happened. I was sapped. The package is gone."

In the dimness of the room, her face looked ghastly. Her make-up stood out as smudges against the sudden pallor of her face. She flashed a cheap counterfeit of her usual smile. "Thank you, sir." Her eyes were haunted, scared. "In the parking lot in ten minutes." She turned and picked her way through the tables toward a rear entrance.

Liddell casually tore the pack open, selected a cigarette. As he lit it, his eyes scanned the room. As far as he could tell, no one was paying him any particular attention. He waited until the floor show was over and the house lights went up. Then, he laid two bills next to his glass, got up, walked out through the bar to the parking lot beyond.

The fog had lifted, had given way to a light drizzle. The blonde was no place in sight. He lit another cigarette from the butt of the one he was smoking, stared around.

The hiss was so low he almost missed it. The second time it came he could make out the shape of the girl in the shadow of the building. He took his time walking over, made sure he wasn't being watched.

"What were you saying in there?" the girl asked breathlessly without preliminaries. "You weren't serious? About the package, I mean."

Liddell nodded. "No sooner had you gone than someone shoved a gun in my ribs, marched me under the stairs and concussed me." He rubbed the sensitive spot behind his ear ruefully. "I thought maybe you could steer me onto whoever it was. I'd like to return the compliment."

"I don't know." There was a hopeless note in the girl's voice. "But I do know one thing. They must have followed me. They know what I'm trying to do."

Liddell dropped his cigarette, ground it out with his heel. "Look, baby. I can't hit anybody if I keep swinging in the dark. Tell me what this is all about and I may be able to help."

The girl hesitated for a moment, then nodded. "All right. But I haven't got time now. They mustn't miss me. Can you meet me later?"

"Now, wait a minute. If these characters know that—"
"They won't try anything tonight. They think they can take care of me whenever they're ready. Meet me tonight and I'll tell you everything you've got to know."

"Okay. Where and when?"

"My place. The Hillcrest Court. It's about three miles north of here. Cabin sixteen."

Liddell nodded. "Why don't I pick you up here when you get through?"

"Do it my way. Meet me at the cabin. I'll be through here at two. And any time after that is okay."

Liddell started to argue, shrugged. "Okay. I'll be there." He waited until the scraping of a door and the soft click of a latch told him she was gone. Then, he pulled another cigarette from his pocket, stuck it in the corner of his mouth, lit it. He moodily contemplated the burning end of the match until it had burned down almost to his fingers, blew it out, swore softly.

III

Hillcrest Court turned out to be a mean little cluster of paint-peeled pre-fabricated cabins huddled off Route 22 about five miles out of Armonk. A noisy neon that spilled a red stain over the lawn and trees in front of the office shattered that cabins were available for transient or permanent guests. Liddell drove past the entrance to the court, pulled the car to a stop at the side of the road, consulted his watch in the dim light of the dash. It showed 2:20.

He cut his motor, doused his lights. Hillcrest Court was surrounded by a heavy growth of underbrush. He left the car at the side of the road, hit in through the bushes in the direction of the cluster of cabins. After a few minutes of stumbling through the bushes, he came to a small clearing that backed on the court. Liddell counted the cabins from the office, estimated that the eighth cottage on the left would normally be Cabin 16.

The weeds in back of the cabin grew knee high, effectively covering an accumulation of beer cans and bottles. Slowly, carefully, he picked his way to the rear of what he figured to be Cabin 16. He listened outside the paper thin wall, heard no sounds. There was no car in the driveway separating Cabin 16 from the one on the right. He flattened himself against the wall, worked his way around to the front.

He caught the knob, turned it cautiously. It was unlocked. He pushed open the door, stepped in, kicked the door shut with his foot. He tugged his .45 from its holster, transferred it to his left hand, felt along the wall for the light switch. He pressed it and the shabby room sprang into blinding brilliance.

There was a badly made double bed, a rickety wooden dresser with a speckled mirror hanging askew
over it, a half open door that led to a lavatory. The only light in the room came from the unshaded fixture in the ceiling that spilled the yellow, revealing light into all but the corners of the room.

The blonde lay across the bed, her face turned to the wall. She wore one shoe; the other had been kicked into a corner. Her corn-colored hair tumbled over her face, the shoulder straps of her dress had been ripped away.

A handkerchief had been forced between her teeth as a gag. Red, angry welts across the whiteness of her back testified to the fact that her visitor had sought information. The gaping wound in her throat that had spilled a viscid, dark brown puddle onto the floor gave mute evidence that he had gotten every bit of information he sought.

Johnny Liddell stood at the door, cursed bitterly. He walked over, picked up the blonde’s wrist, felt for a pulse. He shook his head, dropped the wrist, stared down at her. An odd shade of red in the pool of blood caught his eye. It seemed brighter than the rest. Liddell bent over, squinted at it for a moment, brought out his pencil and fished it out.

He held it under the light, glowered at it. It was a petal from a red carnation and it conjured up in his mind’s eye the thick, sensuous lips, the blank expressionless eyes of Angelo. Sitting on the right lapel of his dinner jacket had been a red carnation.

He stuck the carnation petal between the leaves of his notebook, looked around. He decided it would be a waste of time searching the room since the killer had obviously gotten what he’d come after. He made certain he had left no trace of his presence, wiped the switch and doorknob, doused the light. He cut around back of Cabin 16, made his way through the weed-choked patch behind the court, headed through the underbrush toward where he had left the car . . .

The Dude Ranch looked old, tired like an old woman who had taken off her make-up. Without the flattery of the hidden battery of floodlights and the bright lights spilling out over the lawn it reverted to being just an old white frame house sprawling in the darkness. At this hour there were no cars in the parking lot, the giant who presided over the door was gone, there was no feverish pitch of conversation. Just a tired old white building relaxing without its makeup.

Liddell left his car under a big tree a hundred yards off the entrance to the Ranch. He cut around behind the building in the direction of the doorway in which the blonde had stood earlier, talking to him. There was no sound other than the rustle of leaves and the soft squish of his own
footsteps in the springy turf. Suddenly, he stopped, melted into the shadows. Coming toward him he could make out a tiny red spot that glowed into a coal, then died away. Liddell strained his eyes against the wall of darkness, tried to make out the figure of the man behind the cigarette. From the height of the glowing end, he estimated his height to be nearly six feet.

The man with the cigarette stopped. Liddell slid the .45 from its holster, waited. After a moment the man started walking again. Liddell edged back into the shadow, waited.

When the man reached the tree behind which he was standing, Liddell stepped out behind him, jabbed the snout of the .45 in his back. The man stiffened, the cigarette fell from his fingers. He didn’t move.

“What is this?” His voice was heavy, gutteral.

“How many of you around the place?” Liddell wanted to know.

“Why?” The guard growled. “If you think—”

Liddell jabbed the snout of the gun into the man’s back, brought a grunt. “How many?”

The guard seemed about to retort, shrugged. “Just me.”

Liddell reached around him, tugged an automatic from his shoulder holster. In his side jacket pocket, he found a sap. He weighed it in the palm of his hand.

“And where do I find Angelo?” The guard shrugged, didn’t answer.

Liddell grinned humorlessly. “I know a guy does tricks with a sap like this.” He pounded it against the palm of his hand. “He can break every bone in a man’s body without breaking the skin. I’ve always wanted to try it.”

“He’s in his office,” the guard growled. “Top of the stairs.”

Liddell nodded. “Thanks.” He was debating what to do with the guard when the big man took it out of his hands.

He whirled with unsuspected speed, lunged at Liddell. He was as fast as most professional killers. But not fast enough. The sap caught him high on the side of his face, split the skin over his cheekbone, knocked him to his knees. The second blow caught him flush on the top of the skull, flattened him out on his face on the ground. He didn’t move.

Liddell caught him under the arms, dragged him back behind the tree. He stood in the shadows for a moment, waited. There was nothing to indicate that there was anyone else on the grounds.

Then, he walked across the lawn to the big French doors that led into the bar room. The room beyond was dark. He gently tapped out a small pane of glass over the knob, stuck his hand through, opened the door and let himself in. He picked his way carefully across the room toward
the big staircase in the entrance hall.

Slowly, testing each step as he went, he climbed to the head of the stairs. There was a thin thread of light under one of the doors. Liddell slid the .45 into his hand, crossed to the door, listened. There wasn’t a sound.

Gently, he clasped his hand over the knob, turned it. The door wasn’t locked, swung open easily.

Angelo was sitting behind a highly polished desk, studying some papers. He looked up with an annoyed frown, his jaw sagged, his eyes widened. His eyes hopscotched from Liddell’s face to the black, bottomless muzzle of the .45 and back. He seemed frozen, didn’t move a muscle as Liddell stepped in, kicked the door closed behind him.

“What is this?” he finally managed.

“I’ve got a message for you, Angelo. From the cigarette girl in Cabin Sixteen.”

A muscle jumped under Angelo’s left eye. “You’re a liar.”

Liddell grinned bleakly. “You’re right. She’s dead.” His eyes fastened on the right lapel. “What happened to your carnation?”

Angelo’s eyes swiveled down to the right lapel, rolled upward, studied Liddell from under their lids. “I didn’t wear one.” He licked at his lips, to be getting the quiver under his eye under control. “Who are you?”

“The name’s John Liddell. I’m a private detective.”

Angelo sneered, leaned back in his chair, touched his fingers across his chest. “What are you here for? To talk business?” He pursed his lips. “How much?”

“You haven’t got that much, friend. I came for a package a client gave me tonight. I’m taking it with me when I leave. Whether you’re in a condition to know about it when I do depends on you.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Liddell grinned. “If you’re stalling for time, waiting for your boy to walk in on us, don’t wait. I had a little talk with him. He was a little stubborn, but I pounded some sense into his head. Even though I had to make a hole in it to do it.”

Angelo’s tongue darted from between his lips, licked at them. “I haven’t got any package that belongs to you or anybody else,” he said. He struggled to keep his eyes off the pile of papers on his desk, lost the struggle. “Why don’t you get smart and get out of here? That way nobody has to get hurt.”

Liddell walked over to the desk, stared down at the papers on it. Angelo lurched upward, caught the edge of the desk, turned it over, knocked Liddell backwards. Before the private detective could recover, the big man had sprinted for the door,
slammed it violently behind him. Liddell struggled to his feet, started for the door. He realized that he would make a perfect target silhouetted in the lighted doorway so he snapped the wall switch throwing the room into total darkness.

Then, he turned the knob pulled the door open, stood aside. There was no sound but the sound of his own breathing. Somewhere below he thought he heard footsteps, realized that if Angelo reached the grounds he could never hope to catch him.

Liddell threw caution to the winds, started after the big man on the run. He didn’t see the outstretched foot, hit it full force, sprawled headlong. He hit the floor with a slam that knocked the breath out of his body, sent the .45 skidding from his grasp. He heard it hit the wall, go tumbling down the stairs.

Instinctively, he rolled as he hit, heard the thud as Angelo’s 200 pounds hit the spot where he had fallen. Liddell lashed out with his heels, heard the other man grunt as they made contact. Liddell managed to get to his feet, crouched in the darkness, waited for the next assault. He could feel the perspiration running down his back as he strained his eyes against the darkness, tried to locate his adversary.

Suddenly, he caught the dull glint of a knife blade. Angelo’s shoe scuffled against the floor as he shuffled in for the kill. He held his knife waist high, point up in the manner of a skilled knife fighter. Liddell kept his eye on the knife blade, waited for the other man to close in the distance.

As soon as Angelo was close enough, Liddell kicked out with his heel at where he estimated the big man’s shins to be. Angelo muttered a curse, growled with pain. Before he could get set, Liddell chopped down at the hand holding the knife with the side of his hand. He made contact, the knife clattered to the floor. Both men dived for it, struggled in the darkness of the hall. The only sound was their labored breathing.

Angelo managed to get his hand on the knife, rolled over on his back to be in position to use it. Liddell was on top of him, caught his wrist, tried to force it back where he could pound the knuckles against the floor. Perspiration beaded on his forehead, rolled down into his eyes, stinging him. Angelo caught his breath in gasping sobs, clawed at Liddell’s throat with his free hand.

Liddell relaxed his pressure on the knife hand, tried to tear the fingers loose on his throat. The grunting and gasping grew louder. Liddell’s fingers around the other man’s wrist grew slippery and wet.

Angelo grunted, threw all of his 200 pounds into a desperate effort to dislodge Liddell, threw
him off balance. He lunged at where Liddell was, slashed at him, missed by inches. Liddell pulled himself to his feet, backed up against the wall. He could hear Angelo scrambling to his feet, knew that this time the big man wouldn’t be sucked into a trap.

He decided on a bold counter attack. Before Angelo could move in on him, Liddell threw himself at the big man. With his left, he deflected the knife blade, put everything he had behind a right smash. He could feel the big man stagger as it pounded into his face. Liddell didn’t give him time to get set, kept throwing rights and lefts into the big man’s face and stomach. He drove him backwards relentlessly.

Suddenly there was a crashing of wood, a scream from Angelo, then a series of dull thumps and silence.

Liddell stood at the head of the stairs, squinted down into the blackness of the stair well down which the big man had disappeared when the bannister gave way behind him. He strained his ears, heard no sound. After a moment, he staggered back to the office, reached in, snapped on the light. By it, he was able to locate the hall switch, snapped it on, spilled a brilliant yellow light into the upper hall.

Angelo lay at the bottom of the stairs, his neck twisted at a crazy angle to his body, one arm bent under him, the other stretched out at right angles. The dull expressionless eyes were open, seemed to be staring sightlessly at where Liddell stood at the head of the stairs looking down at him.

Liddell turned, walked back into the office. The papers that had been on top of the desk were scattered across the floor. He picked them up, rifled through them, stuck them into his jacket pocket. Folded up, they were the exact size of the package that had been taken from him earlier in the evening.

He went through the drawers of the desk, the small wall cabinet, found nothing else. Then, he snapped off the light, walked down the stairs, stepped over the dead man. His gun was in the corner against the wall. He picked it up, snapped it into its hammock, let himself out.

IV

Johnny Liddell sat with his desk chair tilted back, stared out his office window over Bryant Park, eight stories below. After a moment, he pulled himself out of his chair, stamped across the room to where an old water cooler hummed softly to itself. He took a drink, crumpled the paper cup in his fist, threw it at the waste basket. Then, he walked back to his desk, stood stirring the pile of papers on it with a stubby forefinger.

After a moment, he picked them up, ran through them. They
consisted of a list of names, with dates and amounts of money alongside them. Some of the names were vaguely familiar, names that made him a little ill—names of men on the Police Force. He spotted several lieutenants, three captains and at least one inspector’s name. He scowled at the list, tossed it back on the desk, walked over to the window, resumed his study of the lowering skies.

What had an “ice” list to do with the girl that had risked her life to get it? If she were a reporter, it was a little anticlimactic. The newspapers had worked the “police corruption” story to death months ago. Even a list of the names of the cops involved wasn’t hot enough to breathe any life back into that yarn.

He turned as the door to his office opened. His red-headed secretary walked in, deposited a pile of mail on the desk. “What time did you get in? Or didn’t you go home?” she wanted to know.

“I had some things to clean up.” He nodded his head at the mail. “Anything interesting?”

The redhead shrugged. “A couple of checks.” She pursed her lips. “A letter that didn’t make too much sense.” She picked a folded sheet from the top of the pile. “A gal named Doris Benson. Familiar?”

Liddell shook his head. “What’s she want?”

“She wants to hire you. Says she’s got the evidence to clear her brother.” She looked up. “Who’s he?”

Liddell grimaced. “How do I know? I haven’t even talked to her yet. She’s probably just a—” He broke off, screwed his brow into ridges of concentration. “Benson? Wait a minute. That name does ring a bell.” He walked over took the letter from between the redhead’s fingers, glanced through it. He looked up, nodded. “It could be.”

“If you say so,” the redhead humored him. “Now, about those checks—”

“Where’s the envelope for this?”

“Out in the basket with the rest of the envelopes. Why? You taking up stamp collecting?”

She smiled at Johnny.

Liddell brushed past her, rummaged through the waste basket in the outer office, came up with a small envelope. He studied the postmark, nodded. “Take a look, Pinky. It was mailed in Armonk.”


“I’ve already met this girl, Pink. She was waiting for me outside my place last night. She gave me a package to hold for her.” He nodded toward the papers on his desk. “Up to now they didn’t make sense.”

“But they do now? From that?”

Liddell nodded. “Yeah. They make sense. It’s a list of ‘ice’—graft payoffs to some cops. Now
do you remember who Benson was?"

The redhead chewed her lower lip, shook her head. "I don’t think so."

"He was a police lieutenant. Had a first rate reputation until this graft investigation broke. He committed suicide." He tossed the letter down on his desk. "At least that’s what they thought."

"But you don’t? The police were right on the scene, they investigated and thought it was suicide. And here you are on West Forty-second Street a couple of months later and you decide it isn’t. What do you use, a crystal ball or a needle?" she said. "Come on, Johnny. There’s still a report to be made in that Carter case, and we have the bills for—"

"Benson didn’t kill himself, Pink. If he had been guilty of taking ice, his name would have been on this list. And it isn’t. They made him the patsy, knocked him off so he couldn’t clear his name. That’s why it was so important to his sister."

The redhead nodded. "Okay, so you kept it all nice and safe for her. Now give it back to her and let her hire somebody else. You’ve got more cases than you can handle, and besides—"

"I can’t give it back to her, Pink. She’s dead. They murdered her when they found out she had stolen this."

"Who murdered her?"

Liddell dug into his pocket, brought up two cigarettes. "A guy named Angelo. Runs a place called the Dude Ranch outside of Armonk." He lit the two cigarettes, handed one to the girl. "She worked there as a cigarette girl. Probably so she could get at his records."

Pinky turned her palms up. "Then it’s simple. Turn Angelo over to the police and let them take over."

Liddell blew twin streams of smoke from his nostrils. "Not so simple. Angelo’s dead, too. I killed him—taking these back."

"Oh, fine," the redhead groaned. "Now what?"

Liddell smoked for a moment. "Now to prove who these lists belong to. When I prove that, I’ve got Angelo’s boss. That’s the one I want."

"What gives you the idea he has a boss?"

"The lists. They’re all city cops. So was Benson. If the list belonged to Angelo, they’d be upstate cops. Maybe there are some on that list. But there are also city cops. That means somebody down here."

"How do you figure to find out?"

Liddell walked over to the window, stared down at the park below. "I don’t have to find out. I already know. There’s only one operator big enough to carry an ice list that size. The big guy."

"Al Zito?"

Mister Big.” He turned, stared at the redhead glumly. “If I’m
going to get him, it’ll have to be fast. Because as soon as he finds
out I have this list—”

“Johnny, don’t be crazy. You
can’t go up against Zito. Nobody
can. He owns this town body and
soul and everybody in it. You’ll
never make it.”

Johnny Liddell put his fingers
to his lips, pointed to the shadow
on the corridor side of the frosted
glass door that said Johnny Lid-
dell—Private Investigations—En-
trance Room 825.

It was a man’s shadow. A
small man’s. It stood for a mo-
ment, was joined by a second man,
then both headed down the
corridor in the direction of 825.
Liddell scooped up the papers,
pulled out a book in the book-
case, shoved them behind it,
replaced the book.

The door from the outer office
swung open, two men stood
framed in the doorway. One of
the men was heavy shouldered,
his face battered, his eyebrows
thickened. The other was slim,
dapper, pretty in an effeminate
way. He was hatless and his hair,
beginning to show signs of thin-
ning at the temples was light and
wavy. His hand was sunk deep
in a bulging jacket pocket, but on
the wrist a heavy gold identifi-
cation bracelet was visible.

“The waiting room is outside,”
Liddell told them.

The heavyset one twisted the
corner of his lips into what passed
for a smile. “Yeah, but we’re not
waiting. There’s someone wants
to see you, pal.”

Liddell shrugged. “Have him
call my secretary and make an
appointment.”

The big man crossed the room,
cought Liddell’s arm with a ham-
like fist. “Very funny. The guy
I’m talking about ain’t particular
what condition you’re in when you
come, just as long as you come.”

The light haired man inter-
vened. “That won’t be necessary,
Luke,” his voice was low, inti-
mate. “Liddell will come along.
I’m sure he wouldn’t want to keep
Mr. Zito waiting.”

Liddell reached over, crushed
out his cigarette. “The big guy,
eh? What would he want with
me?”

The slight man drew his hand
out of his pocket far enough to
reveal that the bulge was a .45
calibre. “Maybe he needs a
fourth for bridge—you, him,
Angelo and the cigarette girl.”

“Sounds more like solitaire to
me.”

Wavy Hair exposed a perfect
set of teeth in a fixed smile. “It
could end up that way, at that.”

V

The man who lounged on the
couch was fat and soft looking.
Dark, damp ringlets tried futilely
to cover the bald spot that glowed
pinkly in the indirect lighting of
the room. His eyes, two shiny
black marbles, were almost lost
behind the puffy balls of his
cheeks. He seemed half asleep as
he sat there, hands clasped across
his middle, regarding Johnny
Liddell.

“Nice of you to come see me
like this, Liddell.” His voice
sounded choked by the heaviness
of his jowls.

“You mean I had a choice?
What’s it all about, Zito?”

“Mr. Zito.” Pretty Boy jammed
the snout of his gun into
Liddell’s back.

The fat man’s eyes rolled from
Liddell to the gunman. “I’ll
handle this, Joey. Wait outside.”

A faint color tinged the gun-
man’s neck. He started to retort,
checked himself, minced out. He
slammed the door after him.

“I’ve heard a lot about you,
Liddell. All good,” Zito told him.

Liddell nodded grimly. “I’ve
heard a lot about you.”

The fat man chuckled deep in
his chest. “Very good. Very
good, indeed.” He leaned back,
studied Liddell from under the
heavily veined lids of his eyes.
“I thought maybe we could do
a little business.”

“What kind of business?”

Zito hunched his shoulders up-
wards, submerging what little neck
he had. “You’re a private detec-
tive. I want you to find somebody
for me.” He reached over with
a grunt, picked two cigars from
a humidor, held one up. Liddell
shook his head, Zito dropped one
back, closed the lid. “He took off
for Arizona or Montana or one
of those places.” He dropped his
eyes to the cigar, carefully de-
nuded it of its cellophane wrapper,
rolled it into a ball. “Might take
a long time. A year, maybe.”

“I’m pretty well tied up with
a couple of cases now.”

Zito bit the end off his cigar
deliberately, spat it at an ash tray.
“I’ll make it worth your while
to give up those cases. I’ll find
someone to handle them for you.”
His eyes rolled upwards. “Well
worth your while.”

Liddell fished a cigarette from
his pocket, touched a match to it.
“One of those cases has blood on
it.”

The fat man shrugged.
“Angelo’s? He fell down stairs.
Very careless of him. The girl?”
He pursed his lips, frowned.
“Angelo was always too quick on
the trigger. It’s too bad.”

“She was a client of mine. She
wanted my help in clearing her
brother’s name. His name was
Benson. Remember?”

Zito rolled the unlit cigar in
the center of his lips between
thumb and forefinger. “I remem-
ber Lieutenant Benson. Sad case,
wasn’t it?” He eyed Liddell
coldly. “He was one of those
headstrong young men, who
wouldn’t listen to reason. Quite
a bit on your type, matter of
fact.”

Liddell nodded glumly. “Too
bad I didn’t know him better.”
"He would have bored you." The fat man shrugged. "He was stupidly stubborn. We tried to reason, but he was determined to be stubborn." He snapped a lighter to flame, touched it to the end of his cigar. "Certainly you must understand that we avoid violence as much as possible. It isn't good for business." He blew a heavy stream of feathery blue-gray smoke at the ceiling. "That's why I hope you'll accept this assignment."

"And if I didn't?"

The fat man sighed. "It would put both of us to a certain amount of discomfort. Yours, to be sure, would be for much briefer period." He reached over, jabbed at a button with a stubby forefinger. The door opened and the heavy set man walked in. "Luke, Liddell here is being a little hesitant. I wonder if you could give him a sample of what might be in store if we can't reach an agreement?"

Luke twisted the corners of his misshapen lips upward in a gross caricature of a smile. "It'd be a pleasure, Mr. Z. Tough guys are my meat." He shuffled toward Liddell. "Let's dance, sweetheart. They're playing our song."

He threw a beefy fist at Liddell's head. The private detective blocked it easily, slammed his right against the side of Luke's jaw. The big man blinked, licked at his lips, shuffled closer. He feinted with the left again, crossed his right against Liddell's jaw. It slammed Liddell back against the wall, where he slid to a sitting position. There was a dull ringing in his ears, the floor seemed to be slanting crazily as he struggled to his feet.

He was dimly aware of the fat man draped comfortably on the couch, the big cigar tilted from the corner of his over-ripe lips, surrounded by a broad grin. Luke stood over Liddell waiting for him to get up.

Liddell shook his head, tried to dislodge the cobwebs. He got to one knee, pretended to topple forward, got his legs behind him and plowed into the bodyguard's midsection, shoulder first.

Luke let out a strangled oath as Liddell's lunge caught him unaware and bowled him over. There was a crash as the big man hit a chair, splintered it. As he went down, he took a small end table and chair with him. He lay in the debris and cursed angrily.

By the time Luke got to his feet, Liddell was ready for him in a half crouch. The big man moved in again, apparently impervious to Liddell's Sunday punch that opened a half inch gash on the cheekbone. He threw a hamlike fist at Liddell's face, missed, gasped as Johnny sank his left to the cuff in his stomach.

Luke started to go for his hip holster. Before the gun could clear leather, Liddell was all over him. He caught the gun hand in
a vise-like grip, bent it around the other man.

Luke struggled, tried to bring his knee up, lost leverage as Liddell stuck the top of his head under the other man’s chin, pushed upward. Perspiration gleamed on the bodyguard’s face as slowly, inexorably Liddell bent him backwards over his own arm.

Luke screamed out in pain, the gun slipped from his damp fingers, hit the floor. Liddell released his hammerlock, let the big man fall to the floor. Luke was up in a moment, tried to butt. Liddell sidestepped the rush, chopped down at the back of the other man’s neck with the side of his hand. Luke hit the floor face first, didn’t move.

The fat man on the couch growled angrily, stabbed for a button. Before the door could open to admit the wavy haired gunman, Liddell had Luke’s gun pointed at Zito’s midsection.

“What’s the mat—” The wavy haired man’s eye hop-scotched from the unconscious man on the floor to the fat man on the couch to the gun in Liddell’s hand.

“Tell him to come in,” Liddell said.

Zito nodded. “Do what he says, Joey.”

The thin man walked in, gun in hand.

“Drop the gun and kick it away,” Liddell told him.

Zito nodded, his face hard. “I always told you you depended too much on Luke’s muscle,” Joey told the fat man. “If you had let me handle him it would have been different.” He dropped his gun to the floor, kicked it away, stared at Liddell through narrowed eyes. “There’ll always be another time.”

Liddell wiped his lips with the back of his hand. “Don’t push it too hard, Pretty Boy. I’m letting you walk away from this one. I’m not always that good natured.”

Zito pulled the cigar from between his teeth, examined the soggy end, pasted back a loose leaf with the tip of his tongue. “Funny. Guys like you and Benson—you always talk alike. You end up the same way, too.”

“Maybe. Maybe not. Don’t forget, I have that ice list of yours.”

Zito smiled at his cigar, placed it between his teeth. “Have you?” His eyes rolled to Joey. “Tell him, Joey.”

Joey grinned viciously. “That red-headed female in your office. She talks very easily. But then, the boys we sent over to talk with her are very persuasive.”

“You don’t miss a trick, do you?” Liddell grunted. “But don’t forget, the game isn’t over until the last trick is played out.”

VI

The city room of the Dispatch was just beginning to come to life.
Half a dozen reporters, their hats shoved on the backs of their heads, jackets hanging over the backs of their chairs, sat with ears glued to telephones. At other desks, typewriters chattered about the day's doings for the early City Edition. From the other room, the teletypes added their deeper tones to the clatter with the occasional pinging of a bell.

Johnny Liddell picked his way down an aisle between desks to a glass door that bore the legend Managing Editor.

A thick, squat man with a shock of untidy gray hair looked up from the room's only desk as the door slammed shut. His face was tired, deeply lined under the green eyeshade he wore. In his mouth he clamped a short-stemmed bulldog pipe. He nodded as he recognized his visitor.

“Well, well. Haven't seen you in a dog's age, Johnny. What've you been doing?”

“About three rounds with Zito's muscle man. Guy named Luke.” He pulled up a chair, dropped into it. “I'm in trouble, Ed. Zito's out to get me.”

Ed Lewis pulled the pipe from between his teeth, whistled softly. “That's Big Casino. When he's on your tail, you cash in your chips.”

“What's his weak spot?”

The managing editor shook his head. “If he had one, we'd have put the finger on him years ago.” He knocked the dottle out of the pipe, pulled a pouch from his pocket. “The guy can't be touched. He's got too much on the right people.” He dug the pipe bowl into the pouch, started to pack it with his index finger. “You better make tracks. By the way, what put him on your tail?”

“Remember the Benson case?”

Lewis nodded. “The copper who was supposed to have killed himself?”

“He didn't. He was murdered and made to look like he did the Dutch.”

The managing editor scratched a match, touched it to the pipe bowl. “Figured as much. Can you prove it?”

Liddell shook his head. “His sister tried to. She went to work for one of Zito's stooges. Got her hands on a copy of Zito's ice list. Her brother's name wasn't on it.”

“Can she prove it?”

Liddell grinned grimly. “She had her throat cut last night in a tourist court up near Armonk. I got the list back from Angelo—the creep that runs the Dude Ranch up there. Incidentally, get a flash on him?”

Lewis consulted the stack of galleys at his elbow, shook his head. “Should I have?”

“You will. Anyway, two of Zito's goons took me out of my office this morning and they went over it with a fine tooth comb. I haven't got the list any more.”

The managing editor sighed,
took a deep drag on his pipe, formed a blue cloud of smoke with pursed lips. "See what I mean?" He shook his head. "Neither you nor I have a prayer of a chance of going up against Zito."

"How about his babe?"

Lewis ridged his brows. "His babe?"

"The one that testified before the crime commission. The big black haired blister that wouldn't even give them her name."

"Mary Lister? She's not Zito's babe. Hell, that hot pepper would burn him to a crisp."

"What's the tie-in?" Johnny wanted to know.

Lewis shrugged. "She used to run errands for the Syndicate. Carried a lot of orders and messages that couldn't be trusted to writing or telephone wires. Every time she visited a city, some hood got knocked off. She was pretty valuable to the boys."

"And now?"

"They've put her out to pasture."

Liddell looked thoughtful. "Gal like that should know plenty."

"But plenty. Why do you think she's still alive? She knows too much."

"Yeah."

"That's usually fatal."

The managing editor grinned humorlessly. "Not with little Mary. She saw too many guys get theirs—guys who knew a lot more than she did. So she took out life insurance."

"Meaning?"

"The way I understand it, she's planted photostatic copies and full confessions naming names, places and dates with about ten people around the country. The day anything happens to her, they're delivered to the FBI and about twenty of our top hoodlums keep a date with the electric chair."

Liddell pursed his lips, whistled soundlessly. "She sounds like the kind of gal I'd like to meet."

"You're wasting your time, Johnny. She wouldn't crack. Why should she? She's sitting too pretty."

Liddell stood up. "You'd be surprised how persuasive I can get."

The managing editor took his pipe from between his lips, tapped at his teeth with the stem. "It's a dry run, Johnny. Even if she wanted to talk, she couldn't. They've got as much on her as she has on them. You mentioned Benson. Ever meet him?"

Liddell shook his head. "Nice tall, good looking kid. He turned the charm on Mary. Thought he could get enough dope out of her to smash the top mob. He was a smart cop."

Liddell shrugged. "Not too smart. They got to him."

"Ever wonder why a smart cop got himself into a position where he could be knocked off and have
it made look like suicide? And with no signs of a struggle?"

"Go on."

"Figure it out for yourself. He knew he was playing with quick death. Yet, the guys who were out to hit him get their hands on his gun to do the job with. What's it sound like to you?"

"It sounds like he should have taken his gun to bed."

Lewis nodded. "It sounds like that to me, too. Don’t forget, Johnny. Mary Lister’s specialty is putting guys on the spot. There are twenty eight gang killings in the past five years—and all twenty eight were playing footsie with little Mary before they stopped the big one."

"Where do I find her?"

Lewis stared at him for a moment, shrugged. "No use trying to talk you out of it?"

Liddell shook his head.

"Okay. She’s got the penthouse in Barkley Towers."

VII

The Barkley Towers was an expensive pile of rocks and plate glass at the river end of 57th Street. Johnny Liddell crossed a modernistic lobby furnished with brightly colored couches and chrome chairs which complemented the soft pastel carpeting.

He headed for the elevator bank labeled Penthouse, pushed the top button. After a moment, the car slid to a noiseless stop, the doors opened. He stepped out into ankle deep pile of the rug, crossed to the steel door leading to the penthouse.

He knocked, waited. On the second knock, he heard sounds from within the apartment, the door opened an inch.

"Who are you looking for?"

The voice was low, sultry, still retained a faint trace of a southern accent.

"My name’s Liddell. I’m looking for Mary Lister."

There was a slight pause.

"What for?"

"It’s about a mutual friend. A man named Benson. He’s dead."

The door closed. He could hear sounds of a chain being removed, then it swung wide open.

"Come in." The sultriness of her voice hadn’t quite prepared him for what he saw. She was tall, utterly striking in her beauty. Her hair was silky black, caught behind the ears by a blue ribbon, allowed to cascade down over her shoulders. Her lips were full, wet and soft looking. She wore a tight fitting dressing gown that clung seductively to the well-formed, full bosom, the rounded thighs and hips.

She waited until Liddell had walked past her, closed the door.

"Who sent you here?"

"Nobody. I’m trying to clear Benson’s name. You’re the only one left that can help me."

She ran the tips of her fingers across her forehead. "You’re sure Al Zito isn’t behind your coming?"
Liddell slowly shook his head. The girl led the way in to a sitting room. The gown was drawn tightly across her hips, seethed rhythmically as she walked. She motioned him to the couch. "I knew Benson. I knew him well. We were getting ready to go away together when they did it to him." She caught her full lower lip between her teeth. "He never killed himself."

"Can you prove it?"

The brunette shrugged, the sway of her breasts traced patterns against the fabric of her gown. "What good would it do? They'd kill me."

Liddell shook his head. "Not if we can smash them first. You'll always be in danger until we do. That's why I came to you."

"You mean you'd go up against them alone?"

"If I have to."

The brunette turned the full power of her green eyes on him, took in the rugged jaw, the heavy shoulders. She seemed to like what she saw. "I believe you would." She pursed her lips, then nodded. "I'll play along." She reached over, picked up a decanter and two glasses. She poured some liquor into each, handed one to Liddell. "We'll need luck." She lifted her glass.

Liddell sniffed at the glass, tasted it. It tasted as good as it smelled. He drained his glass. The girl followed suit, coughed, spilled her glass down the front of her gown.

"Damn!" She set her glass down. "I won't be a second. Let me get into something fresh."

She smiled, disappeared in the direction of the bedroom.

Liddell slid out of his jacket, tossed it across a chair, folded his shoulder holster over it. Then he went back, stretched out on the couch.

He was on his second cigarette when she returned. She had changed the robe for a nightgown that brought a catch to his throat. She was full hipped and had short legs. Her stomach was flat. She walked over to where he sprawled on the couch.

"As long as we're going to be partners—" She smiled lazily, looking down at him.

He sat up, reached up, ran his hands over the smoothness of her hips, the flat of her back. She sank to her knees, her lips sought his, covered them hungrily. Her hands were at the back of his neck, her nails digging into his shoulders.

Gently, he got up from the couch, pulled her to her feet. Her eyes were glazed, her lips wet, shining. "I'm crazy for big men," she murmured. Her mouth sought his again.

After a moment, he held her away, consulted his watch.

"Am I boring you?" she pouted.

"Never, baby." He checked his watch again. "I just want to
know when fifteen minutes are up.”

“Why?”

Liddell grinned. “I figure that’s how long it would take a couple of guns to get across town from Zito’s place.”

The girl’s lids half covered her eyes, her teeth glistened through half drawn lips. “What are you talking about?”

“The telephone call you made to Al Zito, telling him you had me on the spot. Just like Benson.”

“You’re crazy,” she snarled. “If that’s what you think, get out of here. Get out!”

Liddell made no move. He looked at the girl, at her beauty. “It’s not that easy, baby,” he told her. “I can’t keep running forever. Sooner or later there’s got to be a showdown.”

“You think you can buck the Syndicate?” she sneered. “They’ll break you in two. Just like they break everybody that tries to buck them.”

Liddell nodded. “That’s why it’s got to be smashed no matter who gets hurt.”

The brunette backed up to the chair where his .45 lay in its holster. “I’ve heard that song before. But the ones who sang it are all worm food. I’m still around. So is the Syndicate.”

“And you fingered the ones that sang the song.”

“That’s what I get paid for.” She swept her arms around the apartment. “I like living like this. You think I’d let you or anyone else stand in the way of it? What’s it mean to me if some jerk gets out of line and has to get hit? Sure, I finger them. And you’re right about me calling Al Zito. He told me to keep you here.”

She ran her cupped hands under her breasts, then down over her stomach, along her thighs. She licked her lips. “You can’t live forever, so—” Her eyes widened at the sight of the .38 that had suddenly appeared in his hand. “What are you going to do?”

“There’s a forty-five in the holster, baby. Get it.”

“What for?”

“I’m going to give you the chance you never gave the guys you bird-dogged. I’m going to give you first shot. Then, I’m going to do something that should have been done years ago. I’m going to smash the Syndicate.”

“You can’t. Look, be reasonable. I’ll get you out of here. You can go down the back stairs. They’ll never get you. They’ll—”

“There’s nothing personal in it, baby. If it would do any good to take you in, I would. But you’d be out before the ink got dry.”

“You’ll never get away with it. Zito has connections higher than you’ll ever reach.”

Liddell nodded. “That’s just it. They won’t come out of the woodwork until those letters of yours reach the FBI and the police.”

The color seeped out of the
brunette’s face, leaving her make-up dark patches against the pallor. She grabbed for the .45, was squeezing the trigger almost before it was out of the holster. Liddell heard a lamp smash at his ear, felt the impact as one of the heavy slugs hit his shoulder. He squeezed the trigger. The little .38 jumped in his hand.

The brunette stiffened, went up on her toes. A bright red stain appeared on the front of the gown. She looked down incredulously, dropped the .45, grabbed at her middle.

She went to her knees, fingers laced over the wound. “You shouldn’t have done it, Johnny Liddell.”

“I had to. There’s a mad dog running loose in this city and it’s got to be stopped no matter who gets hurt. It was the only way I could.” He caught her as she fell forward, eased her to the floor. After a moment, he got up, walked to the phone.

He dialed the dispatch, asked for the managing editor. “Lewis? This is Liddell. You’d better contact the FBI and tell them to watch their mail for the next few days.”

He dropped the receiver on its hook, wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. The phone shrilled at his elbow. He lifted its hook, held it to his ear.

“Mary. This is Joey. We’re coming up. Keep him away from his gun.”

There was a click as the receiver was tossed on the hook. Liddell hung up on his end, picked up his coat and gun, headed for the back staircase, shoulders held straight.

Can you ever keep murder in the family? In our next issue nationally-famous mystery writer Craig Rice explores that bizarre problem with a superb grasp of what constitutes a top-echelon crime thriller . . . and as fascinating a cast of characters as you’ll find in modern detective fiction. A brand new Malone novel by Craig Rice is an event which may well be shouted from the rooftops. So we’ll just whisper a gentle warning. MURDER IN THE FAMILY in the next exciting issue of THE SAINT could be sold out early at your local newsstand!
Mr. Mulliner, Private Detective

Surely purloining your host's diamonds and cheating at cards was the privilege of the peerage. But why did Mr. Mulliner smile?

The conversation in the bar parlour of the Anglers' Rest had turned to the subject of the regrettably low standard of morality prevalent among the nobility and landed gentry.

Miss Postlethwaite, our erudite barmaid, had brought the matter up by mentioning that in the novelette which she was reading a Viscount had just thrown a family solicitor over a cliff.

"Because he had found out his guilty secret," explained Miss Postlethwaite, polishing a glass a little severely, for she was a good woman. "It was his guilty secret this solicitor had found out, so the Viscount threw him over a cliff. I suppose, if one did but know, that sort of thing is going on all the time."

Mr. Mulliner nodded gravely. "So much so," he agreed, "that I believe that whenever a family solicitor is found in two or more pieces at the bottom of a cliff, the first thing the Big Four at Scotland Yard do is make a round-up..."
of all Viscounts in the neighborhood."

"Baronets are worse than Viscounts," said a Pint of Stout, vehemently. "I was done down by one only last month over the sale of a cow."

"O.B.E.'s are worse than Baronets," insisted a Whiskey Sour. "I could tell you something about O.B.E.'s."

"How about Earls?" demanded a Mild and Bitter. "If you ask me, Earls want watching too."

Mr. Mulliner sighed. "The fact is," he said, "reluctant though one may be to admit it, the entire British aristocracy is seamed and honeycombed with immorality. I venture to assert that, if you took a pin and jabbed it down anywhere in the pages of Debrett's Peerage, you would find it piercing the name of someone who was going about the place with a conscience as tender as a sunburned neck.

"If anything were needed to prove my assertion, the story of my nephew, Adrian Mulliner, the detective would do it."

"I didn't know you had a nephew who was a detective," said the Whiskey Sour.

"Oh, yes. He has retired now, but at one time, he was as keen an operator as anyone in the profession. After leaving Oxford and trying his hand at one or two uncongenial tasks, he had found his niche as a member of the firm of Widgery and Boon, Investigators, lower Albemarle Street."

"And it was during his second year with this old-established house that he met and loved Lady Millicent Shipton-Bellinger, younger daughter of the seventh Earl of Brangbolten."

It was the Adventure of the Missing Sealyham that brought the young couple together (said Mr. Mulliner). From the purely professional standpoint, my nephew has never ranked this among his greatest triumphs of ratiocination; but, considering what it lead to, he is, I think, justified in regarding it as the most important case of his career.

What happened was that he met the animal straying in the park, deduced from the name and address on its collar that it belonged to Lady Millicent Shipton-Bellinger, of Brook Street, and took it thither at the conclusion of his stroll and restored it.

"Child's-play" is the phrase with which, if you happen to allude to it, Adrian Mulliner will always airily dismiss this particular investigation. But Lady Millicent could not have displayed more admiration and enthusiasm had it been the most flawless masterpiece of detective work.

She fawned on my nephew. She invited him in to tea—consisting of buttered toast, anchovy sandwiches, and two kinds of cake—and at the conclusion of the meal they parted on terms which, even at that early stage in their
acquaintance, were something warmer than those of mere friendship.

Indeed, it is my belief that the girl fell in love with Adrian as instantaneously as he with her. On him, it was her radiant blonde beauty that exercised the spell. She, on her side, was fascinated, I fancy, not only by the regularity of his features, which, as is the case with all the Mulliners, was considerable, but also by the fact that he was dark and thin and wore an air of inscrutable melancholy.

This, as a matter of fact, was due to the troublesome attacks of dyspepsia from which he had suffered since boyhood; but to the girl it naturally seemed evidence of a great and romantic soul. Nobody, she felt, could look so grave and sad, had he not hidden depths in him.

One can see the thing from her point of view. All her life she had been accustomed to brainless juveniles who eked out their meagre eyesight with monocles and, as far as conversation was concerned, were a spent force after they had asked her if she had seen the Academy or did she think she would prefer a glass of lemonade. The effect on her of a dark, keen-eyed man like Adrian Mulliner, who spoke well and easily of footprints, psychology, and the Underworld, must have been stupendous.

At any rate, their love ripened rapidly. It could not have been two weeks after their first meeting when Adrian, as he was giving her lunch one day at the Senior Bloodstain, the detectives’ club in Rupert Street, proposed and was accepted. And for the next twenty-four hours, one is safe in saying there was in the whole of London, including the suburban districts, no happier private investigator than he.

Next day, however, when he again met Millicent for lunch, he was disturbed to perceive on her beautiful face an emotion which his trained eye immediately recognized as anguish.

“Oh, Adrian,” said the girl, brokenly, “the worst has happened. My father refuses to hear of our marrying. When I told him we were engaged, he said ‘Pooh!’ quite a number of times, and added that he had never heard such dashed nonsense in his life. You see, ever since my Uncle Joe’s trouble, father has had a horror of detectives.”

“I don’t think I’ve met your Uncle Joe.”

“You will have the opportunity next year. With the usual allowance for good conduct, he should be with us again about July. And there is another thing.”

“Not another?”

“Yes. Do you know Sir Jasper Addleton, O.B.E.?”

“The financier?”

“Father wants me to marry him. Isn’t it awful?”
"I have certainly heard more enjoyable bits of news," agreed Adrian. "This wants a good deal of careful thinking over."

The process of thinking over his unfortunate situation had the effect of rendering excessively acute the pangs of Adrian Mulliner's dyspepsia. During the past two weeks, the ecstasy of being with Millicent and deducing that she loved him had caused a complete cessation of the attacks; but now they began again, worse than ever.

At length, after a sleepless night, during which he experienced all the emotions of one who has carelessly swallowed a family of scorpions, he sought a specialist.

The specialist was one of these keen, modern minds who disdain the outworn formulae of the more conservative mass of the medical profession. He examined Adrian carefully, then sat back in his chair with the tips of his fingers touching.

"Smile!" he said.

"Eh?" said Adrian.

"Smile, Mr. Mulliner."

"Did you say smile?"

"That's it. Smile."

"But," Adrian pointed out, "I've just lost the only girl I ever loved."

"Well, that's fine," said the specialist, who was a bachelor. "Come on, now, if you please. Start smiling."

Adrian was a little bewildered.

"Listen," he said. "What is all this about smiling? We started, if I recollect, talking about my gastric juices. Now, in some mysterious way, we seem to have got on the subject of smiles. How do you mean, smile?"

"I never smile. I haven't smiled since the butler tripped over the spaniel and upset the melted butter on my Aunt Elizabeth, when I was a boy."

The specialist nodded. "Precisely. And that is why your digestive organs trouble you. Dyspepsia," he proceeded, "is now recognized by the progressive element of the profession as purely mental. We do not treat it with drugs and medicines. Happiness is the only cure. Be gay, Mr. Mulliner. Be cheerful. And, if you can't do that, at any rate smile. The mere exercise of the risible muscles is in itself beneficial. Go out now and make a point, whenever you have a spare moment, of smiling . . ."

"Like this?" said Adrian.

"Wider than that."

"How about this?"

"Better," said the specialist, "but still not quite so elastic as one could desire. Naturally, you need practice. We must expect the muscles to work rustily for a while at their unaccustomed task. No doubt things will brighten by and by."

He regarded Adrian thoughtfully. "Odd," he said. "A curious smile, yours, Mr. Mulliner. It
reminds me a little of the Mona Lisa’s. It has the same underlying note of the sardonic and the sinister. It virtually amounts to a leer. Somehow, it seems to convey the suggestion that you know all.

“Fortunately, my own life is an open book, for all to read, and so I was not put out. But I think it would be better if you endeavored not to smile while invalids or nervous persons are present. Good morning, Mr. Mulliner. That will be five guineas, precisely.”

On Adrian’s face, as he went off that afternoon to perform the duties assigned to him by his firm, there was no smile of any description. He shrank from the ordeal before him. He had been told off to guard the wedding-presents at a reception in Grosvenor Square, and naturally anything to do with weddings was like a sword through his heart. His face, as he patrolled the room where the gifts were laid out, was drawn and forbidding.

Hitherto, at these functions, it had always been his pride that nobody could tell that he was a detective. Today, a child could have recognized his trade. He looked like Sherlock Holmes.

To the gay throng that surged about him he paid little attention. Usually tense and alert on occasions like this, he now found his mind wandering. He mused sadly on Millicent. And suddenly—the result, no doubt, of these gloomy meditations, though a glass of wedding champagne may have contributed its mite—there shot through him, starting at about the third button on his neat waistcoat, a pang of dyspepsia so keen that he felt the pressing necessity of doing something about it immediately.

With a violent effort he contorted his features into a smile. And, as he did so, a stout, bluff man of middle age, with red face who had been hovering near one of the tables, turned and saw him.

“Egad!” he muttered, paling.

Sir Sutton-Hartley Wesping, Bart—for the red-faced man was he—had had a pretty good afternoon. Like all Baronets who attended Society wedding receptions, he had been going around the various tables since his arrival, pocketing here a fish-slicer, there a jeweled egg-boiler, until now he had taken on all the cargo his tonnage would warrant and was thinking of strolling off to the pawnbroker’s in the Euston Road with whom he did most of his business. At the sight of Adrian’s smile, he froze where he stood, appalled.

We have seen what the specialist thought of Adrian’s smile. Even to him, a man of clear and limpid conscience, it had seemed sardonic and sinister. We can picture, then, the effect it must have had on Sir Sutton Hartley-Wesping.

At all costs, he felt, he must
conciliate this leering man. Swiftly removing from his pockets a diamond necklace, five fish-slicers ten cigarette-lighters and a couple of egg-boilers, he placed them on the table and came over to Adrian with a nervous laugh.

"How are you, my dear fellow?" he said.

Adrian said that he was quite well. And, indeed he was. The specialist's recipe had worked like magic. He was mildly surprised at finding himself so cordially addressed by a man whom he did not remember ever having seen before, but he attributed this to the magnetic charm of his personality.

"That's fine," said the Baronet, heartily. "Er-by the way—I fancied I saw you smile just now."

"Yes," said Adrian. "I did smile. You see—"

"Of course I see. Of course, my dear fellow. You detected the joke I was playing on our good hostess, and you were amused because you understood that there is no animus, no arriere pensee, behind these little practical pleasureries. Nothing but good, clean fun, at which nobody would have laughed more heartily than herself. And now, what are you doing this week-end, my dear old chap? Would you care to run down to my place in Sussex?"

"Very kind of you," began Adrian, doubtfully. He was not quite sure that he was in the mood for strange week-ends.

"Here is my card, then. I shall expect you on Friday. Quite a small party. Lord Brangbolton, Sir Jasper Addleton, and a few more. Just loafing about, you know, and a spot of bridge at night. Splendid. Capital. See you, then, on Friday."

And carelessly dropping another egg-boiler on the table as he passed, Sir Sutton disappeared.

Any doubts which Adrian might have entertained as to accepting the Baronet's invitation had vanished as he heard the names of his fellow-guests. It always interests a fiance to meet his fiancee's father and his fiancee's prospective fiance. For the first time, since Millicent had told him the bad news, Adrian became almost cheerful.

If, he felt, this Baronet had taken such a tremendous fancy to him at first sight, why might it not happen that Lord Brangbolton would be equally drawn to him —to the extent, in fact, of overlooking his profession and welcoming him as a son-in-law?

He packed, on the Friday, with what was to all intents and purposes a light heart.

A fortunate chance at the very outset of his expedition increased Adrian's optimism. It made him feel that Fate was fighting on his side. As he walked down the platform of Victoria Station, looking for an empty compartment in the train which was to take him to his destination, he perceived a
tall, aristocratic old gentleman being assisted into a first-class carriage by a man of butlerine aspect.

And in the latter he recognized the servitor who had admitted him to 18A, Upper Brook Street, when he visited the house after solving the riddle of the missing Sealyham. Obviously, then, the white-haired, dignified passenger, could be none other than Lord Brangbolton. And Adrian felt that, if on a long train-journey he failed to ingratiate himself with the old buster, he had vastly mistaken his amiability and winning fascination of manner.

He leaped on, accordingly, as the train began to move, and the Earl, glancing up from his paper, jerked a thumb at the door.

"Get out, blast you," he said.

"Full up."

As the compartment was empty, but for themselves, Adrian made no move to comply with the request. Indeed to alight now, to such an extent had the train gathered speed, would have been impossible. Instead, he spoke cordially.

"Lord Brangbolton, I believe?"

"Go to Hell," said his lordship.

"I fancy we are to be fellow-guests at Wesping Parva this weekend."

"What of it?"

"I just mentioned it."

"Oh?" said Lord Brangbolton.

"Well, since you're here, how about a little flutter?"

As is customary with men in his position Millicent's father always traveled with a pack of cards. Being gifted by nature with considerable manual dexterity, he usually managed to do well on race-trains.

"Ever played Persian Monarchs?" he asked, shuffling.

"I think not," said Adrian.

"Quite simple," said Lord Brangbolton. "You just bet a quid, or whatever it may be, that you can cut a higher card than the other fellow."

Adrian said it sounded just like Blind Hooky.

"It is like Blind Hooky," said Lord Brangbolton. "Very like Blind Hooky. In fact, if you can play Blind Hooky, you can play Persian Monarchs."

By the time they alighted at Wesping Parva, Adrian was twenty pounds on the wrong side of the ledger. The fact, however, did not prey upon his mind. On the contrary, he was well satisfied with the progress of events. Elated with his winnings, the old Earl had become positively cordial, and Adrian resolved to press his advantage home at the earliest opportunity.

Arrived at Wesping Hall, accordingly, he did not delay. Shortly after the sounding of the dressing-gong, he made his way to Lord Brangbolton's room and found his lordship in his bath.

"Might I have a word with you, Lord Brangbolton?" he said.
"You can do more than that," replied the other, with marked amiability. "You can help me find the soap."

"Have you lost the soap?"
"Yes. Had it a minute ago, and now it's gone."

Adrian considered. "It looks like an inside job," he said, thoughtfully. "Tell me, exactly what occurred, in your own words. And tell me everything, please, for one never knows when the smallest detail may not be important."

Lord Brangbolton reflected. "Well, it was like this," he said, "I was here, in the bath, as it might be, and the soap was here—between my hands, as it were. Next moment, it was gone."

"It could scarcely be the work of a gang," said Adrian, meditatively. "You would have noticed a gang. Are you sure you have omitted nothing?"

"Well, I was singing, of course."

A tense look came into Adrian's face. "Singing what?"

"Sonny Boy."

"As I suspected," said Adrian, with satisfaction. "I wonder if you are aware, Lord Brangbolton, that, in the singing of that particular song, the muscles unconsciously contract as you come to the final 'boy'? Thus: 'I still have you, Sonny—BOY!' You observe? It would be impossible for anyone, rendering the number with the proper gusto, not to force his hands together at this point, assuming that they were in anything like close juxtaposition.

"And if there were any slippery object between them, such as a piece of soap, it would shoot sharply upwards and fall..." He scanned the room keenly. "... outside the bath on the mat. As, indeed," he concluded, picking up the missing object and restoring it to its proprietor, "it did."

Lord Brangbolton gaped. "Well, dash my buttons, if that isn't the smartest bit of work I've seen in a month of Sundays! You ought to be a detective!"

Adrian took his cue. "I am a detective," he said. "My name is Mulliner."

"Mulliner!" Lord Brangbolton's geniality had vanished with ominous abruptness. "Did you say Mulliner?"

"I did."

"Then you're the feller..."

"... who loves your daughter Millicent, Lord Brangbolton. And I am hoping that I may receive your consent to the match."

A hideous scowl darkened the Earl's brow. His fingers, which were grasping the loafah, tightened convulsively.

"Oh?" he said. "You are, are you? You imagine, do you, that I propose to welcome a blighted footprint-and-cigar-ash inspector into my family? Rather than see my daughter married to a dashed detective, I would..."
"What is your objection to detectives?"

"Never mind what's my objection to detectives. Marry my daughter, indeed! I like your infernal cheek! Why, you couldn't keep her in gloves."

"I admit that my services are not so well paid as I could wish, but the firm hint at a rise next Christmas . . . ."

"Tchah!" said Lord Brangbolton. "Pshaw! If you are interested in my daughter's matrimonial arrangements, she is going, as soon as he gets through with this Bramah-Yamah Gold Mines Flotation of his, to marry my old friend, Jasper Addleton. As for you, Mr. Mulliner, I have only two words to say to you. One is pop, the other is off. And do it now."

Adrian sighed. It was plainly useless to argue with the haughty old man in his present mood.

"So be it, Lord Brangbolton," he said.

And, affecting not to notice the nail-brush which struck him smartly on the back of the head, he left the room.

The food and drink provided for his guests by Sir Sutton Hartley-Wesping at the dinner which began some half-hour later were all that the veriest gourmet could have desired; but Adrian gulped them down, scarcely tasting them. His whole attention was riveted on Sir Jasper Addleton, who sat immediately opposite him.

And the more he examined Sir Jasper, the more revolting seemed the idea of his marrying the girl he loved.

Of course, an ardent young fellow, inspecting a man who is going to marry the girl he loves, is always a stern critic. Adrian would, no doubt, have looked askance at a John Barrymore or a Ronald Colman. But, in the case of Sir Jasper, it must be admitted that he had good grounds for his disapproval.

In the first place, there was enough of the financier to make two financiers. It was as if Nature, planning a financier, had said to itself: "We will do this thing well; we will not skimp," with the result that, becoming too enthusiastic, had overdone it.

And then, in addition to being fat, he was also bald and goggle-eyed. And, if you overlooked his baldness and the goggle protuberance of his eyes, you could not get away from the fact that he was well advanced in years. Such a man, felt Adrian, would have been better employed in pricing burial-lots in Kensal Green Cemetery than in forcing his unwelcome attentions on a sweet young girl like Millicent; and as soon as the meal was concluded he approached him with cold abhorrence.

"A word with you," he said, and led him out on the terrace.

The O.B.E., as he followed him into the cool night air, seemed
surprised and a little uneasy. He had noticed Adrian scrutinizing him closely across the dinner table, and if there is one thing a financier who has just put out a prospectus of a gold mine dislikes, it is to be scrutinized closely.

“What do you want?” he asked, nervously.

Adrian gave him a cold glance. “Do you ever look in a mirror, Sir Jasper?” he asked, curtly.

“Frequently,” replied the financier, puzzled.

“Do you weigh yourself?”

“Often.”

“Do you ever listen while your tailor is toiling round you with the tape-measure and calling out the score to his assistant?”

“I do.”

“Then,” said Adrian, “and I speak in the kindest spirit of disinterested friendship, you must have realized that you are an overfed old bohunkus. And how you ever got the idea that you were a fit mate for Lady Millicent Shipton-Bellinger frankly beats me. Surely it must have occurred to you what a priceless ass you will look, walking up the aisle with that young and lovely girl at your side? People will mistake you for an elderly uncle taking his niece to the Zoo.”

The O.B.E. bridled. “Ho!” he said.

“It is no use saying ‘Ho!’” said Adrian. “You can’t get out of it with any ‘Ho’s.’ When all the talk and argument have died away, the fact remains that, millionaire though you be, you are a nasty-looking, fat, senile millionaire. If I were you I should give the whole thing a miss. What do you want to get married for, anyway? You are much happier as you are.

“Besides, think of the risks of a financier’s life. Nice it would be for that sweet girl suddenly to get a wire from you telling her not to expect you home as you had just started a seven-year stretch at Dartmoor!”

An angry retort had been trembling on Sir Jasper’s lips during the early portion of this speech, but at these concluding words it died unspoken. He blanched visibly, and stared at the speaker with undiscguised apprehension.

“What do you mean?” he faltered.

“Never mind,” said Adrian.

He had spoken, of course, purely at a venture, basing his remarks on the fact that nearly all O.B.E.’s who dabble in High Finance go to prison sooner or later. Of Sir Jasper’s actual affairs he knew nothing.

“Hey, listen!” said the financier.

But Adrian did not hear him. I have mentioned that during dinner, preoccupied with his thoughts, he had bolted his food. Nature now took its toll. An acute spasm suddenly ran through him, and with a brief “Ouch!” of pain he doubled up and began to walk round in circles.
Sir Jasper clicked his tongue impatiently. "This is no time for doing your Swedish exercises," he said, sharply. "Tell me what you meant by that stuff you were talking about prison."

Adrian had straightened himself. In the light of the moon which flooded the terrace with its silver beams, his clean-cut face was plainly visible. And with a shiver of apprehension, Sir Jasper saw that it wore a sardonic, sinister smile—a smile which, it struck him, was virtually tantamount to a leer.

I have spoken of the dislike financiers have for being scrutinized closely. Still more vehemently do they object to being leered at. Sir Jasper reeled, and was about to press his question when Adrian still smiling, tottered off into the shadows and was lost to sight.

The financier hurried in to the smoking-room, where, he knew, there would be the materials for a stiff drink. A stiff drink was what he felt an imperious need of at the moment. He tried to tell himself that that smile could not really have had the inner meaning which he had read into it. But he was still quivering nervously as he entered the smoking-room.

As he opened the door, the sound of an angry voice smote his ears. He recognized it as Lord Brangbolton's.

"I call it dashed low," his lordship was saying in his high-pitched tenor.

Sir Jasper gazed in bewilderment. His host, Sir Sutton Hartley-Wesping, was standing backed against the wall, and Lord Brangbolton, tapping him on the shirtfront with a pistonlike forefinger, was plainly in the process of giving him a thorough ticking off.

"What's the matter?" asked the financier.

"I'll tell you what's the matter," cried Lord Brangbolton. "This hound here has got down a detective to watch his guests. A dashed fellow named Mulliner. So much," he said bitterly, "for our boasted English hospitality. Egad!" he went on, still tapping the Baronet round and about the diamond solitaire, "I call it thoroughly low.

"If I have a few of my Society chums down to my little place for a visit, naturally I tell the butler to count the spoons every night, but I'd never dream of going so far as to employ beastly detectives."

"But, listen," pleaded the Baronet. "I keep telling you. I had to invite the fellow. I thought that if he had eaten my bread and salt, he would not expose me."

"How do you mean, expose you?"

Sir Sutton coughed. "Oh, it was nothing. A mere trifle. Still, the fellow undoubtedly could have made things unpleasant for me, if
he had wished. So, when I looked up and saw him smiling at me in that frightful sardonic, knowing way—"

Sir Jasper Addleton uttered a sharp cry. "Smiling!" He gulped. "Did you say smiling!"

"Smiling," said the Baronet, "is right. It was one of those smiles that seem to go right through you and light up all your inner being as if with a searchlight."

Sir Jasper gulped again. "Is this fellow—this smiler fellow—is he a tall, dark, thin chap?"

"That’s right. He sat opposite you at dinner."

"And he's a detective?"

"He is," said Lord Brangbolton. "As shrewd and smart a detective," he added, grudgingly, "as I ever met in my life. The way he found that soap. . . . Feller struck me as having some sort of a sixth sense, if you know what I mean, dash and curse him. I hate detectives," he said with a shiver. "They give me the creeps. This one wants to marry my daughter Millicent, of all the dashed nerve!"

"See you later," said Sir Jasper. And with a single bound he was out of the room and on his way to the terrace. There was, he felt, no time to waste. His florid face, as he galloped along, was twisted and ashen. With one hand he drew from his inside pocket a cheque-book, with the other, from his trouser-pocket, a fountain-pen.

Adrian, when the financier found him, was feeling a good deal better. He blessed the day when he had sought the specialist’s advice. There was no doubt about it, he felt the man knew his business. Smiling might make the cheek-muscles ache, but it undoubtedly did the trick as regarded the pangs of dyspepsia.

For a brief while before Sir Jasper burst on to the terrace, waving fountain-pen and cheque-book, Adrian had been giving his face a rest. But now, the pain in his cheeks having abated, he deemed it prudent to resume the treatment. And so it came about that the financier, hurrying towards him, was met with a smile so meaning, so suggestive, that he stopped in his tracks and for a moment could not speak.

"Oh, there you are!" he said, recovering at length. "Might I have a word with you in private, Mr. Mulliner?"

Adrian nodded, beaming. The financier took him by the coat sleeve and led him across the terrace. He was breathing a little stertorously.

"I've been thinking things over," he said, "and I've come to the conclusion that you were right."

"Right?" said Adrian.

"About me marrying. It wouldn't do."

"No?"

"Positively not. Absurd. I can
see it now. I'm too old for the girl."

"Yes."

"Too bald."

"Exactly."

"And too fat."

"Much too fat," agreed Adrian. This sudden change of heart puzzled him, but none the less the other's words were as music to his ears. Every syllable the O.B.E. had spoken had caused his heart to leap within him like a young lamb in Springtime, and his mouth curved in a smile.

Sir Jasper, seeing it, shied like a frightened horse. He patted Adrian's arm feverishly. "So I have decided," he said, "to take your advice and—if I recall your expression—give the thing a miss."

"You couldn't do better," said Adrian, heartily.

"Now, if I were to remain in England in these circumstances," proceeded Sir Jasper, "there might be unpleasantness. So I propose to go quietly away to some remote spot—say, South America. Don't you think I am right?" he asked giving the cheque-book a twitch.

"Quite right," said Adrian.

"You won't mention this little plan of mine to anyone? You will keep it as just a secret between ourselves? If, for instance, any of your cronies at Scotland Yard should express curiosity as to my whereabouts, you will plead ignorance?"

"Certainly."

"Capital!" said Sir Jasper, relieved. "And there is one other thing. I gather from Brangbolton that you are anxious to marry Lady Millicent yourself. And, as by the time of the wedding I shall doubtless be in—well, Callao is a spot that suggests itself off-hand, I would like to give you my little wedding-present now."

He scribbled hastily in his cheque-book, tore out a page and handed it to Adrian.

"Remember!" he said. "Not a word to anyone!"

"Quite," said Adrian.

He watched the financier disappear in the direction of the garage, regretting that he could have misjudged a man who so evidently had much good in him. Presently the sound of a motorcar's engine announced that the other obstacle, at least, between himself and his happiness had been removed, and Adrian strolled indoors to see what the rest of the party were doing.

It was a quiet, peaceful scene that met his eyes as he wandered into the library. Over-ruling the request of some of the members of the company for a rubber of bridge, Lord Brangbolton had gathered them together at a small table and was initiating them into his favourite game of Persian Monarchs.

"It's perfectly simple, dash it," he was saying. "You just take the pack and cut. You bet—let us say, ten pounds, that you will cut
a higher card than the feller you're cutting against. And, if you do, you win, dash it. And, if you don't, the other dashed feller wins. Quite clear, what?"

Somebody said that it sounded just like Blind Hookey.

"It is like Blind Hookey," said Lord Brangbolton. "Very like Blind Hookey. In fact, if you can play Blind Hookey, you can play Persian Monarchs."

They settled down to their game, and Adrian wandered about the room, endeavoring to still the riot of emotion, which his recent interview with Sir Jasper Addleton had aroused in his bosom. All that remained for him to do now, he reflected, was by some means or other to remove the existing prejudice against him from Lord Brangbolton's mind.

It would not be easy, of course. To begin with, there was the matter of his straitened means.

He suddenly remembered that he had not yet looked at the cheque which the financier had handed him. He pulled it out.

And, having glanced at it, Adrian Mulliner swayed like a poplar in a storm.

Just what he had expected, he could not have said. A fiver, possibly. At the most, a tenner. Just a trifling gift, he had imagined, with which to buy himself a cigarette-lighter, a fish-slicer, or an egg-boiler.

The cheque was for a hundred thousand.

So great was the shock that, as Adrian caught sight of himself in the mirror opposite to which he was standing, he scarcely recognized the face in the glass. He seemed to be seeing it through a mist. Then the mist cleared, and he saw not only his own face clearly but also that of Lord Brangbolton, who was in the act of cutting against his left-hand neighbor, Lord Knubble of Knopp.

And, as he thought of the effect this sudden accession of wealth must surely have on the father of the girl he loved, there came into Adrian's face a sudden, swift smile.

And simultaneously from behind him he heard a gasping exclamation; and, looking in the mirror, he met Lord Brangbolton's eyes. Always a little prominent, they were now almost prawnlike in their convexity.

Lord Knubble of Knopp had produced a bank-note from his pocket and was pushing it along the table.

"Another ace!" he exclaimed. "Well, I'm dashed!"

Lord Brangbolton had risen from his chair. "Excuse me," he said in a strange, croaking voice. "I just want to have a little chat with my friend, my dear old friend Mulliner here. Might I have a word in private with you, Mr. Mulliner?"

There was silence between the two men until they had reached a
corner of the terrace out of ear-shot of the library window. Then Lord Brangbolton cleared his throat. "Mulliner," he began. "Or, rather—what is your Christian name?"

"Adrian."

"Adrain, my dear fellow," said Lord Brangbolton, "my memory is not what it should be, but I seem to have a distinct recollection that, when I was in my bath before dinner, you said something about wanting to marry my daughter Millicent."

"I did," replied Adrian, "and, if your objections to me as a suitor were mainly financial, let me assure you that, since we last spoke, I have become a wealthy man."

"I never had any objections to you, Adrian, financial or otherwise," said Lord Brangbolton, pattering his arm affectionately. "I have always felt that the man my daughter married ought to be a fine, warm-hearted young fellow like you. For you, Adrian," he proceeded, "are essentially warm-hearted. You would never dream of distressing a father-in-law by mentioning any—any little—well, in short, I saw your smile in there that you had noticed that I was introducing into that game of Blind Hookey—or rather, Persian Monarchs, certain little—shall I say variations, designed to give it additional interest and excitement, and I feel sure that you would scorn to embarrass a father-in-law by foolish misunderstandings.

"Well, to cut a long story short, my boy, take Millicent and with her a father's blessing." He extended his hand.

Adrian clasped it warmly. "I am the happiest man in the world," he said, smiling.

Lord Brangbolton winced. "Do you mind not doing that?" he said.

Little remains to be told. Adrian and Millicent were married three months later at a fashionable West-End church. All Society was there. The services were conducted by the Very Reverend the Dean of Margate.

It was in the vestry afterwards, as Adrian looked at Millicent and seemed to realize for the first time that all his troubles were over, and that this lovely girl was indeed his, for better or worse, that a full sense of his happiness swept over the young man.

All through the ceremony he had been grave, as befitted a man at the most serious point of his career. But now, fizzing as if with some spiritual yeast, he clasped her in his arms, and over her shoulder his face broke into a quick smile.

He found himself looking into the eyes of the Dean of Margate. A moment later, he felt a tap on his arm.

"Might I have a word with you in private, Mr. Mulliner?" said the Dean in a low voice.
Robert Sumner, M.D., sighed with relief when the orchestra's effort to imitate Western swing came to a limping end. And he had seen nothing in the dancer's act worthy of the applause from the other tables. He ignored the smirk of the heavy girl who had partially disrobed. He slumped wearily in his chair and turned his heavy lidded eyes to his companion.

"She's not here either, Robert," the big man said, drumming fat fingers on the sticky table-top. "Look, boy, there's no need of your knocking yourself out the way you've been doing the last couple of days. The United States Army can turn this town of Teheran inside out, have every Persian—"

"No, Colonel Boone," Sumner spoke softly, partly from habit and partly from the exhaustion that engulfed him. "It isn't the army's affair. She wasn't on duty. She wouldn't be on duty even right now."

The young doctor closed his eyes, shutting out the sordid de-

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This new story came to us all the way from Teheran, Iran. The author informs us that he has four children, is married to the world's best cook, and likes the people he writes about. That liking is well confirmed in the present yarn, with adroit characterization acting as a catalyst to bring a story of suspense and heart-warming courage to a rousing climax.
tails of his surroundings, and the picture of Peggy rose in his tired mind. Lieutenant Peggy Norton, R.N., with soft, fresh-scrubbed cheeks and a tiny freckled nose. A girl willing to leave an officer’s pay to become the wife of a missionary.

“Look, boy,” Colonel Boone said, and Robert realized that he had been on the very verge of some much-needed sleep. “You’d better get some rest or you’ll be needing a doctor yourself.”

“All this doctor needs is a certain nurse.” Robert grinned, but it didn’t come off, because even he was in no mood for jokes. He gave a hitch to his thin shoulders and added more seriously, “It’s all my fault that she’s gone. There’s nothing so important at that South Teheran clinic of mine that I couldn’t have left it to go with her out to the airport. I’ll never forgive myself for letting her go alone—wherever she went.”

“Well, she’s not here, that’s certain,” Colonel Boone said as he planted his thick hands on the wobbly table and pushed himself to his feet. “Frankly, I don’t think either of us expects to find a girl like Peggy Norton in a place like this anyway.”

“Then where is she?” Robert said. His voice, like his tired body, was thin now, and there was a high-pitched note of desperation in it. “Where else is there to look?”

They pulled their coats on despite the assisting efforts of an employee in a dirty white jacket. Outside, the night wind was raw. Robert shivered and hurried to keep pace with the big colonel as they walked to the place where an Iranian chauffeur waited in the officer’s car.

“Drop you off somewhere?” Boone offered.

“Thanks,” Robert said hollowly. “I’ll walk back to the apartment. I can see better walking than when I’m whizzing along in a car.”

“Just as you say, boy, but I don’t think you’re any more apt to see her walking along the streets than you would be in the car. Anyway, the thing for you to do is get home and get some rest.”

The soldier was holding the door with martyr-like patience for the officer. Colonel Frank Boone heaved himself inside, the door slammed, and the driver hurried to his own place behind the wheel.

“Look, Robert,” Boone said, rolling down a window, “the American army packs a lot of weight. I can—”

“It’s all my fault,” Robert said stubbornly, struggling to keep his voice from reaching a nervous treble.

“You blame yourself too much,” the colonel said gently. “Frankly, a lot of things are your fault, but not this.”

“What’s my fault?” Robert
said sharply. Perhaps he was slow and exasperatingly bumbling at times, but it was none of the colonel’s business, no matter how close their friendship. He tried to keep his voice low and even, but it rose sharply in spite of his efforts. His bony fingers gripped the door of the car.

“Look, Robert,” Boone said, “you don’t have half the things you need for that charity clinic of yours down there in the slums. Why? Because you insist on getting your stuff from the States like any ordinary peasant would, and the amount of customs duty you pay is something terrific. I’ve told you time and again that there are certain things that I can get in for you duty-free. I’ve also offered to let you use our APO number here. But no, you have to use the regular Persian mail, and there’s no advantage to that. Why, if you’d let me, I could—”

“No,” Robert said, relaxing his grip, “that wouldn’t be right. You say it’s legal, but it wouldn’t be ethical.”

“Why not?” Colonel Boone asked. “Aren’t you helping the poor of this country?” He paused, neither expecting nor receiving an answer. “The way you go at it, you’re paying the Persian government—and paying dearly, too—for the privilege of helping people that should be the responsibility of that government.”

“Maybe so.” Robert jammed his thin hands into his pockets, hunched his narrow shoulders against the piercing cold. “Suppose I do depend on you to get supplies into the country for me. You’ll be here only one more year at the most. What do I do then?”

“Do like you’re doing now if you want to,” Boone said. “Until then, you can take advantage of a good thing.”

“We’ve been over all this before,” Robert said wearily. “It doesn’t get us anywhere—and it doesn’t find Peggy.”

The image of her was in his mind again, and not only the image, but the laughing music of her, and all the fragile, delicate emerald charm of her that defied definition. He became aware of the Colonel’s impatience to be off.

“Thanks for everything,” he said hurriedly, taking his hand off the car door. “I’ll be moving along. Got to write some letters tonight. Part of my job, you know, writing letters to the churches at home that help support my work out here.”

“Look, Sumner,” Boone said, “you can do as you please about Lieutenant Norton; I’ll string along with you, help you all I can and we’ll do it your way. As you say, she’s on her own now—we could be wrong even in assuming that she’s missing at present. But she’s still in the army, and if she doesn’t report for duty the minute she’s due, we’re going to do it our way—and I’m not going to let
anything or anybody, Persian or American, stop me."

As if to emphasize his words, the motor came to life and the car moved away. Robert stood in the chill night air, watching the vapor spiral out of the exhaust until both sound and sight of the car were swallowed in the lonely darkness.

The empty streets were as desolate as anything in a big city could be. Robert began to walk in the direction of his distant apartment, his coat flapping about his skinny legs. On one side of him ran the jube, the open ditch between sidewalk and street that was the city’s principal source of water. On the other side of him were the store-fronts like so many garage doors with the huge corrugated iron shutters padlocked down, protecting the plate glass windows and also hiding them from the eyes of shoppers.

As he came nearer the business district he saw a few people. He peered intently at the face of each woman he passed, although he scarcely expected to find the shamrock-green eyes of Peggy looking back at him from a black, all-concealing prayer veil. The women, for the most part pointedly refused to meet his gaze, and Robert felt a sense of humiliation at what he knew they must be thinking of him.

Peggy had planned to go to Meshed for a few day’s rest. Robert had been too busy with his clinic to go to the airport with her, and now, what was the clinic, what was anything without the gay smile of Peggy Norton?

An army captain and one of the missionary doctors had gone to the Meshed airport to meet her, but their telegrams to Robert and the colonel said that she had not arrived. After some investigation it became apparent that she had never arrived at the Teheran airport on the morning of her scheduled flight. Where she had gone no one knew, although Robert himself had become a one-man searching party since the arrival of the first telegram.

The building which housed his apartment loomed into view and prevented him for a time from racking his tired brain for answer. A happy, beautiful colleen, engaged to be married—even to a slow, fumbling missionary doctor—didn’t just disappear.

He climbed the steps in the narrow hallway, put his key in the lock. Inside, he switched on the light and locked the door again.

"Hello. Dr. Robert Sumner. Dr. Robert Wheeler Sumner."

The voice had a gravelly quality to it. There was a man sitting in Robert’s favorite chair, a powerful man with a thick neck and close-set eyes.

Robert’s throat was dry. The tiredness left him, everything left him, and he found himself engulfed in fear. He kept his eyes on the man, and, feeling for a
chair, eased himself carefully into it, his long fingers gripping the arms.

“You think a lot of that girl, don’t you?”

For a wild moment all fear left the doctor. Here was news of Peggy; why should he be afraid of the man who brought it?

“Where is she?” he finally managed to ask.

“I didn’t say,” the gravelly voice replied, and the close-set eyes bored into Robert and the terror returned.

“Who are you?” Robert asked, his voice shaky.

“Call me Len.”

The two men sat staring at each other. Robert knew that it was useless to ask questions. The other man had no intention of disclosing information he did not want to give, and there was no way in which Robert could compel him to do so.

“How’s your clinic? Doing lots of work there?”

“I haven’t been there much lately,” Robert answered tonelessly. “I suppose you know what I’ve been doing.”

“It would be nice to have a nurse there to help you, wouldn’t it, Dr. Sumner?”

Robert said nothing. His fear was gradually subsiding, and a cold hatred of the man sitting opposite him was replacing it.

“You use quite a bit of medicine in your clinic, don’t you, Dr. Sumner? Drugs, narcotics of all kinds—”

“Why do you ask me questions?” Robert flashed. “You know all about me, who I am, what I do. Where is Peggy? What do I have to do, or give you, to get her back?”

The face above the thick neck imparted no more sign of emotion than did the gravelly voice. “There’s quite a valuable supply of narcotics down at railway customs for you. Just arrived from America. You’ll get your notice from the customs authorities tomorrow. It will be ready for you to pick up day after tomorrow at half an hour before noon. We can go together to get it.”

“I won’t do it,” Robert exclaimed. “Those things are hard to get, and my clinic needs—”

“They bring a good price on the market, too,” the hard voice interrupted.

“That stuff is donated by people at home to be used for charity, not to be sold on the black market!” Robert’s voice went shrill.

“Then you don’t want the nurse to help you in your clinic?”

Robert opened his mouth to speak, but for a moment no words came. He made an effort to relax, and at length he found his voice.

“How do I know you know where she is? How do I know you’ll release her even if I let you sell the narcotics in the black market?”
"You don't know, Dr. Sumner. But you're in no position to bargain. I suggest we go together to customs when the time comes, and you take a chance on seeing the girl again. In fact, there's nothing else you can do."

Stunned, Robert continued to stare at the man. True, the narcotics would bring a nice price on the black market, but not enough to compensate for a human life. Yet what was the life of an American to this man who called himself Len? Robert knew from his accent that he was not an Iranian...

"All right," the doctor echoed. "There's nothing else I can do."

"Don't worry," the man said, getting to his feet. "Nothing is going to go wrong, from my angle."

He moved slowly to the door, unlocked it cautiously and disappeared, leaving Robert in the silence of the empty room.

Robert walked to a small, cluttered desk in one corner, sat down and began to write letters. Suddenly his weariness let up. He wrote rapidly and clearly...

The next day at the clinic he found it extremely difficult to keep his mind on his work. He had stayed up late writing the letters. The image of Peggy was constantly before him, and, all too often, the picture of the thick neck and close-set eyes of the man who called himself Len.

Through it all his heart went out in pity to the patients who filed before him. Each one wanted special attention, something extra that wasn't given to the other patients, and Robert knew he couldn't give it to them. He had become callous to a degree; to listen to the complete woes of one would mean that possibly ten others would go without treatment of any kind. As it was, he never had time to see all the people who came to see him in a given day. He was not as thorough with any of them as he would like to have been.

"You're doing all right, doctor."

The sound of English, after hearing nothing but Persian throughout the morning, startled him. He turned and faced the man called Len. He had patiently waited in line, posing as a patient.

"After you left your house this morning," Len informed the doctor, "you went to see your friend the colonel, which is all right as long as you don't tell him anything—and you didn't. Then you went to the post office to mail some letters. After that you bought some shoelaces from a street peddler, took the number twenty-six bus and came here."

"I don't deny any of that," Robert said.

"Of course you don't, Dr. Sumner. You're doing all right. We'll go together to customs tomorrow, you will sign the papers, the clerk will hand the package to me, and everything will be perfectly legal."
Nothing is going to go wrong—from my angle. Don't forget that, doctor. And don't try anything because I've proved to you that I know every move you make."

Shaken, Robert turned to the next patient in line. He had allowed the man called Len to take far too much of his time. His stethoscope shook in his slender hands, but he tried to go on with his work, tried to shove the picture of the thick neck and the close-set eyes from his mind, tried to shut out the ghostly sound of the gravelly voice so that he could hear the complaints of the patients.

On the way back to his apartment habit asserted itself in a way for which he was in a measure thankful. He knew now that there was absolutely no probability of finding Peggy in any of the places where he had formerly looked. Yet he found himself staring at each woman he passed on the street, peering into doorways and windows as he walked past, finding excuses to enter shops so that he could look around to see if she were possibly among the people there. It was what the man, Len, wanted him to do. If Len or his henchmen were watching, they would see exactly what they wanted to see.

Although desperately in need of sleep, Robert found it impossible to rest that night. It was incredible that anyone would go to such trouble for the sake of a few narcotics. The one shipment, valuable as it was in the black market, was not enough to pay for the serious risks that were being taken. The little suspicions that had been in the doctor's mind began to assert themselves as petrified facts.

It was foolish for Robert to assume that as soon as he acquiesced to the narcotics deal Peggy would be released, safe and sound. No, the narcotics deal would be only a beginning; there would be other jobs, more jobs, bigger jobs, and Dr. Robert Sumner himself would become more and more involved in each one of them, always in the hope of freeing his Peggy—a hope which would never be accomplished by acquiescing to the man called Len. For the safety of Peggy's person and his own reputation he had to make a break, the sooner the better, with Len.

Yet he knew of nothing he could do now that he had not already done.

The next morning he was still haggard and restless. Ordinarily he would have gone to the clinic, but he could not bring himself to leave his apartment, to subject himself to the eyes of the agents of the man called Len. For he knew one of them would follow his every step.

One conviction that had been gathering momentum all night and throughout the morning became firmly lodged in his mind by
eleven o’clock. He did not know how he would accomplish it but he knew that, at all costs, he must contact Colonel Boone before he went to the customs office.

He squared his thin shoulders resolutely and left the apartment.

A taxi was parked in front of his house, its driver looking at him expectantly. Such a practice was not uncommon, but he knew this was not a casual cab driver.

A man sat in the back of the taxi, a man Robert had not seen at first. He looked at the man closely, then froze in his tracks. It was Len.

“We’ve been waiting for you,” said the gravelly voice. The back door of the taxi swung open.

For a wild moment Robert considered taking to his heels. He was much lighter than Len, had no doubt that he could outrun the other man if a simple footrace were the only consideration.

Then suddenly he saw that Len was not alone in the back of the taxi. Someone was sitting beside him, completely enveloped from head to foot in a black chadar, the prayer veil of Islamic women.

He could see only the eyes as they peered from the folds of the black chadar. They were wide, frightened eyes, and they were shamrock green. His heart seemed to come to a complete halt.

As if in a dream, he stepped into the taxi. He was incapable of running now, to find the colonel or for any other purpose. The voice of Len rasped in his ears, but he scarcely heard it.

“Taxis are nice things to have, Dr. Sumner. Sometimes people need a taxi when they go to the airport to catch a plane. They might think it’s just chance that they happen to get one taxi instead of another, but it isn’t. You have to see to it that nothing goes wrong, of course . . .”

Robert sat mute. There was nothing for him to say. He was not surprised by Peggy’s silence. Beneath the carefully pinned chadar he knew that she was bound and gagged, and he hated himself for his inability to overcome Len and the driver of the taxi with a flash of courage and brawn. He was ashamed for Peggy, herself helpless, to see him in such a condition. He sat in silence as the taxi bounced out of the city limits toward railway customs to the south of the town.

He took small comfort in the fact that it was best to keep quiet. If anything went wrong from the angle of the man called Len, Robert knew Len would not hesitate to sacrifice his pawns in this deadly game. He tried to tell himself it was better to die gradually of shame and humiliation than to die in a burst of glory in a futile effort to obtain freedom.

The thought persisted in his mind that it wouldn’t be bad to die in such a cause. He would gladly give his life in order to save Peggy’s.
When they reached customs the soldier at the gate hardly glanced their way as the taxi drove inside the big enclosure.

The taxi driver parked in such a manner that he could race back out the gate in a hurry if necessary. Robert was numb as he and Len left the vehicle for the long, low building where he would claim his drugs from the customs.

The man behind the counter in the customs office was a small, wiry person who said little. No word was exchanged by him or Len, but Robert saw the sharp look of understanding they gave each other:

Mechanically the doctor presented his papers. There was an agony of waiting, which might have been a few moments at the most, then the precious package appeared. The package on which his life and Peggy’s hung. The package which could mean restored health to dozens of human wrecks at his clinic . . .

Numbly Robert watched the little man behind the counter silently hand the package over to Len. He hadn’t even made the gesture of pushing it over in Robert’s direction. Robert had signed for it. It was all legal now.

In silence they turned and left the office. What was there to do now? All was lost.

“Look, Robert boy, what’s all this about?”

His heart leaped at sound of the familiar voice. He turned to see the big colonel coming toward the taxi. The presence of the officer had its effect on Peggy too; with a frantic squirm she wrenched open the door and kicked out of the taxi, falling in a helpless heap on the ground, the black chadar falling away from her head to expose the gag in her mouth.

In a split second Robert made one of the biggest decisions of his life. With a clumsy fist he sent an awkward right to Len’s jaw. It was the first blow that he had struck against a human being in his life. But there was righteous anger behind it.

It hardly made an impression on the larger man, but it did bring an angry reaction. Len lunged, and his fist smashed into the young doctor’s mouth, sending him spinning.

The colonel was shouting now, and soldiers suddenly sprang from everywhere. Soldiers and police.

Robert then helped Peggy to her feet. The soldiers had dragged the driver from the taxi. Blue-uniformed Iranian police and khaki Iranian and American soldiers surrounded Len.

Robert smiled. It had worked! He was not just a futile fumbler after all . . .

They were still talking about it the next day at the American officers’ club. Robert and Peggy sat with Colonel Boone at a table near the pool and talked about it.
“Very clever, Robert boy,” the colonel boomed as he sipped his drink. “I didn’t get your letter until a couple of hours before the whole thing happened. You know how slow the Iranian postal system is. But being watched as you were, and considering all the other circumstances, it was all you could do, I realize. They wouldn’t expect you to use the Iranian postal service to send mail to American government officials. Whom did you write to besides me and the National Police?”

“No the American Consulate and the Prime Minister,” Robert said, grinning happily. “I was tired that night and couldn’t think of any one else. But I still haven’t written to my supporting churches at home.”

“Well, we finally had to do it my way—to some extent,” the colonel mused. “That fellow with the thick neck won’t give you any more trouble. And that little bird out at customs—they’ve been after him for a long time, but they needed proof. They’re going to deport him.”

Robert found it hard to believe that Peggy was here, all the soft beauty of her, the laughing music of her, and all the fragile, delicate emerald charm of her that defied definition.

The colonel beamed at them, said:

“Look, boy, from now on you won’t be needing all those services I’ve offered you. They’re going to give you a customs-free permit to bring in anything you please for that clinic of yours. Could anything be any better than that?” he asked.

“Yes,” Robert answered. He was looking at a pair of green eyes, the loveliest in the world.
Danny is often saying, "No matter how smart a guy is, there's always a smarter guy to take him." And here, just the other night, he proves it in a most amazing way.

This Danny McGeever is a pretty smart lad himself, and likewise a very dizzy one. The screwball tricks he plays never cease to astonish the Main Stem boys, and on this particular night he plays the screwiest trick of all.

Of course you may not know Danny by that name—his profession requires so many!—but no doubt you've met up with him under one of his various aliases. On this night we're discussing he's known as J. Wellington Sinclair, big Wall Street operator.

Danny's favorite stunt is a little game known as "peddling the rag," the "rag" in this case being a phony stock certificate supposedly worth a fortune. It's a con game known to all so I shan't bore you with details, but will only remark it's still worth a play even in these enlightened days.

Its successful operation calls for two guys, and tonight Danny is

It was a smelly deal, but it even fooled smart guy Danny McGeever

Ever since the first ape learned to talk smart lads have hit the dust time and again because of over-confidence. And now this little saga adds another victim to the long list of brain boys with Achilles' heels.
using his old sidekick, Jack Lein, to help out. It also calls for Danny to be dressed as a substantial man of finance. But how do we find him dressed tonight? We find him wearing a rusty raincoat and an old slouch hat pulled low on his head, and on top of that he’s wearing a wig, dark cheaters and phony whiskers—a rusty-looking tramp if you ever saw one! Danny, you see, is up to another of his screwy tricks.

He shuffles through the rain along a dark street until he comes to an alley. After a quick look around, he slips into the alley and takes off the ragged raincoat, the wig and whiskers. He’s dressed now as J. Wellington Sinclair, the Wall Street big-shot. He hauls a taxi, drives to a Loop hotel.

He goes to a room on the ninth floor of the hotel, unlocks the door and steps inside.

A woman sits at the window looking out at the rain. She’s a cow-like woman, fat and fortyish, with yellow hair and bovine eyes. She looks up at him and says, “What have you been up to?”

“I’ve been up to something slick and smooth. Tonight,” chuckles Danny, “I pulled a fast one. Does the name Sam Henry mean anything to you?”

She shakes her head in a slow, bovine way.

“Anyway,” says Danny, “this Sam Henry runs a prosperous cheese business, and Jack and I have been readying him for a touch. So I know that tonight this Henry has fifteen G’s in his poke. He doesn’t ready the way I like, and it looks as if he’s off the hook. So tonight he’s heisted for his fifteen G’s.”

The woman stops chewing her gum and stares at Danny. “And who, may I ask, heisted him?”

“Well,” says Danny, “I’m not admitting anything, but—” Danny takes a fat leather wallet from his pocket.

The woman stares at it, says very slow, “Did you say fifteen grand?”

“Fifteen grand is what I said.” Danny opens the wallet. And when he sees what is contains he’s knocked speechless for perhaps the first time in his life.

The wallet is filled with scraps of newspaper!

The cow-like woman laughs. Danny, flabbergasted, gapes at her. “I saw him,” he says. “With my own eyes I saw him. I was in his office. I saw him put the dough in it!”

“Well it looks to me,” says the woman, “as if this cheese guy has played you for a hunk o’—”

She’s interrupted by the telephone.

Danny takes up the phone, says, “Hello.” Then he smiles big. “Good evening, Mr. Henry,” he says in his best professional manner. “Have you decided to close?”

“Yes, Mr. Sinclair, I have. But something happened tonight that
might have wrecked it if I hadn't been very cautious."

"What happened, Mr. Henry?"

"I was held up and robbed," says Mr. Henry, "by a bearded tramp in a long raincoat. As you know, I had put fifteen thousand dollars in my wallet, but after you left my office I took the precaution to substitute newspaper clippings for the money. And a good thing I did because the robber, after locking me in my garage, made off with my wallet."

"How terrible!" says Danny. "But you managed to save your money?"

"Oh, yes," says Mr. Henry. "The money was safely tied in wrapping paper. The robber took hold of it, but when he smelled its odor he gave it back to me. You see, Mr. Sinclair, I had taken the further precaution of surrounding the money with pieces of my best limburger."

Danny emits a hollow laugh. "And then what happened, Mr. Henry?"

"I broke out of the garage," says Mr. Henry, "and found a policeman. Then I went downtown with my money."

"And did you close the deal with my associate?"

"Oh, yes," says Mr. Henry. "I closed the deal with your associate."

"And my associate now has the money?"

"Well, no," says Mr. Henry. "As a matter of fact your associate is now in the custody of the police."

There's a long pause. Then Danny licks his lips and says very soft, "And why the police, Mr. Henry?"

"Well, Mr. Sinclair, while I was locked in my garage I had time to think the whole thing through and it came to me there was something fishy about your deal. So I called the police, and they sent a detective with me to meet your associate. And who, Mr. Sinclair, do you suppose your Wall Street associate turns out to be?"

"I am sure," says Danny, "I haven't the faintest idea."

"No other than Jack Lein, the swindler, sir, known to the police of a dozen cities."

"Well, well," says Danny, taking a deep breath, "this is indeed distressing news."

"It is indeed, sir!"

"But," says Danny, "the deal for my copper stock—"

"Your copper stock," says Mr. Henry firmly, "is of no more value than the newspaper clippings you found in my wallet. And that is precisely why I phoned you—to hold you there on the telephone until the police could reach your room."

Danny drops the phone, darts for the door, flings it open. The cops are waiting outside for him.

So, it's like Danny often says to me: No matter how smart a guy may be there's always a smarter guy to take him.
It was a Friday when the holocaust began. I remember that because Friday was never a good day for me. I don't like fish, black cats bother me, and the Friday issue of the Chronicle is always, for some reason, the kind that runs a guy ragged around the arches. So it was a Friday, and when I say holocaust, I don't mean a casual massacre.

I was sitting at my desk in that dark and dingy corner of the city room which I call home because nobody else will, and I was writing a follow up on the suicide of a guy named Milton Swan, when a Western Union boy popped into the city room and began to call my name. McGinty at the sports desk showed the boy over to me, and I signed for the wire.

I opened the wire and I looked at the date line. It was Babylon, Iowa. The telegram said:

DAFFY DILL
N Y CHRONICLE
NEW YORK N Y

WILBUR PENN PROMINENT
BABYLON CITIZEN SHOT AND KILLED BY UNKNOWN ASSAILANT

When Richard Sale transferred his center of gravity to Hollywood we're quite sure that Daffy Dill accompanied him. You can't create a character like Daffy, and then just up, and forget him. Disturbing as it may seem to Dick Sale, we predict that Daffy's irrepressible zest and vitality will dog his footsteps and haunt his sleep until he is too old to dream.
TONIGHT AT TEN PM STOP HAVE
ATTEMPTED TO REACH PENNS
BROTHER NAMED MARTIN PENN
SOMEBE M IN NEW YORK CITY
BUT AM UNABLE TO LOCATE HIM
STOP APPRECIATE IT IF YOU
COULD FIND HIM AND GET STATE-
MENT FROM HIM CONCERNING
MURDER OF HIS BROTHER STOP
WILL SPLIT NEWS ON CASE WITH
YOU IF YOU HELP STOP WIRE
CHARGES COLLECT

JOHN HARVEY
EDITOR BABYLON GAZETTE

Well, that was a hot one. I was
to go out and scour New York
looking for some punk named
Martin Penn to get a statement
out of him about a murder in a
hick town in Iowa, and the editor
of the town rag, Mr. Harvey, was
going to be big about it and split
news with me concerning his
gigantic murder case.

As if the readers of the New
York sheets would give two hoots
about murder in Babylon (Iowa).
The picture of me roaming the
wintry streets looking for a state-
ment was not at all appealing.

I would have tossed the tele-
gram in the waste basket, if I
hadn’t had a conscience. Wilbur
Penn shot tonight. That meant
the night before and that meant I
was holding a night letter, not a
straight telegram and that meant
Mr. Harvey was a cheap skate.

So I took the telegram in to the
Old Man who was sitting forlornly
in his dog-house, his green eye-
shade hiding his eyes and accen-
tuating the glistening prairie of
hairless dome that covered his
skull. I dropped the thing on his
desk.

“Rural editor asks collabora-
tion,” I said. “How do you like
them berries?”

“Don’t bother me,” said the
Old Man. “Can’t you see I’m
reading?”

He had a copy of How to Make
Friends and Influence People in
his lap, and I tsk-tdsked and shook
my head. “Come on, come on,” I
said. “You’re too far gone for
that book to do you any good.
Take a look at this thing and grab
a laugh. They’re few enough now-
adays.”

The Old Man picked up the
wire and read it, and he didn’t
laugh.

When he had finished it, he
said, “What’s so funny about it?
Just because it’s a hick town? A
hick paper? There’s nothing funny
in that. We didn’t all begin in
New York, Mr. Dill, like yourself.
Some of us were small town
scribes for years before we got a
break and came on here. Do you
know where I came from before
I hit New York? Wipe that smile
off your face. The name of the
town was Punxatawney, Pa. .
So go ahead and cover for John
Harvey.”

“Go ahead—and cover—for
him?” I said. “You mean you’re
going to waste me on this guy’s
Babylon killing?”
"I've always made it a policy," replied the Old Man severely, "to cast my bread upon the waters. When a man wires me for help from out of town, I give. Don't be a sap, Daffy. The day might come when you would wind up in Babylon, Iowa, needing a stake, an 'in,' or just plain help. And having helped this guy once, he'll help you twice."

"I have no intention of ever going to Babylon," I said. "The Bible told me it was a sinful, wicked place. It should have said that there was a moocher in the place too."

"Never mind the wisecracks," said the Old Man wearily. "Cover for this guy. And just to make sure you do, let me see Milton Penn's—"

"Milton Penn," I said sarcastically.

"You let me see his statement before you wire it. It would not be unlike you to forge a statement from Daffy Dill, Esk., rather than go out and find this other guy. Snap into it."

When I came out of the doghouse, Dinah Mason met me and shook her head. "Boy, you look low."

"I am low," I said. "Out of seven and a half million people in this town, I've got to find one guy to ask him for a statement."

"Far be it from me to simplify your existence," Linah said, patting my cheek. "But did you ever think of looking up the lug in a telephone book and asking for his statement via Alexander Bell's marvelous invention?"

I said, "Wonderfull! At rare intervals you show genius."

"A mere nothing, my dear Watson."

I went through a Manhattan telephone directory and found one Martin Penn as easily as falling off a log. Martin Penn, it said, 170 Beeker Place r. CRAWford 2-2399.

I asked our operator to get the number for me. But after a few minutes she said, "Sorry, Mr. Dill, your party does not answer. I will call you again in twenty minutes."

Well, that was all right. But when five P.M. rolled around and the party still had not answered, I knew that I was going to have to go up there and interview the guy when he got home from work, and that it was all kind of a nuisance. Dinah made a date for dinner, but I agreed only on condition that she go up to Beeker Place with me. She must have been hungry because she accepted the stipulation without a howl . . .

Martin Penn was not home. He lived in a small apartment house in Beeker Place and we rang his doorbell for ten minutes before we gave it up as a bad job.

I was just as glad but Dinah, the little nimbus cloud, only said, "Hi-ho, it only means you have to come back tomorrow and try, try again. Let's eat at the Hide-
away Club. I haven’t seen Bill Latham since they put Santa Claus’ whiskers back among the moth-balls.”

That was all right with me. We took a cab over to Broadway where the Hideaway Club failed to live up to its name by advertising its location in no uncertain neon lights.

Bill Latham greeted us at the door with a broad grin. “Well, well,” he said, “the Fourth Estate in person. Are you following Poppa Hanley around or did he tell you to meet him here?”

“Is that galoot here?” Dinah sighed. “Oh great gouts of blood—now he and Daffy will discuss death and detection all night. It’s like going out to dinner with a signal thirty-two ringing in your ears. I’ll bet you five fish, Bill, that they get a call before dessert.”

“I’ll take it,” Latham grinned. “Things have been pretty quiet, Poppa was telling me, so the chances are you’ll lose. He’s over there in a wall booth, down by the band.”

We wended our way past the dancers on the floor and reached the red leather booth where Poppa was sitting, mangling a half a dozen oysters and looking pompously dignified.

When he saw us, he leaped to his feet and looked happier. Poppa is one homely man, when you come right down to it. He was all dressed up, but that didn’t keep his long ears from sticking out like an elephant’s flappers, and his face, always brick red, was holding its own.

“Golly,” he said, “this is a pleasure, Dinah. If only you could have left the runt at home. Oh well, a guy can’t have everything. Sit down.”

Dinah won the five bucks. We had finished the beefsteaks and were waiting for the salad when Bill Latham came over and slipped a fin in Dinah’s bag.

“Telephone call for you, Lieutenant,” he said. “Will you take it here?”

Poppa looked grim and nodded. They brought a telephone to the booth and plugged it in.

Poppa said, “Hello? This is Hanley . . . Oh, hello, Babcock. I’m eating dinner. I told you not to call unless it was something important . . . eh? . . . Oh . . . Hell . . . All right. What’s the address again? . . . I’ve got it. I’ll meet you there. You pick up Claghorn and Louie, and tell Dr. Kyne to come running. I think he’s over in Bellevue. I’ll see you there.”

He hung up and took a deep breath and sighed and looked at me.

Dinah groaned, “The march of crime.”

“A guy,” Hanley said to me. “Bumped off. Want to come?”

“Who is it?” I said. “Of course I’ll come. If I didn’t come, the Old Man would beat my pride into the dust, grrrr!”
“Guy named Fenwick Hanes,” said Poppa. “Babcock got the call through Telegraph Bureau. Someone telephoned in and said that this guy had been found in the Hotel Metronome on West 45th. That’s not far from you. Let’s go see. Just up Broadway a couple of blocks. You heard what I said.”

“Well,” Dinah said sourly, “I’ll be a rootin’ tootin’ hillybilly if I get left here alone with the check. I’m coming too, boys, and don’t argue with a woman. Garson! L’addition for these gentlemen!”

We got out of there and walked north, the three of us, until Dinah got a stitch in her side from the pace.

“Take it easy,” she said. “That meal is having its troubles. The fellow is dead. Why the rush?”

“Listen, Angel-Eyes,” I said. “The last time you saw a corpse, you passed out on me. I think you’d better go home.”

“Not me,” Dinah said grimly. “I’ve got a date with you and not even a murder is going to make me a wall-flower.”

We reached the Metronome a few minutes later and found Detective Claghorn waiting for us in the lobby downstairs. We shook hands with him and then we went up.

Claghorn said, “I came right up, Chief, when I heard the news. Did Babcock telephone you? I guess he’s on the way with the stuff and the M.E. I happened to be home when he buzzed me and I don’t live far from here myself. The manager is upstairs and I don’t think we’re gonna get a lead from what he said.”

On the seventh floor, we found the manager, a man named Horace Wilson, who was pasty-faced and nervous.

“These things are always bad publicity for the hotel,” he groaned, “but what can we do about them? They always happen.”

“Let’s have a look-see,” Hanley grunted noncommittally.

We opened the door and went in. Dinah took one look and opened the door and went out again.

“I’ll wait downstairs,” she said. “I’ll tell the other boys where to come. But as for me, I just had dinner and I don’t want to waste the money you all spent on it. See you anon.”

Dinah is a sissy, but I like her for it. These women who can look a stiff in the eye without flinching are too hard-boiled for Daffy. It wasn’t that Mr. Fenwick Hanes was a mess, for he wasn’t. He had been murdered very neatly indeed, and there was little blood.

Fenwick Hanes had been shot to death. One shot. He was lying in his bed with his shoes and his coat and vest off.

“Mr. Hanes left a message at the desk that he was to be awakened at eight o’clock,” the
manager explained. “Apparently he decided to take a nap. He was in from out of town and had been running around quite a bit and was tired. At eight P.M. the elevator boy heard a shot. He called me and I came in and found him like that.”

“Hmm,” said Hanley. “Looks like a thirty-two . . .” He stared at the manager. “You mean that’s all there is? You didn’t see anyone in here?”

“Yes.”

I went over and picked up a small alarm clock which Hanes had set by his bed. It said eight-thirty. I looked at it sharply and I said, “Boy, if this could only talk.”

The elevator boy showed up then along with Dr. Kerr Kyne and Babcock and the police fotog. Hanley went to work on the boy and the gist of it was that the boy had been going by the floor when he heard a shot. He instantly came back to the seventh floor and stepped out. He said he heard a bell ringing. Then he went for the manager. He did not see anybody.

Big help. I could see the disappointment in Hanley’s face.

Well, it was one of those things. I wasn’t particularly interested in the killing and I didn’t see where the Chronicle’s readers would be. Just a hotel knock-off. That is, until I asked for some dope on Fenwick Hanes himself.

“We don’t know anything about him,” said the manager. “He checked in three days ago and signed the register Fenwick Hanes, Babylon, Iowa—” The manager stopped short because of the way I gaped at him.

“Babylon, Iowa!” I said.

“That’s right.”

I grabbed the telephone and then set it down again. I was that excited. Then I took up a telephone book and looked up the apartment in Beeker Place and telephoned the superintendent.

“This is the police department,” I growled at the super while Hanley watched me as though he thought me half cracked. “I want you to go right up to Mr. Penn’s apartment and open it and have a look at it. We have a tip that there’s been foul play and we’re checking on it. You telephone back and tell me what you find.”

And I gave him the number. “Ask for Lieutenant Hanley, room 706.”

“All right,” said the super. “I’ll take a look right away.”

Ten minutes later he telephoned back and I grabbed the handset and listened while he roared shrilly, “Murder! Murder! Mr. Penn is been murdered!”

I hung up instantly and I turned to Poppa Hanley and said, “Three wise men, all of Babylon, all dead. Come on, Poppa. This thing is really beginning to get hot.”

Wilbur Penn had been killed in Babylon. Martin Penn had been
killed the day before we found him. Fenwick Hanes had been killed at eight p.m. this very night.

What had started with a routine inquiry from Iowa had suddenly blossomed into three exceedingly dead corpses. Which goes to show that life is still full of little surprises.

Poppa and I sent Dinah home and we left Babcock and Claghorn over at the Metronome and took Dr. Kerr Kyne with us.

“I want it clearly understood,” Dr. Kyne said to me with sarcasm as we drove to Beeker Place, “that you never call me Buzzard again. For if anybody ever made me look like an amateur when it comes to hovering over the dead, you are that man, Mr. Dill, and it gives me great pleasure to say that I can practically scent the smell of graveyards all over and around you.”

I let him go on. I couldn’t help smiling because it was about time he got a chance to crow a little. We reached Beeker Place in nothing flat and were greeted at the door by the superintendent who was almost hysterical with fright.

He took us right up to the apartment where Dinah and I had previously rung the bell to no avail. He unlocked the door and we trooped in.

Dr. Kerr Kyne went right to work. Martin Penn was dead, all right. You didn’t have to be the chief M. E. of New York County to gather that much. He was a thin, sharp sort of man with a shrewd face, this corpse which sat comfortably in a chair. No bullet in the head this time, as in the case of Fenwick Hanes. This bullet had struck Martin Penn directly over the heart.

From the expression on the dead man’s face, it was plain that he had seen his killer, perhaps even talked with him. For there was hate in Martin Penn’s face and no fooling.

We had better luck here though. Dr. Kyne said that Penn had been dead for at least thirty-six hours and that the slug was a thirty-two, and undoubtedly the same gun which killed Hanes had killed Penn.

I reminded myself to check with John Harvey of the Babylon Gazette on the slug which had killed Wilbur Penn. There was an avenging angel on the trail somewhere and it would be a good idea if we stopped him. Murder is a habit when you do too much of it, the killer might easily leave a line of dead behind him, getting scared and more scared on the way. It’s fear that makes murder, in one way or another.

Martin Penn had been a shrewd man, so shrewd that even in death he had pointed out a clue to the identity of his killer.

Sitting in that chair, with a bullet in his body, he had not died at once. This isn’t strange, for I have seen men shot through
the heart with a high-power copper-jacket still stumble on and fire several shots, although they were already dead. In man, there is sometimes an unconquerable will which makes him perform even after a mortal wound has been inflicted.

In any case, with his own finger, dipped in the blood of his own wound, Martin Penn had traced something upon the maple arm of the chair in which he sat.

It was a flat-sided arm, wide enough to take a pad for sketching, and the blood had dried black upon the wood, leaving his handiwork quite plain there by his right hand.

It was the sketch, crude and macabre, of an ear. Just one ear.

But it was enough to start me thinking and I remembered the alarm clock and suddenly I said, “Poppa, I think I get it.”

“You’re a smarter guy than I am if you do,” Poppa said sourly.

“An ear,” I said. “Well, what about an ear? It would just be guessing if we had this killing alone. But we’ve got the Fenwick Hanes murder too, and to me, the distinctive thing about that one was the alarm clock. Did you know that the alarm had run down on the thing? And the alarm had was set for eight o’clock.

“Now it’s my guess—guess, mind you—that Hanes wanted to make an evening performance at eight-thirty in some theater. He told the desk to wake him at eight. He didn’t trust them, but set the clock for eight himself. Everything happened at eight. There was a killer in there who shot him. The elevator boy heard the bell ringing even when the shot was fired. Which would mean the alarm went off before Hanes was killed. And it was allowed to run down!”

“Now, Poppa—look me in the eye and imagine me a killer. I’m standing here and I’m going to bump you off. Just as I’m getting up nerve, an alarm clock goes off. What do I do?”

“You instinctively turn off the alarm because it’s noisy and you’re afraid of two things: you’re afraid it’ll wake up your victim and you’re afraid it will attract outside attention.”

“Fine,” I said, “and right. I never saw a man yet who didn’t dive for an alarm clock to turn it off when it started to holler. Yet this killer stood there, heard the alarm, shot Hanes, then scrambled, and the alarm kept going to advertise things. What does that mean to you?”

“It means,” said Hanley heavily, “that the killer was deaf.”

“It sure does,” I said. “And Martin Penn didn’t sweat out his last seconds drawing this ear for no other reason but that.”

Hanley grunted. “Well, you don’t have to look so pleased about it. I still don’t see how it gives us a lead. All we have to do is find a guy with a thirty-two
caliber gun which fits these bullets, the guy being deaf. Huh. That's all we have to do."

"I think," I said, "that when you get a line on the Penns and Hanes, it will narrow down your choice considerably. But as for now, I see nothing to keep me from returning to the gay white way. So long, Peter, I'm to pick up Dinah and see the sights. Tomorrow I'll buzz John Harvey in Babylon and see what he has to offer on the murder of Wilbur Penn."

At the city room of the New York Chronicle, next morning at ten a.m., I gladdened the Old Man's heart by pounding out the dope on the stories of the night before, and then I telephoned the Babylon Gazette out in Iowa—at the Chronicle's expense—and asked to speak with John Harvey.

I got a man named Woolsey who apparently worked on the sheet and he said, "Gosh, Mr. Dill, it's funny you should call him. He's not here. He left for New York yesterday morning and he'll be arriving on the Golden Arrow sometime this morning in Pennsylvania Station. This murder out here is raising a lot of fuss, and when he didn't hear from you in answer to his telegram, he decided to go on to New York himself and see Wilbur Penn's brother.

"There are some folks here think Martin Penn shot his own brother, and John wants to be first on the spot to make sure. He said he'd go see you and maybe you could help him find Martin Penn. I think the train gets in at eleven."

"I can show him Martin Penn all right," I said. "Mr. Penn is now residing in the morgue. There's a headline for your yarn. Martin Penn was shot and killed two days ago in his New York apartment. He was killed before his brother Wilbur was, only nobody knew it. I'll meet Harvey at the train. So long."

How I was going to pick John Harvey out of the welter getting off the Golden Arrow I didn't know, but I made a try. I went up to Pennsy and tipped a porter to page John Harvey when the crowd came off the ramp.

But I didn't locate him in the crowd and no one answered the name. I had lunch at a drugstore fountain and then went downtown again.

When I got there, Mr. Harvey was waiting for me.

He was a little man in an old suit, his hair touched with gray, and he smoked cigarettes without touching them. The one I saw just hung in his mouth and he handled it wonderfully with his lips. He had a big mole on the right cheek.

"Sure am glad to meet you, Mr. Dill," John Harvey said. "I guess you don't know how out-country editors kind of idolize the way you
do things. When that Penn murder broke I said to myself, what a break it would be if Daffy Dill could help us out on the New York end."

"Well, I was helping you," I said. "I didn't wire you but I got out on the rounds and I telephoned you this morning and got Woolsey. Then I went up to the station to meet you."

"You went up to meet me?" he said. "I didn't see you, and I'd have recognized you from your pictures, I think. I went out the cab way and got right in a cab. I've still got my luggage with me here."

I glanced down and saw he had two bags with him. "Well," I said, "I suppose you've heard the news."

"I just arrived. I've heard nothing."

"Martin Penn is dead, shot and killed before your friend Wilbur ever was. Did you know a man named Fenwick Hanes?"

"Of Babylon? Certainly I did. Nasty old coot. Used to hang around with Wilbur and Martin Penn and Maxwell Green. The four of them pulled together quite a while."

"He's in New York," I said. "Dead too."

Harvey stared at me. "Dead in New York? I saw him in Babylon on Wednesday."

"At the morgue," I persisted grimly. "With a tag on his toe."

"My God," he said huskily. "Now listen," I said, "you're supposed to go over to Police Headquarters. Lieutenant William Hanley wants to talk with you. He thinks you can give him some dope on the backgrounds of these corpses, and I think you can too. We need help. We're stymied."

I watched him light a cigarette and he glanced down at the match as he did so, and I said, "The little brown fox jumped over the big high fence."

"Well," said Harvey looking up, "I'll run down there then and help them out, and then I want to see you again, and get the story on this for my own paper. Will I find you here?"

"You will," I said, "as soon as you come back."

"May I leave my things here? I'll put up at a hotel when I come back. I don't know New York at all. Never been here before in my life."

"They'll be right here," I said.

As soon as he had left, I telephoned TWA airlines and I said, "Did you have a plane leaving from Babylon, Iowa, yesterday morning at ten A.M.?"

"No," they said. "But the Des Moines plane left at ten A.M. and Des Moines is only twenty miles from Babylon. If you wanted to fly to New York, you'd run over to Des Moines and get the plane there."

"When did that ship come in?"

"Three yesterday afternoon."
"Thanks very much." I hung up and Dinah came over. I pointed at the grips and I said, "A very careless guy, my hollyhock. For instance, how would you get a TWA tag on your luggage if you'd come east on the Pennsy's Golden Arrow?"

"Simple, dolt," she said. "It's a tag from a previous trip."

"Could be," I said, "but ain't for one reason. Guy says he's never been to New York before in his life. Tag says Destination N. Y. So?"

"You've got something there," Dinah said. "And you can have it."

"The little brown fox jumped over the big high fence," I said. "Have you gone crazy?" Dinah said. "What has the fox got to do with the high cost of living?"

"Not a thing," I said. "But when I told John Harvey about the little fox, he didn't seem to worry about it at all. Never even noticed I said it."

"Maybe he's just polite."

"And on the other hand, maybe the laddy is deaf. He spoke with me all the time, watching my lips carefully. I gave him the fox business when his eyes were off my face, and he never heard it. He's deaf. He reads the lips. He didn't come in on the Golden Arrow. He came in on the Sky Chief yesterday, in time to bump off Fenwick Hanes last night at eight bells."

"And I'll bet you dough he's only sticking around to grab off someone else. He knocked off Wilbur Penn himself, and I'll bet you a fin he was in town two days ago on Tuesday to slip the slug into Martin Penn up in Beeker Place. How? We see now."

I telephoned the Babylon Gazette again long distance and got hold of Woolsey once more.

"This is Daffy Dill again," I said. "I want some info, my friend, and for it I'll promise to hand you the biggest scoop your rag ever printed, and you'll have it on the streets before the Des Moines papers ever see it. Tell me one thing: where was John Harvey on Tuesday? He wasn't in town was he?"

"Oh no," Woolsey said. "John left Sunday afternoon to take a little fishing trip up in Michigan. He likes to go after muskellunge up there. He got back here Wednesday morning."

"Does a Maxwell Green live in Babylon?"

Woolsey hesitated. "He used to, but he lives in New York now. Him and Martin Penn are lawyers together, somewhere in New York."

"That's all I wanted to know," I said. "Thanks." I hung up.

"All right, brainstorm," Dinah Mason said dryly. "What's up?"

"Get me a telephone book," I said, "and we'll soon see."

Dinah threw hers over and I looked up Maxwell Green. He was there all right. He lived on
West 56th Street and I gave him a ring.

"Hello?" a voice said.

"Maxwell Green?"

"Yes."

"Of Babylon, Iowa?"

"That's right," he said. "Who is this? Harvey?"

"Yes." I said it on the spur of the moment to see what would come.

"Look here, Harvey," Maxwell Green said heavily, "I told you I'd see you at eleven-thirty and it's nearly that now. You said it was important enough for me to remain at home. Now you'd better get here and get here fast with your important matter. I haven't got all day to waste on you." He slammed up.

Victim number four. And he didn't even know it. "Hello, Poppa," I said a few minutes later. "Is Harvey still there?"

"Still here?" Poppa Hanley said. "He hasn't been here yet."

Oh yes, I saw the gag nicely. Never been in New York before. Must have got lost. But meanwhile John Harvey was on his way to 56th Street to kill a man.

"Hanley!" I snapped. "Get over here fast. Pick me up. Bring a rod. We're going to stop another one! Now make it fast, Poppa, we've got no seconds to lose!" I gasped. "No—wait a minute, Poppa. No time. You haven't time to pick me up. Meet you there!"

I gave him the address, hung up and called Maxwell Green back.

"Listen, Mr. Green," I snapped, "and get it straight the first time. This is Daffy Dill of the New York Chronicle—"

"No statement," he snapped and hung up.

The damned old fool. I rang him again but he wouldn't answer.

I got my faithful old grave-scratcher out of the drawer, tore downstairs and grabbed a cab. I waved a bill under the driver's nose and we went north like a bat out of hell. We took the west side express highway up to Fifty-second and cut off and then doubled back. We made it damned fast.

When we pulled up in front of the building I saw that I had beaten Poppa Hanley there and I went in like a Roman ram.

The doorbells said that Maxwell Green lived on the fourth floor. I tried the vestibule door but it was locked, so I broke the glass with my gun butt and opened the door from the inside. I went up the stairs like a madman, and I heard Poppa Hanley's siren approaching down the street. It was a nice thing to hear, believe me.

When I reached the fourth floor I was in a blind panic. I went from door to door looking for the name Green and finally found it and tried the knob. The door was locked.

From across the hall I charged at that door and hit it with my shoulder. I weigh one eighty and
I was glad of it then because I knocked that lock clean out of its socket, split that door in half and nearly rooked my shoulder.

I didn’t fall. I was careful not to fall. I balanced my weight when I hit the door so that I was standing in a fixed position with my gun hand ready when I came to a stop.

I was right.

John Harvey was standing there. He had forced Mr. Maxwell Green into a chair and in Harvey’s hand was a thirty-two caliber Colt revolver with the hammer back and his index finger flexing on the trigger.

I think if John Harvey had been able to hear, he might have shot me down when I hit that door. But he couldn’t hear. He saw the expression on Maxwell Green’s face, and only because of that did he know something was amiss. By the time he turned, he was rattled, and when he saw me, he was more rattled.

He fired twice at me before he had his gun all the way around. He put two bullets through the window, only one of them had an urn in front of it and there was a hell of a crash.

I didn’t want to kill that guy because he knew too much that Hanley wanted to know in the way of explanation, but what can you do when someone is throwing lead at you? You don’t aim carefully down the barrel and then break a kneecap. You just keep fanning the trigger and aiming low from instinct and hoping your next one will put him down.

But he stands there too long; you think he’s never going to fall. He stands there and you see the red spit of his gun and a bullet cracks by your ear. Close, that means. They only crack when they’re close to your ear. Otherwise, it’s a buzz and that means it’s away from you.

Harvey went to one knee after my third shot and I was already down, hit in the side. It was as though the dog had bit the hand that fed it, for Harvey had not hit me. Maxwell Green had. He picked up a book end and flung it at Harvey and missed and hit me. He nearly broke a pair of ribs.

The next thing I knew Harvey was limping past me and had reached the door. I couldn’t do a thing about it. I was trying to get a breath into my lungs and couldn’t. The damned brass book end had knocked the wind clean out of me and I just couldn’t manage to get a breath of fresh air.

Harvey made the door at exactly the same time that Poppa Hanley made it. They were both going in opposite directions. I tried to yell to Poppa to stop the lug, but you don’t have to tell Poppa what to do. He can scent trouble very easily, and he can scent a killer even more facilely.

Poppa just pulled up without a
word and rapped Harvey across the jaw with a gun barrel and then followed it with a lovely left hook which dropped the Babylon editor right in my lap where I rapped him one more for not getting in the way of that book end and getting clipped with it instead of me, who is frail and fragile when it comes to such things.

That was the business. Harvey wasn’t out and he made a try at his gun, tried to jam it into his ear and pull the trigger, but Poppa kicked it out of his hand and growled, “Can’t face the Musica, eh?”

Which, I thought later, was really a very good crack, and I told Dinah so when I saw her. Maxwell Green seemed to know what it was all about.

“Yeah,” Poppa Hanley told him, “the first one he knocked off was Martin Penn. He came to New York on Tuesday instead of taking a fishing trip as he said, and he bumped Martin. Then he went back home and bumped Wilbur Penn, Martin’s brother. He telegraphed Daffy merely to insure his being in Babylon when the body was discovered. Having done that, he told his assistant he was taking the train for this town. Instead, he took the plane, got there early, knocked off Fenwick Hanes, and he planned to knock you off this morning.”

“Why, he called me last night and made an appointment with me this morning,” Green exploded. “To kill me!”

“That’s right,” I said, “and you’re a lousy shot with a book end, incidentally.”

“Knowing all that,” Poppa Hanley said, “have you got any ideas on why this deaf plug-ugly was pulling this round robin of homicide? Not just to keep the police department on its toes, certainly.”

Maxwell Green sat back in his chair and sighed. “Yes,” he said, “I think I know the answer.”

“Then give, mister. I want to wrap this thing up for the D.A. before this guy thinks up some excuse a dumb jury will like.”

Maxwell Green said slowly, “Wilbur Penn was the man whom Harvey wanted to get.”

“All right,” I said. “But you and Martin Penn and Fenwick Hanes were all too smart. I mean, you knew that Harvey would be the one to kill Wilbur. Three wise men of Babylon. So to kill Wilbur Penn, John Harvey had to kill four men.”

Green nodded. “But I don’t doubt he would have enjoyed the extra work involved,” he said bitterly. “Four years ago, John Harvey and Wilbur Penn were in love with the same woman, but she married Harvey. Well, that was all right. They had a youngster, a little girl, cute little trick. But it seems that Margaret Harvey, John Harvey’s wife, came into some money. Her uncle left
her nearly one hundred thousand dollars. And Harvey began to run around with other women.

“Next thing, Margaret Harvey was found dead. Gas in the kitchen. Wilbur was county attorney at Babylon then, and when he found Margaret, he also found a live canary in the same kitchen. Now, a canary doesn’t live through a gassing that kills a grown woman.

“Wilbur could have put Harvey in the electric chair, but he didn’t. He didn’t because of Margaret’s daughter. Wilbur got quite fond of her. And Margaret’s will left her money to her daughter, so John Harvey had outfoxed himself.

“Wilbur told Harvey the truth, told him that if he ever stepped out of line again, or ever tried to regain custody of the daughter—whom, incidentally, Wilbur took over, with Harvey’s consent, of course—he, Wilbur, would prosecute Harvey to the full extent of the law. And if anything happened to Wilbur, the rest of us, all former law partners, would take up the task.”

“I get the setup,” I said. “This little rat without any hearing got desperate for money. He wanted to get his daughter back, contest the will, and get some of the mazuma. To do that, he had to knock off Wilbur, but he also had to knock off the three men Wilbur Penn had put wise to the mess.”

Green nodded.

Well, it was easy to prove. I had to make a trip to Babylon and it wasn’t as bad a town as it sounds. Harvey’s daughter, little Meg, was a cute trick, and she was too young to know what was going on. She’s living now with Uncle Maxwell, as she says, and John Harvey is only a memory.

Dinah still kids me about the allergy I have for book ends, but if you’ve ever been cracked in the ribs with a well-flung one—or maybe you’re happily married—you’ll bear with me and understand.
Then there was the story—told me some years ago as a true copy of a leaf from the dread secret archives of the Paris police—of the woman who disappeared during the World Exposition as suddenly, as completely, and as inexplicably as did Dorothy Arnold ten years later from the sidewalks of New York.

As I first heard the story, it began with the arrival from Marseilles of an Englishwoman and her young, inexperienced daughter, a girl of seventeen or thereabouts. The mother was the frail, pretty widow of an English officer who had been stationed in India, and the two had just come from Bombay, bound for home. In the knowledge that, after reaching there, she would soon have to cross to Paris to sign some papers affecting her husband's estate, she decided at the last minute to shift her passage to a Marseilles steamer, and, by going direct to Paris, look up the lawyers there and finish her business before crossing the Channel to settle.

She walked alone, her mother lost in a City of Mystery. In all of Paris nothing so frightful had happened before—or would again!

It is time we all acknowledged that a great injustice has been done Alexander Woollcott. Every one persists in identifying him with the lead character in the famous play, The Man Who Stayed for Dinner. Like Woollcott the man was a wit and a caustic one. But we are sure that if he had shared Woollcott's superb narrative gift he would never have outworn his welcome. He would have been asked to stay forever.
forever and a day in the Warwickshire Village where she was born.

Paris was so tumultuously crowded for the Exposition that they counted themselves fortunate when the cocher deposited them at the Hotel Crillon, and they learned that their precautionary telegram from Marseilles had miraculously caught a room on the wing—a double room with a fine, spacious sitting-room looking out on the Place de la Concorde.

I could wish that they had wired one of those less magnificent caravansaries, if only that I might revel again in such a name as the Hotel of Jacob and of England, or, better still, the Hotel of the Universe and of Portugal. But, as the story reached me, it was to the Crillon that they went.

The long windows of their sitting-room gave on a narrow, stone-railed balcony and were half-shrouded in heavy curtains of plum-colored velvet. As again and again the girl later on had occasion to describe the look of that room when first she saw it, the walls were papered in old rose. A high-backed sofa, an oval satin-wood table, a mantel with an ormolu clock that had run down—these also she recalled.

The girl was the more relieved that there would be no need of a house-to-house search for rooms, for the mother had seemed unendurably exhausted from the long train ride, and was now of such a color that the girl’s first idea was to call the house physician, hoping fervently that he spoke English, for neither she nor her mother spoke any French at all.

The doctor, when he came—a dusty, smelly little man with a wrinkled face lost in a thicket of whiskers, and a reassuring Legion of Honor ribbon in the buttonhole of his lapel—did speak a little English. After a long, grave look and a few questions put to the tired woman on the bed in the shaded room, he called the girl into the sitting-room and told her frankly that her mother’s condition was serious; that it was out of the question for them to think of going on to England next day, and that on the morrow she might better be moved to a hospital.

All these things he would attend to. In the meantime he wanted the girl to go at once to his home and fetch him a medicine that his wife would give her. It could not be as quickly prepared in any chemist’s.

Unfortunately, he lived on the other side of Paris and had no telephone, and with all Paris en fête, it would be perilous to rely on any messenger. Indeed, it would be a saving of time and worry if she could go, armed with a note to his wife he was even then scribbling in French at a desk in the sitting-room.

In the lobby below, the manager of the hotel, after an excited colloquy with the doctor, took
charge of her most sympathetically, himself putting her into a sapin and, as far as she could judge, volubly directing the driver how to reach a certain house in the Rue Val du Grace, near the Observatoire.

It was then that the girl’s agony began, for the ramshackle victoria crawled through the festive streets and, as she afterwards realized, more often than not crawled in the wrong direction. The house in the Rue Val du Grace seemed to stand at the other end of the world, when the carriage came at last to a halt in front of it.

The girl grew old in the time which passed before any answer came to her ring at the bell. The doctor’s wife, when finally she appeared, read his note again and again, then with much muttering and rattling of keys stationed the girl in an airless waiting room and left her there so long that she was weeping for very desperation, before the medicine was found, wrapped, and turned over to her.

A hundred times during that wait she rose and started for the door, determined to stay no longer but to run back, empty-handed through the streets to her mother’s bedside. A thousand times in the wretched weeks that followed she loathed herself for not having obeyed that impulse.

But always there was the feeling that having come so far and having waited so long, she must not leave without the medicine just for lack of the strength of will to stick it out a little longer—perhaps only a few minutes longer.

Then the snail’s pace trip back to Right Bank was another nightmare, and it ended only when, at the cocher’s mulish determination to deliver her to some hotel in the Place Vendome, she leaped to the street and in sheer terror appealed for help to a passing young man whose alien tweeds and boots told her he was a compatriot of hers.

He was still standing guard beside her five minutes later when, at long last, she arrived at the desk of the Crillon and called for her key, only to have the very clerk who had handed her a pen to register with that morning look at her without recognition and blankly ask, “Whom does Made-moiselle wish to see?”

At that a cold fear clutched her heart, a sudden surrender to a panic that she had fought back as preposterous when first it had visited her as she sat and twisted her handkerchief in the waiting room of the doctor’s office on the Left Bank; a panic born when, after the doctor had casually told her he had no telephone, she heard the fretful ringing of its bell on the other side of his walnut door.

This then was the predicament of the young English girl as she stood there at the desk of the
hotel in Paris—a stranger in the city and a stranger to its bewildering tongue. She had arrived that morning from India and had left her ailing mother in charge of the house physician while she went out in quest of medicine for her—a quest in which, through a malignant conspiracy between perverse circumstances and apparently motiveless passersby, she had lost four hours.

But now with the bottle of medicine clutched in her hand, she reached the hotel at last, only to be stared down at by the clerk at the desk, only to have the very man who had shown them their rooms with such a flourish that morning now gaze at her opaquely as though she were some slightly demented creature demanding admission to someone else's apartment.

But, no, Mam'zelle must be mistaken. Was it not at some other hotel she was descended? Two more clerks came fluttering into the conference. They all eyed her without a flicker of recognition. Did Mam'zelle say her room was No. 342? Ah, but 342 was occupied by M. Quelquechose. Yes, a French client of long standing. He had been occupying it these past two weeks and more. Ah, no, it would be impossible to disturb him. All this while the lobby, full of hurrying, polyglot strangers, reeled around her.

She demanded the registration slips only to find in that day's docket no sign of the one she herself had filled out that morning on their arrival, the while her tired mother leaned against the desk and told her how. And even as the clerk now shuffled the papers before her eyes, the stupefying bloodstone which she had noticed on his ring-finger when he handed her the pen five hours before, winked at her in confirmation.

From then on, she came only upon closed doors.

The same house physician who had hustled her off on her tragic wild-goose chase across Paris protested now with all the shrugs and gestures of his people that he had dispatched her on no such errand, that he had never been summoned to attend her mother, that he had never seen her before in all his life.

The same hotel manager who had so sympathetically helped her into the carriage when she set forth on her fruitless mission, denied her now as flatly and somehow managed to do it with the same sympathetic solicitude, suggesting that Mam'zelle must be tired, that she should let them provide another chamber where she might repose herself until such time as she could recollect at what hotel she really belonged or until some inquiries should bring in news of where her mother and her luggage were, if—

For always there was in his ever polite voice the unspoken reservation that the whole mystery
might be a thing of her own disordered invention. Then, and in the destroying days that followed, she was only too keenly aware that these evasive people—the personnel of the hotel, the attaches of the Embassy, the reporters of the Paris Herald, the officials at the Surete—were each and every one behaving as if she had lost her wits.

Indeed there were times when she felt that all Paris was rolling its eyes behind her back and significantly tapping its forehead.

Her only aid and comfort was the foresaid Englishman who, because a lovely lady in distress had come up to him in the street, and implored his help, elected thereafter to believe her against all the evidence which so impressed the rest of Paris.

He proved a pillar of stubborn strength because he was some sort of well-born junior secretary at the British Embassy with influence enough to keep her agony from gathering dust in the official pigeon-holes.

His faith in her needed to be unreasoning because there slowly formed in his mind a suspicion that for some unimaginable reason all these people—the hotel attendants and even the police—were part of a plot to conceal the means whereby the missing woman's disappearance had been effected. This suspicion deepened when, after a day's delay, he succeeded in forcing an inspection of Room 342 and found that there was no detail of its furnishing which had not been altered from the one etched into the girl's memory.

It remained for him to prove the mechanism of that plot and to guess at its invisible motive—a motive strong enough to enlist all Paris in the silent obliteration of a woman of no importance, moreover a woman who, as far as her daughter knew, had not an enemy in the world. It was the purchased confession of one of the paper-hangers who had worked all night in the hurried transformation of Room 342, started the unraveling of the mystery.

By the time the story reached me, it had lost all its content of grief and become as unemotional as an anagram. Indeed, a few years ago it was a kind of circulating parlor game and one was challenged to guess what had happened to the vanished lady.

Perhaps you yourself have already surmised that the doctor had recognized the woman's ailment as a case of the black plague, smuggled in from India; that his first instinctive step, designed only to give time for spirit- ing her out of the threatened hotel, had, when she died that afternoon, widened into a conspiracy on the part of the police to suppress, at all costs to this one girl, an obituary notice which, had it ever leaked out, would have emptied Paris overnight and
spread ruin across a city that had gambled heavily on the great Exposition for which its gates were even then thrown wide.

The story of this girl's ordeal long seemed to me one of the great nightmares of real life and I was, therefore, the more taken aback one day to have its historicity faintly impaired by my discovering its essence in a novel called *The End of Her Honeymoon* which the incomparable Mrs. Belloc-Lowndes wrote as long ago as 1913.

Then I find myself wondering lore in the making. For such a story to travel round the world by word of mouth, it is necessary that each teller of it must believe it true, and it is a common practice for the artless teller to seek to impart that belief to his listeners by affecting kinship, or at least a life-long intimacy, with the protagonist of the adventure related.

In my entertaining, desultory, and (with one exception) fruitless researches into the origin of twenty such world-girdling tales, I have often challenged one of these straw-man authorities, only

*Out of the burning sunshine and the pitiless wind came the white, cameo-like face of the dead girl.*

**THE DEVIL'S WIND**

*By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM*

in the next SAINT

if she unearthed it in the archives of the Paris police or whether she spun its mystery out of her own macabre fancy, making from whole cloth a tale of such felicitous invention, that like Stockton's *The Lady or the Tiger* or Anatole France's *The Procurator of Judea*, it had moved from land to land with the seven-league-boots of folk-music and so been told and retold at hearths the world around by people who had never read it anywhere.

The story of "The Vanishing Lady" is a fair specimen of folk- to have it vanish as utterly as did the ailing lady from the Place de la Concorde.

In the case of this story, which was used not only by Mrs. Belloc-Lowndes but by Lawrence Rising in a later novel called *She Who was Helena Cass*, I can report that it is a favorite seemingly, with old ladies on shipboard, those rootless widows who wear buttoned shoes with cloth tops and whose families, with ill-concealed delight, persuade them to do a good deal of traveling.

*(Please turn to page 160)*
AMONGST ALL THE talented officers of Scotland Yard Chief Detective Inspector Lestrade was both the most astute and the most successful—so at least he often gave me to understand.

Long after he had retired I used to visit him in the nursing home in Surrey in which he passed the last years of his life and with the minimum of encouragement he would relate again the triumphs of himself, of Gregson, of Athelney Jones, of "young" Stanley Hopkins and the rest of those heroes who had flourished in what he considered the palmy days of the Yard.

Yet, curiously enough, he seldom mentioned the name of Sherlock Holmes with whom his name had been linked in my own early memories. This I found difficult to understand, and I even, at one time, harboured the unworthy suspicion that he was in some way jealous of the reputation of Holmes, Baker Street Detective.

When I contrived to mention Holmes' name he would make a faintly depreciatory comment and pass on to another part of the saga of his own career. Rarely, very rarely, he was more com-

Here is a Sherlock Holmes story that Conan Doyle forgot to tell.

When J. C. Masterman trims his literary sails in a satiric northeaster, hold your breath! You're headed straight for the bright shoals of laughter and will probably end up a physical wreck from merriment alone. Who would have thought our author would have dared to revive—SHERLOCK HOLMES!
municative about a man—or men for a certain Dr. Watson had worked with Holmes in those bygone days—about whose doing I had an insatiable curiosity. Once only he related a story of the two to me.

"Mr. Sherlock Holmes was a clever man in his way, but not nearly so clever as he thought himself and as for that Watson—! My old chief at the Yard, I remember, used to call Mr. Sherlock Holmes the Gifted Amateur, though why I couldn’t quite make out.

"You see, properly speaking, he wasn’t an amateur at all, and as for being gifted—well—there were some of us at the Yard that could have given him half a stone and a beating any day."

Lestrade gave a wheezy chuckle of satisfaction.

"But he had some bright ideas, hadn’t he?" I asked. "I suppose he was helpful to you now and then?"

"If you ask me," retorted Lestrade, "the boot was on the other leg. I can remember one case when I helped Holmes—and Watson, too, for that matter—out of a pretty tight jam—not that they were as grateful to me as they might have been.

"I’ll tell you about it.

It was in the year 1889, (Lestrade began) so far as I can remember, and it’s in my mind that Mr. Sherlock Holmes had been having rather a lean time—why, even that Watson could hardly find any cases to write about at that time. You know the Doctor used to write up his friend’s cases for what they call publicity purposes nowadays.

When, therefore, the case of The Dark Diamond was handed over to me and I noticed that Dr. Watson was connected with it, in his professional capacity, it seemed to me that it was the only kind thing to do to let Holmes have a finger in the pie. I was a bit sorry for him, as you might say, besides I wasn’t too sure that I could solve the mystery as quickly and easily as I wanted to.

So I walked around to Baker Street somewhere about tea-time and found them both smoking in their room.

"Ah, Lestrade," said Holmes in his high and mighty manner, "you are often the harbinger of good tidings. What have you for me now?"

"I suppose Dr. Watson has told you about this case of Rheinhart Wimpfheimer’s diamond?" I asked.

Holmes smiled. "Watson’s account is a trifle confused. I should be glad if you would run over the case so that I may have the salient facts before me; possibly I may be able to help you."

The reports which I made in those days didn’t miss much, so I read out the notes which I had already made.
“As you know, Mr. Rheinhart Wimpfheimer is well-known as a man who has amassed a prodigious fortune in trade with the Orient. He is even better known as the greatest of all collectors of famous and curious jewels.

“In this field only one other person can compare with him, and that is his younger brother Mr. Solomon Wimpfheimer, a wealthy bachelor residing in Albany. Between the two brothers a keen but friendly rivalry has always existed, but the elder’s collection is believed to be incomparably the finer.

“Mr. Rheinhart Wimpfheimer is himself a widower, living in some luxury at his residence, 123 Great Cumberland Place. Apart from the servants his household consists of himself, his unmarried daughter, aged twenty-five, and his private secretary, who assists him both in his business dealings and in his collecting.

“Many of his possessions have already been given or loaned to museums, but some of the more precious are always kept in the house.

“Among them all the famous Dark Diamond of Dungbura holds pride of place. So much is he attached to this wonderful stone that he carries it with him daily in a small chamois leather bag suspended from his neck. At night it is placed resting on the chamois leather bag on the table by his bedside.”

“A moment, Lestrade,” Holmes interrupted me. “Watson, pray pass me the third of those bulky volumes by your side.

“Ah—yes—I thought that there would be a note. The Dark Diamond of Dungbura, one of the most famous stones in the world, owing to its size, its peculiar colour, and its history. How or when it appeared in Dungbura, which is on the confines of Tibet, and how it passed from there to Europe are unknown, but it has since found a place in several of the greatest collections.

“Whereas most precious stones have a sinister reputation this one is reputed invariably to bring happiness and good fortune to its possessor. But I interrupted your orderly narrative, Lestrade. Proceed, if you will.”

“Early on Wednesday morning Mr. Rheinhart Wimpfheimer was suddenly taken very ill. His usual medical attendant was on holiday and our friend Dr. Watson here was acting as his locum tenens. Dr. Watson was urgently summoned to the house at about nine and diagnosed the case as one of brain fever—correct me if I am wrong, Doctor.”

“That is quite correct,” said Dr. Watson. “I prescribed the usual remedies and promised to call again in the evening.”

“Dr. Watson called again in the evening and on his arrival found Mr. Wimpfheimer still unconscious. During the course of
the visit, however, the patient had a short period of mental clarity and—I regret to say—vehemently expressed his desire to have the assistance of some physician more highly qualified than Dr. Watson.”

“Ah, well,” said Holmes, “after all he is a cultured man of unlimited wealth and the services of a general practitioner of limited experience and mediocre ability—”

“Holmes, this is unworthy of you,” protested Watson. “You yourself have failed to obtain immediate success on some occasions.”

“The dates?” replied Holmes acidly.

I hurried on with my report lest a quarrel should develop between the two friends. “The patient relapsed into delirium and Dr. Watson gave instructions to the nurse and wrote down the names and addresses of some of his eminent fellow practitioners. He then left the house.”

“The time, Watson?” inquired Holmes.

“It was seven p.m.” replied Watson, a little sulkily. “Mr. Wimpfheimer is a collector of furniture and objets d’art of all kinds. I passed at least four grandfather clocks on the staircase and as all of them struck the time was somehow impressed on my memory.”

“Excellent, Watson,” said Holmes. “I am gratified that you are developing the power of observation. What happened next?”

“A call was sent to Scotland Yard at ten o’clock this morning and I myself hurried round to One-twenty-three Great Cumberland Place, where I found the house in a state of great commotion. When Sir Euston Paneras, the brain-fever specialist, called that morning to examine the patient, it was observed by the valet that the Dark Diamond of Dungbura, which had lain on the table by the bedside the night before, had vanished.”

“It was there at the time of your visit, Watson?” inquired Holmes.

“It was—I observed it lying on the chamois leather bag on the table.”

“Between that time and the specialist’s visit five persons entered the sickroom—the nurse who was on duty during the night, the nurse who relieved her this morning, the patient’s confidential valet, his private secretary and his daughter.”

“What steps have you taken?” inquired Holmes. “Have you examined all these persons?”

“No stone has been left unturned but the mystery seems insoluble. Of the five persons concerned, none left the house except Miss Wimpfheimer, who drove in a hansom to visit her uncle in Albany and tell him of his brother’s progress. She left the house at about nine p.m. and returned some three-quarters of an hour later.”
“These persons are, moreover, all above suspicion. The valet and the secretary have been with Mr. Wimpfheimer for more than ten years. The first nurse retired to sleep almost immediately after she left the sickroom. The second nurse did not leave the sickroom after she came on duty. The whole house has been searched from attic to cellar and the diamond is not in it.

“I am forced to the conclusion that some burglar must have entered the room and abstracted the stone—but here again there are difficulties. There are double windows in all the rooms and an elaborate system of burglar alarms, moreover, Mr. Wimpfheimer has a dachshund to which he is devotedly attached. This animal never leaves him and sleeps in his bedroom. It is inconceivable that it should not have barked if a burglar had entered the room in the nighttime.

“Still, a burglar must have entered the room. The question is, how and when did he enter, and how did he escape? You know my methods, Mr. Holmes, apply them. (I often gave Mr. Sherlock Holmes pieces of advice of that kind and I think they were useful to him). Perhaps you may have some suggestion to make as to how the crime was accomplished.”

Mr. Sherlock Holmes honoured me with one of his supercilious smiles. “The case, my good Les-
some weeks at least. The physical formation of the dachshund enabled me, furthermore, to make an examination of the carpet."

"What was peculiarly noticeable about the carpet?" I asked.

"Nothing was noticeable about the carpet—that was peculiar. Your theory that a burglar must have entered the room is wholly untenable."

He paused and placed the tips of his long fingers together.

"We have, therefore, certain incontrovertible facts. The diamond lay on the table when Watson paid his visit at seven P.M. It had disappeared when Sir Euston called at ten in the morning; no burglar can have entered the room during that period. Five persons, and five persons alone, entered the room during the night, all of them people of unimpeachable character; no one of them had any motive, so far as is known, for the theft.

"It is an old maxim of mine, however, that when the impossible has been excluded, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. Therefore one of those five persons stole the diamond."


Holmes's pale face flushed a little at this compliment, but he continued his exposition. "If we confine ourselves to the established facts we can carry the analysis further.

"The diamond has been stolen from the bedroom, and stolen by one of the five persons who entered the bedroom. It is not in the house and therefore it has been removed from the house. It is a fair deduction that the thief who took it from the bedroom also removed it from the house.

"Moreover, other considerations lead me to the same conclusion. No ordinary thief would choose the night when a trained and wakeful nurse sat at Mr. Wimpfheimer's bedside to make a burglarious entry and indeed no professional thief would even contemplate stealing the Dungbura diamond, for its peculiarities would make it impossible for the thief to dispose of it.

"I therefore come to the conclusion that this was no ordinary thief. One solution and one only remains. Lestrade, the stone was abstracted not for vulgar gain but in order that it might be transferred to some other collection.

"There are no lengths to which collectors will not go—the pride of possession overcomes all scruples—and remember that the Dungbura diamond brings happiness and good fortune to its possessor."

Holmes paused dramatically. "Mr. Solomon Wimpfheimer is a collector. Miss Wimpfheimer visited him in the evening to tell him of his brother's illness. We do not know what impelled this unhappy woman to transfer the
diamond from her father to her uncle but we do know that it was her hand which removed it from Great Cumberland Place.

"The case is completed. Breakfast can wait. Put on your hat, Watson, and we will stroll with Lestrade to Albany. There, unless I am much mistaken, we shall find the diamond."

"But—but—" interrupted Watson.

Holmes frowned at his friend. "I have demonstrated that the diamond can have left Great Cumberland Place in no other way," he remarked severely.

"But—my stethoscope—" stammered Watson.

We both turned towards him as the doctor, clutching his side, appeared to faint and fell back in his chair.

For the first time in my experience, Holmes seemed to be overcome by a human emotion. He rushed to his friend, tore open his shirt and applied the stethoscope to his chest.

"Alas, poor fellow," he cried, "he is dead. I can hear nothing."

"What," muttered Watson, "is what you must expect to hear when you use my stethoscope."

For my part I seized a bottle of seltzogene from the table and dashed it over the doctor's face. He gradually recovered, though he still clutched his side as though in great pain.

It was then that I had one of those flashes of intuition which helped me so much in my career. "Mr Holmes," I said, "I believe that Dr. Watson has something which he wishes to say to us."

The doctor nodded assent. "Holmes," he said, "I cannot keep silence any longer. I have been in the Army and it is impossible for me to allow a breath of suspicion to rest on a pure and lovely woman. At all costs I must clear her reputation.

"When Mr. Wimpfheimer dismissed me in such cavalier fashion I felt a not unnatural resentment. At that moment, as he relapsed again into delirium, my eye caught the glint of the diamond lying on its chamois leather bag on the table. The nurse left us to bring in some cooling drink which I had prescribed.

"In a flash my mind was made up—indeed my brain seemed to function with abnormal speed and certainty. A complete plan presented itself to me. I would seize the diamond and convey it to Baker Street. You would find it in our room.

"I had no doubt your keen analytical brain would connect the presence of the diamond in Baker Street with my visit to Great Cumberland Place, but I felt assured that the staunchness of your friendship would shield me from any undesirable consequences.

"I felt certain that you would find means, when a baffled Scotland Yard consulted you, to restore the stone to its owner, and to
prove that it could in fact never have left Great Cumberland Place. You would then, I knew, generously allow Lestrade to take all the credit of the recovery.

"With me, to think is to act. To seize the diamond was the matter of a moment. I rolled it into its bag and thrust them both into the mouth of my stethoscope. Thus burdened, I hurried from the house and hailed the first passing hansom. Inside I felt for the first time a spasm of nervousness, and I doubted the security of the hiding place which I had chosen.

"I therefore removed the diamond from the bag, pushed the bag back into the stethoscope and placed the diamond in my mouth—a trick of concealment which I learned on the Afghan frontier.

"Then another doubt assailed me. It was essential for the success of my plan that you should not fail to find the diamond. Should I place it in the tobacco in your Persian slipper, but you might not smoke enough to reach it in time. Or should I secrete it in your violin, but would you notice it there?"

"In this mental dilemma I allowed the muscles of my jaw to relax, the hansom gave a sudden lurch, and, alas! I swallowed the Dark Diamond of Dungbura!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Holmes, "It is too large."

"I have swallowed much in my time," retorted Watson with quiet dignity. A new access of pain swept over him and his face contorted with agony.

"How he suffers," cried Holmes. "It is a tortured brain."

"No, no. Alimentary, my dear Holmes, alimentary," gasped Watson. "Take me to a hospital and I will stake my medical reputation that the Dark Diamond can speedily be recovered."

Holmes drew me aside. "Watson," he said, "has bungled shamefully, as I fear he often does—nevertheless, we might still use some part of his strange plan. I could well restore the diamond to Great Cumberland Place."

It was then that I took command of the situation.

"No, Mr. Holmes," said I, "that is out of the question. When the Yard undertakes a case of this kind it does not rest until success is achieved. Within twenty-four hours of taking over the case I have laid my hands on the criminal, who now writhes in your chair, and I have—within very narrow limits—located the stolen diamond. With some assistance from the hospital, I shall recover it and I shall restore it to its owner."

But I noted a look of chagrin on Holmes's face, so I tapped him on the shoulder and tried to console him.

"The Yard," I said, "cares little to whom the credit goes if only its task is achieved. After all, the confession which I extracted from
Dr. Watson has saved me some hours of patient investigation. If therefore, Mr. Wimpfheimer recovers I shall inform him that the Gifted Amateur, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, lent his assistance to us in the recovery of the diamond.”

A happy smile passed over the great Lestrade’s wrinkled face.

“I am not denying,” he said, “that my speed and efficiency in the handling of the case of the Dark Diamond was a big step upward in my professional career.

“Nor did I forget my promise to the Gifted Amateur. Mr. Reinhart Wimpfheimer recovered and when, some three or four months later, I met Mr. Sherlock Holmes, he was wearing a handsome diamond tiepin which I do not remember to have seen in his possession before.”

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dishonor
among
thieves

by . . . Edgar Wallace

When I was steward on the old Numantic there was a man
tested Stoney Barton who
taveled with us regularly. He
was one of the cleverest card-
sharps that ever sailed the Western
Ocean. He was one of those
solitary workers who didn’t have
to travel a circus. His method
was to sit in at any game of bridge
and make his killing without
assistance.

It was a good graft, especially
at bridge, because often his part-
er would be a highly respectable
banker or business man who had
no idea that Stoney got his grand
slams out of stacked cards.
Naturally the partner won too,
and that made it easier to collect.

This graft, if you’re clever
enough to work it, is the safest
and surest of all. The funny thing
about bridge parties is that they
always want a fourth, and the
richer the players, the more
anxious they are to pick on some-
body who doesn’t look as if he
could afford to lose.

Stoney’s method was to sit in
a corner of the smoke-room with

Edgar Wallace was certainly the most prolific detective story writer in
the British Isles for more years than there are toes on a troll. But
the way his pen raced marred neither the vigor, nor the painstaking
precision of his style. It’s not too surprising when you remember that Mr.
Wallace was once a special constable. A law officer has to take pains.
a book on bridge problems and a deck of cards, and work out the teasers in the book. And, as every guy who plays bridge thinks he knows it all, he was usually surrounded by people who told him where he was wrong and how they’d have done it.

He could practically choose his own party, though they didn’t know this.

He made a good income without a chance of getting into trouble. Once he was invited down to a millionaire’s camp in the Adirondacks, and often he got dinner-party invitations in New York and London. That was the beauty of his system: he not only won money for himself but for his partners—and they were his friends for life.

There was a detective in New York named Dicker who hated Stoney worse than poison. It appears that Stoney was very sweet on Dicker’s daughter, who was a high-school girl and quite a lady, for Dicker had made more money than any detective had ever made honestly. They say—but why repeat scandal?

Elsie Dicker made a couple of trips to Europe, once to finish her education and once to make sure, and on the second of these trips she met Stoney, a fine upstanding fellow, good-looking and about ten years older than she.

Stoney gave up business for that trip and danced around that young lady as though she were a queen of Babylon and he a Christian slave. He was in fact a Reformed Wesleyan on his mother’s side. This was how I first came to find out that he was a card-sharp.

I heard him crooning hymns in his cabin one morning and peeked in, thinking he was ill, and saw him arranging a deck of cards for his evening séance.

They made a hit with one another, and it was arranged that Stoney should call at the house and meet pa. It wasn’t necessary: Pa was there waiting on the pier, and when Elsie said, “Daddy, I want you to know Mr. Barton,” the old man put his lamps over Stoney and froze him.

“I know Mr. Barton,” he said, “and if you want to know him any better you come along to headquarters and I’ll show you the register.”

It seems that Stoney had been inside once and in trouble often.

After that there was war between Dicker and Stoney. The young people must have met often without the old man knowing, and certainly there was generally a fat letter waiting for Stoney whenever he came back from Europe—I’ve delivered half-a-dozen to him in his cabin.

I believe Stoney had an interview with Sergeant Dicker and said he’d give up ocean-going and settle down in a respectable business if the old boy would let up on him.
But Dicker wouldn’t hear of it. He tried to “frame” Stoney twice—once on a charge of carrying concealed weapons, and once on a worse charge, but Stoney had some sort of pull and got clear each time.

Elsie believed in him. When her father told her he was a card-sharp she just smiled.

“He’s got business interests in Europe,” she said. “That is why he travels so much.”

When the old man started raving about what Stoney had confessed to him, she went up to her room and locked the door.

One day when we were in port, old man Dicker came down to the ship and saw me. I happened to know him well because I’d done a little business with him. No, I’m not going to tell you what it was. Ships’ stewards have their own little sidelines, and it’s not for me to put you as wise as I am.

“Felix,” he said, “you know this so-and-so feller Stoney Barton. He’s the biggest crook that ever caught a sucker. Give me an angle to this bird, and you won’t lose by it.”

Naturally I knew nothing and he got very sore with me.

“Mr. Dicker,” I said, “if I started squealing about all that I know, where should I be—and for the matter of that, where should we all be? If a detective came here from the Jewelers’ Association and said, ‘Felix, how many private parcels have you delivered to a certain man in New York in the past two years?’ What would you think of me if I spilt?”

He didn’t ask me any further questions about Stoney.

“That’s all right by me, Felix,” he said, “but I’ll tell you something: this man is breaking my daughter’s heart and ruining her life and spoiling everything I’ve planned for her—there’s a stockbroker from the Middle West who’s crazy about her, and he’s got a house and everything. I’m going to get Stoney if it takes all the rest of my life to get him. It will be a hobby with me.”

About six months after this I heard in a roundabout way that old Dicker had left the police. He’d made a fortune in Wall Street, gambling in Motor shares or steel or something. Anyway, I saw him driving down Fifth Avenue one afternoon, and from the fact that he was driving in a Rolls-Royce and wearing a shabby suit of clothes I knew he must be terribly rich.

Then a curious thing happened. Stoney had an old aunt who lived in California, and this old dame, all unknown to him, had been speculating in real estate for years. When she died, round about this time, Stoney found he was worth about a million and a half dollars. Being a crook, he was naturally suspicious, and the lawyer who brought the good news had a narrow escape of being thrown into the street.
"I thought he was a con man," Stoney told me, "or some nut trying to buy my 'left pass.'"

Now Stoney had a marvelous trick which no member of any other gang could imitate. The boys called it the "left pass"—it was a way of changing one pack for another right under the nose of the players. Micky Sullivan, one of the smartest men at the game, took two trips across the Western Ocean, not to play but just to watch Stoney operate.

"It beats me, Felix," he told me. "I've watched that guy from every angle and I'm just as wise as ever I was."

To my knowledge Micky offered him five thousand dollars for the trick, but Stoney wouldn't sell. Every gang came after him to find out how it was done, but all Stoney would say was:

"It's so simple that I'd be robbing you if I took your money."

The first thing that happened after he'd got his fortune was that the boys came after him to learn all about the "left pass."

"I'm sorry," he told Micky, "but it's not for sale."

For a few months he loafed around the United States trying to get a kick out of spending honest money. But there was nothing to it. He got borerder and borerder. Then one day he came aboard the Majoric—the new ship of the line.

I hadn't seen him for the best part of a year, and didn't know about the real estate till he told me all about his troubles.

"I've got to go on, Felix," he said. "This millionaire life is killing me. There are no interests for a man of my activity and judgment. I've got to get away to sea, to recover my soul, and to see what kind of suckers have grown up since I took my vacation."

There was a gentleman and his daughter in Suite A. I knew they were coming, because a lot of flowers had arrived in the morning for the young lady. He gave me a rather cold how-are-you.

"I suppose the ship is full of cheap card-sharps?" he said in a very loud tone of voice, which I knew was intended for his daughter. "It's disgraceful these lines aren't properly policed. There ought to be a couple of detectives on every ship that pulls out of New York. In my opinion, steward, the steamship company is responsible, for isn't it acting as aiders and abettors of these gamblers?"

The girl wasn't a bit upset: I saw her smile.

"Oh, daddy, leave the card-sharpers alone."

"There's one I won't leave alone till I've got him behind bars!" shouted Mr. Dicker, his face going red. "I'm on the side of the law, steward. I don't believe in all this toleration bunk. I—h'm..."

He finished rather abruptly
because I had caught his eye. I felt he was tempting Providence.

I was pretty busy until we had passed Fire Island, and then I had a few minutes to talk to Stoney. He was sitting in his cabin, reading a new book on bridge. He read them all—he liked a good laugh.

"Anybody on board, Felix?" he asked.

"There's a million dollars traveling in Suite A with his daughter," I said. "His name's Dicker."

He was lolling on the sofa when I told him this, but that brought him up quicker than a jab with a pin.

"Not Dick Dicker?" he asked, and when I nodded, he whistled.

"Does he know I'm aboard?" he asked.

I couldn't tell him that, but I guessed that old man Dicker wouldn't have been so violent if he hadn't seen the passenger list.

Stoney was very quiet and thoughtful after that, and I wondered what was going to happen. The deck steward's a friend of mine, and I passed the word to him to keep his eyes open, but he had nothing to report that night. Stoney made no attempt to speak to the girl, and he passed Dicker as though he didn't recognize him.

If the old man had been wise he would have kept very quiet all that voyage, but he hated Stoney so much that he couldn't lose an opportunity and when, the next night, Stoney walked into the smoke-room, he saw people nodding towards him and putting their heads together, and he guessed that Dicker had done a lot of broadcasting.

And what he guessed was confirmed when somebody took down a notice from the wall warning passers not to play cards with strangers, and carelessly dropped it on the table before Stoney as he passed.

Soon after that Stoney got up and went down to his cabin.

The old man had made a lot of friends in the couple of days he had been at sea, and he was sitting with a few of them when Stoney walked out.

"I've cooked him," he said. "Now let me warn you young men not to play cards with that fellow."

He had had a couple of drinks, according to the bar-room steward, and was a bit talkative, and he was naturally more so because the people who were with him were three young English college men who were going home after visiting the States.

"You boys are English," he went on, "and you don't understand the depths of depravity to which an American crook can sink. That man would steal the feathers out of an angel's tail."

He must have told them that he'd been connected with the Central Office, because one of the young men asked him a question
about Stoney’s previous convictions, and old man Dicker told all he knew and more.

“If he ever asks you to play cards with him, send for the purser—or send for me,” he said.

The very next day Stoney did soft of suggest that they should make up a four, but the three young Englishmen said they weren’t playing that afternoon.

“It’s going to a dud trip for me, Felix,” he said. “I’d get Lafferson in to play euchre with me, but I don’t want to call attention to him.”

Lafferson was a pretty slick con man and a friend of Stoney’s. He was traveling to Europe with a grip full of hope, after three blank voyages. The poor fellow was telling me that unless he found a sucker this trip he’d be obliged to go back to the bookpeddling business.

I knew that Stoney was very fond of Lafferson, but, now that the old man had branded him, he couldn’t even speak to the man or buy him a drink without putting him in wrong.

Old Dicker was very jubilant. He went straight to his daughter and told her.

“I said I’d kill him dead, and I have killed him dead,” he said. “That fellow will never put his nose on the Majoric again. I’ve told the purser, I’ve told the chief steward, and it’s more than their jobs are worth to let him operate on this passage.”

She took it very well, partly, I think, because she’d had a long talk with Stoney on the boat deck. I happened to know this because I was watching out for the old man so that they shouldn’t be caught.

The three young Englishmen wouldn’t play bridge with Stoney, but they played bridge with Mr. Dicker that afternoon. He was a good player—he told them he was before he started; and, as they were three well-connected young gentlemen, one of them being the brother of the Duke of Wye, they played for pretty high stakes, and old man Dicker went down to dinner with a thousand dollars in his pocket.

“You don’t have to be a swindler to win at cards, Elsie,” he said. “All you have to do is know the game. Card playing’s an instinct...”

You know the sort of stuff that fifth-rate bridge players tell the world after they’ve won.

One of the nice young Englishmen had a private sitting-room and they played there that night. I saw the old man going back to his cabin about two in the morning, and he looked kind of dazed. He didn’t wake his daughter up to tell her how much he’d won, because he hadn’t.

He played with the three young Englishmen after breakfast—and that’s a bad sign—and he played with ’em right up to the luncheon bugle, and his face got longer and
longer, for, if there was one thing that old man Dicker loved more than money, it has never been discovered.

In the afternoon he played again, and round about tea-time he went in search of Stoney. I know that because he asked me where Stoney could be found, and I said he was down watching the people in the swimming-pool; and while the old man was gone to look for him I nipped up on the boat deck and told the young lady that she hadn’t better be seen with Stoney.

Afterwards I was able to direct Mr. Dicker, and he climbed up on to the boat deck. There was Stoney, smoking a mild cigar and reading the market reports.

“You can go, Felix,” said Dicker, and I went—but not far... “I want a word with you, Stoney,” said Dicker, after I was supposed to be out of earshot.

“If it’s a nice word I’ll listen to you,” said Stoney. “But if it’s a naughty word I’ll send for the master at arms and have you put in irons.”

“Don’t be fresh with me!” snarled the old man.

He jerked a chair up and sat down.

“I’ve been playing cards,” he said.

“So I noticed,” said Stoney. “You’ve probably observed that I haven’t.”

Dicker took no notice of this.

“With three young Englishmen,” he said.

Stoney nodded, and sort of smiled out at the sea.

“Do you know ’em?”

Stoney shrugged his shoulders.

“I’ve met ’em occasionally,” he said, and I heard the old man groan.

“Are they—?”

Stoney chuckled.

“It’s the only clever English gang I have met,” he said. “They don’t usually work this route—they’ve been operating on the Pacific for two or three years.”

Dicker stared at him.

“My God!” he said, in a hollow voice. “They’ve got nine thousand dollars of mine.”

Stoney didn’t laugh: he was too well-bred.

“Checks?” he asked.

“Real money,” said old Mr. Dicker, his voice trembling.

There was a long silence.

“That’s very unfortunate,” said Stoney. “To tell you the truth, I wondered if you’d fall for them. The brother of the Duke of Wye is the gang leader—there isn’t any duke of that name, and nobody but a fat-headed New York cop would have been deceived.”

I guess the old man swallowed something at this, but he didn’t speak.

“You’ve got to be brave, Mr. Dicker,” Stoney went on, “and bear your loss like a gentleman.”

“I’ll have them all arrested,” the old man burst out. “The
minute I get to port I’ll go and see the Chief of Police—"

Stoney shook his head.

“No you won’t,” he said. “In the first place, you’d make yourself the laughing-stock of New York; in the second place, you couldn’t bring a charge against them. I’m an expert in these matters.”

Neither of them spoke for a long time, and I had the idea that the old man was trying to say something. So had Stoney, but he didn’t give him any encouragement. At last Dicker cleared his voice.

“Listen, son,” he said, in a tone that was almost friendly, “couldn’t you see these birds and talk to ’em?”

Stoney shook his heard again.

“Couldn’t you play with ’em?” asked the old man desperately.

I saw Stoney lift his eyebrows.

“They wouldn’t play with me, even if they didn’t know me. You’ve set ’em against me.”

“But that left pass of yours—”

“It’s past,” said Stoney. “No Mr. Dicker, not even to oblige you. My name’s mud on this ship, and you’re the good parson who christened me.”

The old man wriggled round in his chair, and I had to stand on my bad toe to stop myself from laughing. Presently old Dicker leaned over.

“How long does it take to learn that pass of yours, Stoney?” he asked in a wheedling voice.

Stoney looked round at him. I think he must have seen me too, but he didn’t take any notice. Anyways, he always liked an audience.

“Once a policeman, always a crook,” he said. “What do I get for passing on the secret of my ancient and dishonourable profession?”

“If you think I’m going to let you run after Elsie—”

“I’m asking for nothing like that,” said Stoney. “All I want is half that you make on the voyage, over and above your nine thousand.”

The old man shuffled at this.

“I don’t want anything but my money back—” he began.

“Is it a bet? You go on playing till the end of the voyage, and I take half of what you make,” said Stoney.

I couldn’t hear what followed, but I do know that Dicker went down to Stoney’s cabin with him, and then they locked the door and were in there for more than three hours.

That night the three young Englishmen and Dicker played till ten o’clock and the thing that happened in the four games they played is nobody’s business. The gangsters had to play because it was a public séance, with all sorts of people looking on.

I went up to the smoke-room on an excuse, and I must say that the old man was a good pupil. The sharpest pair of eyes in the
world couldn't have seen that left pass.

Stoney wasn't there; he wasn't there the next night. But from
the old man's face and the way he strutted down the deck, and from
the way those three young English gentlemen behaved, I could see
that Dicker had make his killing.

The night before we reached Plymouth one of the Englishmen
didn't turn up to dinner. After
dinner a fourth man took his
place. They weren't playing for
high stakes, and there was no
reason to play at all.

Dicker had got so expert with
the left pass that he used to sit
up half the night in his cabin
doing it for his own amusement,
and every time he met Stoney he
used to tell him that he hadn't
quite got his own money back,
but Stoney knew that was a lie.
The old man just hated paying
commission.

On the night before reaching
port everybody sits up later than
usual, and it was two o'clock be-
fore Mr. Dicker reached his cabin
and walked into the sitting-room.
He had hardly closed the door
before there came a tap, and the
fourth man who had been playing
that night walked in after and
closed the door behind him.

"Hullo!" said Dicker, very sur-
prised. "What do you want?"

The stranger looked at him kind
of pityingly (I got all this back
through Stoney).

"I'm afraid I'm on a very un-
pleasant mission, Mr. Dicker," he
said. "My name is Chief Inspector
Barclay from Scotland Yard."

The old man went pale.

"I've been watching you play
for some days," said the fellow,
"and although I haven't been able
to detect anything, I am satisfied
that you have in your possession
a number of packs of cards which
you are substituting for those
which have been dealt."

Old Dicker pretended to be very
angry, but his voice was shivering.

"Very good," said the man.

"Then you have the alternative
of coming along with me to the
captain and being searched in his
presence, or letting me do the
thing quietly here without any
fuss."

"It was a joke," said old
Dicker. "I'm a rich man, Mr.
What's-your-name. I was just
playing a little joke with those
three crooks."

"Are you going to be searched
here or do I take you to the
captain?"

The old man had been a cop
too long to expect that his tale
would go, and he stood by like
somebody dumb while this fellow
searched him and took out the
ten packs of cards that he had
substituted during the evening.

About five minutes later the
bell rang and I went into the sit-
ting-room and was told to fetch
Stoney. I don't know what hap-
pened in the room, but I'm a
pretty good guesser. The detective
went off at Plymouth with two thousand dollars, and Elsie Dicker hadn't been in London two days before she had the grandest engagement ring that could be bought for real money.

They came back together with me on their honeymoon trip, but old Dicker was staying behind. He went on to Paris one day and he saw the chief inspector from Scotland Yard—somebody pointed him out at the Grand Hotel.

"That's Lafferson, the con man, Mr. Dicker. You want to be careful of him. He's a great friend of Stoney Barton's."

He needn't have gone to Paris to find that out. I could have told him. But then, nobody asked me.

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THE VANISHING LADY by ALEXANDER WOOLLcott

(Concluded from page 141)

The story will be whispered as gospel truth from steamer-chair to steamer-chair, with such shakings of the head and such Lord-have-mercy casting up of pious glances that it seems ever new, and, with that air about it, gets submitted so regularly to the fiction magazines that it has threaded many an editorial head with untimely silver.

One day I received word of its having been published as a news story in the London Daily Mail as early as 1911, the bare facts substantiated by affidavits from attaches of the British Embassy in Paris. Here, I said with relief, is the end of my quest, only to have Richard Henry Little point out in the Chicago Tribune that the entire story had been dashed off by Karl Harriman one hot summer night in 1889 to fill a vacant column in the next morning's issue of the Detroit Free Press.

Closing in on my quarry, I called upon the blushing Harriman to tell me whether he had invented the story, or, like the rest of us, heard it somewhere in his travels. He said he could not remember. Thereupon I felt free to consider the question still open, for, without wishing to reflect on the fecundity of his imagination, I beg leave to doubt if any man could invent a tale like "The Vanishing Lady" and thereafter forget that he had done so.
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